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OBAMA’S CRACKDOWN ON WHISTLEBLOWERS
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WHAT’S SO FUNNY ABOUT STEUBENVILLE?
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BEYOND MARRIAGE EQUALITY
MELISSA HARRIS-PERRY

THE RIGHT TAKES AIM AT THE STATES
LEE FANG
Letters

Queens, N.Y.

However phony the cry “Fix the Debt!” may be [“Stacking the Deck,” March 11/18], it seems the superrich have prevailed. Their castle was gallantly defended at the ramparts by their minions (vanquishing loophole closures and taxes on their gold). The superrich will continue to live in comfort in the castle, and outside, the country will be in turmoil. But sooner or later the castle dwellers will hear the roar from outside…

G.M. Chandu

King Coal Deposed

Toronto

Kudos for suggesting that the climate crisis requires a radical solution in “The Keystone Test” [March 11/18]. But when it comes to coal-fired electricity plants, your solution isn’t radical enough. The answer isn’t improved emission standards; it’s the elimination of coal as a fuel. Utopian? Not in Ontario. By 2014, this province will have closed its entire fleet of coal-burning power facilities, which at their peak produced as much air pollution as 6 million cars. And many of the jobs connected to coal combustion will be preserved because the plants are not being destroyed; they’re being converted to burn cleaner things such as natural gas and sustainably harvested wood pellets. Ontario is proving that an advanced industrial economy can renounce the most climate-destructive fuel while still providing sufficient power. What we need from The Nation is not more discussion of emission standards but insistence that the “zero option” is now entirely viable.

Gideon Forman,
Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment

Aquarian Love-Rock Be-In

Oakland, Calif.

About author Seth Rosenfeld’s letter on Berkeley in the late ’60s [March 11/18]: the writer either never attended a performance of the Living Theatre’s Paradise Now or didn’t understand what was going on. “Stripping down and lighting up” was not a disruption of the performance; it was the goal of the performance. Audience participation (of whatever kind) was what the theater troupe was trying to incite. It didn’t follow a typical script.

David Widelock

The Bureaucrats of Academe

Amherst, Mass.

After asking “When was the last time a college or university president produced an edgy piece of commentary, or took a daring stand on a contentious matter?” [“University Presidents—Speak Out!” March 11/18] Scott Sherman takes us way back to the presidencies of James Conant, Robert Hutchins, Kingman Brewster and Clark Kerr and, working his way up to the present, cites a few examples of leaders who have spoken out on issues that are “closer in to higher education.” He ends his timely and provocative piece by citing a 2001 article by Theodore Hesburgh, the former president of Notre Dame: “We cannot urge students to have the courage to speak out unless we are willing to do so ourselves.”

In 1972, John William Ward, the president of Amherst College, said almost the same thing after taking a more daring stand than any of the men Sherman mentions. In May of that year, after having blocked traffic by sitting in at the entrance of Westover Air Force Base in nearby Chicopee, Massachusetts, to protest the Vietnam War, he was arrested for civil disobedience. Soon after, John Coleman, then president of Haverford College, wrote in The New York Times that Ward, along with Father Hesburgh, was “on his way into the leadership circle,” but warned that he would find it “a lonely place” once he got there. “Administrators now administer. They don’t lead,” he said. Sherman’s point. Ward’s example only strengthens it.

Kim Townsend

(continued on page 26)
The December 14, 2012, massacre of twenty children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School seemed like one of those rare moments when the sheer monstrosity of a preventable tragedy breaks through our national stupor and galvanizes political action. In the days after the shooting, prominent opponents of gun control were jolted into reconsidering their position. “Everything should be on the table,” said West Virginia’s Senator Joe Manchin, a heretofore enthusiastic advocate of gun rights. Public support for an assault weapons ban climbed to 60 percent, and more than 90 percent supported universal background checks for gun purchases. President Obama forcefully urged federal action, laying out a comprehensive gun control plan; he mobilized Organizing for Action, the nonprofit that grew out of his reelection campaign, to push for it. The rhetorical high point of his State of the Union address was a sonorous call for a timely vote on such a bill, because the victims of gun violence surely deserved at least that.

Perhaps most promising, in what was taken as a sign of political disarray and ineptitude, the NRA’s main strategy seemed to be to put spokesman Wayne LaPierre on TV as often as possible so that he could elucidate his Bizarro World theory that the solution to gun violence is more guns, especially in schools—a message that repulsed even the organization’s Republican allies.

But three months later, it’s not the NRA and Wayne LaPierre who appear most inept or bizarre. It’s Congress. The Senate is set to take up gun control legislation when it comes back from recess on April 8, but we already know that a ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines is off the table. According to majority leader Harry Reid, the ban, championed by California’s Dianne Feinstein, couldn’t even garner forty votes in the Senate, far below the sixty it would require to break an anticipated GOP filibuster. This means that at least thirteen Senate Democrats, including perhaps Reid, think it’s perfectly acceptable to put weapons like the Bushmaster semiautomatic rifle—the one Adam Lanza used to slaughter a classroom full of first graders—into the hands of virtually anyone who has $700 to spare. The faintest of silver linings is that Senator Feinstein plans to introduce the ban as an amendment, so at least we’ll know which Democrats (and Republicans) lack even the rudimentary common sense or the backbone to support such a measure.

Meanwhile, the prospects for universal background checks are wobbly. Should the legislation garner the filibuster-proof majority required to pass the Senate, it would still have to pass the GOP-controlled House, where Speaker John Boehner may not even put it up for a vote. And even if he were pressured to do so, all the House Democrats and at least seventeen Republicans would have to vote for the bill, a daunting if not impossible bar.

But would the system of background checks that survives this gantlet have any teeth left? Not if the NRA has anything to say about it. As is now clear, the group’s strategy has been far cannier than LaPierre’s rantings have let on. Initially, in order to avoid an overwhelming public backlash, the NRA indicated that it was open to background checks, as did many Republicans in Congress. But behind the scenes, the organization has been orchestrating a two-pronged attack, telling moderates that background checks would be ineffective against criminals while rallying the right wing against background checks that survive this gantlet.
Rape—Still No Joke

Feminists—and everyone else who cares about justice—breathed a sigh of relief when Ma’lik Richmond and Trent Mays, two young men living in Steubenville, Ohio, were found guilty of raping an unconscious 16-year-old girl. In a case where media, texts and video painted a clear-as-day picture of the horrors that happened that night, anything other than a guilty verdict was unthinkable.

But the trial’s outcome doesn’t change the fact that these two young men, along with a party of onlookers, didn’t think anything was wrong—or even out of the ordinary—about sexual violation. And as the media and public response to the trial demonstrated, it’s not just the rapists who believe that penetrating an unconscious girl is little more than teenage party high jinks. For all of our cultural bluster surrounding rape—how awful it is, how it must be stopped—as a country, we still treat sexual assault as a joke.

On the night of the assault, the rapists and their friends were so sure they were doing nothing wrong that they broadcast their crime on social networks and kept photographic mementos. Mays and Richmond joked about the rape, sending pictures to friends and the fact that these two young men, along with a party of onlookers, didn’t think anything was wrong—or even out of the ordinary—about sexual violation. And as the media and public response to the trial demonstrated, it’s not just the rapists who believe that penetrating an unconscious girl is little more than teenage party high jinks. For all of our cultural bluster surrounding rape—how awful it is, how it must be stopped—as a country, we still treat sexual assault as a joke.

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THE OTHER KIMANI GRAYS: Twenty-five-year-old Manuel Diaz was hanging out in Anaheim, California, on a sunny Saturday last July when two police officers began to approach. Diaz ran off, and Officers Nick Bennallack and Brett Heitmann pursued him. Moments later, Bennallack shot and killed Diaz—who was unarmed—on an apartment complex lawn. On March 20, the Orange County District Attorney’s office announced that the shooting was justified.

Video taken immediately after the shooting is chilling. One bystander screams, “He's still alive! Call the cops!” Officers on the scene appear confused and frantic, and eager to push back the growing crowd—but never once do they check on Diaz’s vital signs. Another bystander, speaking in Spanish, encourages people to capture what’s happening on video by reminding them that “the law allows you to tape” the police.

That video sparked outrage last year, as residents took to the streets in protest. Those demonstrations were met with increasing violence by the Anaheim police—who used dogs and fired beanbag bullets at dangerously short ranges not only against men and women, but toddlers as well.

Anaheim is not alone. In Brooklyn, 16-year-old Kimani Gray was buried on March 23 after being killed by plainclothes New York Police Department officers in East Flatbush. Writing for Ebony, Rosa Clemente wondered whether we’re using the right terms when we talk about this specific kind of violence: “Kimani’s killing is not just a case of police brutality, it is yet another example of the ongoing human rights violations against mostly Black and Latino/a young people in New York and cities across the country.” She’s right—“brutality” hardly begins to capture this violation of the fundamental entitlement to life that we should all enjoy.

We’ve largely come to accept that some young people of color will be shot and killed with impunity, and that a community’s outrage will be quelled with unbelievable force. In Anaheim, camouflage-clad SWAT teams paraded the streets and intimidated protesters, while police in Brooklyn reportedly declared a “frozen zone,” which essentially freezes First Amendment rights.

Back in Anaheim, an essentially segregated city is grappling with the fact that another white officer has killed another unarmed Latino man and will not be held accountable for doing so. Sadly, it won’t be the last time.

WAR IS PERSONAL: On March 18, on the eve of the ten-year anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, paralyzed Iraq War veteran Tomas Young published an open letter on Truthdig, addressed to George W. Bush and Dick Cheney, calling for accountability for their crimes. Titled “The Last Letter,” it is written in the name of Iraqis and Americans alike, “on behalf of us all—the human detritus your war has left behind, those who will spend their lives in unending pain and grief.” Nearly a decade after the Sadr City ambush that left him paralyzed, Young has decided to cease medical treatment. “My life is coming to an end,” he wrote. “I am living under hospice care.” Truthdig editor in chief Robert Scheer called his letter “the defining obituary on the Iraq War.”

The story of wounded veteran Tomas Young was documented in 2006 by the great photographer Eugene Richards, then a fellow at The Nation Institute, who worked for several years to capture the impact of the Iraq War here at home. A number of these searing photo essays appeared in The Nation, including several images of Tomas in his wheelchair at home in Kansas City, his body covered with burns from the cigarettes (and fingers) he could not always control. Phil Donahue would later cite these photographs as part of the inspiration for his compelling documentary Body of War, about Tomas and his involvement in the antiwar movement. Richards also contributed portraits for the Nation Books title Collateral Damage, in which journalists Chris Hedges and Laila Al-Arian interviewed fifty returning veterans on the unreported truth of their time in Iraq, giving voice to their testimony on the savagery of US treatment of Iraqi civilians.

Later, in 2010, Richards and his wife, Janine Allongi, published War Is Personal, a book that gathered his fierce and emotionally unfiltered photo essays on the lives of American soldiers and their families. Four of the pictures from that book are featured in an exhibit at the Gasser/Grunert Gallery in New York City (524 West 19th Street) that opens March 28.

‘OBAMA’S GENERAL’ RIPs DRONES: Retired four-star Marine Gen. James Cartwright, who has been called “Obama’s general,” has spoken out forcefully against the unchecked use of drones. A longtime skeptic of the war in Afghanistan, Cartwright declared that drones fuel anger and resentment among the Muslim populations experiencing the attacks, and suggested that their use will cause “blowback” against the United States.

In a speech to the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, reported by The New York Times, Cartwright said, “If you’re trying to kill your way to a solution, no matter how precise you are, you’re going to upset people even if they’re not targeted.” Cartwright also said that he wasn’t enthused about the idea of shifting responsibility for drone warfare from the CIA to the military. He expressed concern that there would be a “blurring of the line” if the military takes control of what is essentially a covert program to wage war in countries with which the United States has not technically gone to war.

Perhaps because of his unorthodox views, Cartwright lost his chance to be named as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Instead, Obama picked Gen. Martin Dempsey, even though the president and Cartwright were close. Last year, Cartwright came out in support of large reductions in America’s nuclear weapons arsenal, another break from the establishment.

STOP-AND-FRISK ON TRIAL: Earlier this month in a New York City courtroom, the New York Police Department’s stop-and-frisk policy went on trial. Nation contributor Ross Tuttle obtained an audio recording that is part of the prosecution’s evidence that the NYPD’s tactics amount to racial profiling. The audio, made in 2009 by Officer Adhyl Polanco, is part of a series of recordings originally released to the media that year. In the recording, an officer describes how the police union helped set quotas for summonses and arrests. You can listen to the audio at TheNation.com.
away from a drunk friend earlier that night. He knew that driving drunk was dangerous, but not that there was anything wrong with penetrating an unconscious girl.

In the days after the rape, text messages show that the seriousness of the assault—or the idea that it was an assault at all—was lost on Mays. After rumors began to circulate in the town that Mays had raped the girl, he wrote to a friend, “I shoulda raped now that everybody thinks I did.” Mays even texted the victim that she should have “thanked” him for “taking care of [her]” by staying with her throughout the night.

This attitude wasn’t limited to students. Text messages also indicate that football coach Reno Saccoccia led the young men to believe that what happened wasn’t a big deal: Mays texted a friend, “he was joking about it so I’m not that worried.” For his part, the coach threatened a reporter, while a volunteer coach was quoted in The New York Times claiming that the victim had made the story up, because she regretted staying out late and getting drunk.

Even after the defendants were found guilty, the fact that they had committed rape still seemed to escape them: Mays apologized for taking pictures of the assault, not for the assault itself.

CNN’s coverage of the verdict—which consisted largely of bemoaning the loss of the “promising” lives of the rapists—was so outrageous it bordered on parody. (Literally—a much-criticized segment sounded suspiciously like an Onion video featuring a Colorado basketball star whose “greatest achievement came off the court...when he overcame the trauma of committing a terrible rape.”) In the days since the verdict, the teenage victim has been attacked on social media for drinking too much, for agreeing to get into a car with boys and for “ruining” the lives of her rapists by bringing charges. The harassment has gotten so bad that two women were charged with threatening her on Facebook and Twitter.

Sadly, we’ve come to expect this kind of response. It’s a continuation of the same old story—one that began long before Steubenville. It’s a story that says the victim and her supporters are overreacting; that it wasn’t a big deal; it’s PC-ness run amok. Even politicians like Wisconsin State Representative Roger Rivard say “some girls rape easy,” meaning that they call a night out they later regret “rape.” It’s the default story in a country that doesn’t have a real understanding of what rape is.

Decades of feminist work on rape awareness may have changed policy—we now have protections under the Violence Against Women Act, and in January 2012 the FBI updated its antiquated definition of rape to include male victims and oral and anal penetration—but it has done little to change the culture. In fact, the legal progress we’ve made on sexual assault often provides a rhetorical shield for those who don’t want to admit we live in a rape culture: How can that be possible? Rape is illegal! No one condones it!

But are we really that surprised that these two young men didn’t think their actions were wrong?

Videos of young men running up to women they don’t know just to grab their ass or stomach and run away are played for laughs on shows like Tosh.0. (The show is hosted by a comedian who garnered tremendous support after he joked about a woman in his audience being gang-raped.) At the Oscars, host Seth MacFarlane starred in a “funny” musical number listing movies in which “We Saw Your [Female Actresses’] Boobs,” including a number of scenes of rape or sexual assault. We have handfuls of qualifiers—“date,” “legitimate,” “forcible,”“gray”—that we throw in front of “rape” because we want to know if a sexual assault was a “real” rape or one of those non-rapes Republican politicians keep talking about.

And it’s not just rape that’s the joke—it’s women. Our very existence is presented to young men as fodder for sex and laughs, our humiliation and pain as goal posts for their masculinity. Basically, we’re anything other than people deserving respect and humanity. While the mainstream culture fools itself into thinking that Americans take rape seriously, most women know better. We get the joke. We’re just tired of being the punch line.

Jessica Valenti, the founder of Feministing.com, is the editor of the award-winning anthology Yes Means Yes: Visions of Female Sexual Power and a World Without Rape.

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

Republican Brawl

First Palin said that Rove had spent a lot
Of other people's money, and had got
For all of that a largely losing slate—
Suggesting Rove’s gone past his sell-by date.
So Rove, in search of subtle ways to hit her,
Implied that she’d turned out to be a quitter.
Then John McCain, with careful choice of words,
Said Rand and Cruz behaved like “wacko birds.”
O’Reilly said that Bachmann’s speech was trite.
We can’t choose sides, since everyone is right.

The Dark Side of DNA

On February 26, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in Maryland v. King, which presents the question of whether the Fourth Amendment permits the warrantless collection of DNA from people arrested for, but not convicted of, a crime. Currently, twenty-eight states and federal law enforcement collect DNA upon arrest—when a person is still presumed innocent. During oral arguments, Justice Samuel Alito called it “perhaps the most important criminal procedure case that this Court has heard in decades.”

The case goes back to April 10, 2009, when Maryland police arrested Alonzo King on assault charges. A DNA sample was collected, and four months later, it was found to match...
“Less than one percent of our population is fighting our country’s wars, so the promises we make to our soldiers must be kept.

Now, it’s year-long waits for them to hear back from the VA? We must fix that. It’s on us.”

—Rachel Maddow
Evidence from an unsolved rape, which led to King’s conviction for the crime. The case is precisely the sort of example given by proponents of broad DNA collection: DNA has the power to identify the guilty and exonerate the innocent. But in King’s case, the Maryland Court of Appeals determined that arrestees have privacy expectations that outweigh the state’s crime-solving interest.

In its petition to the Supreme Court, Maryland argues that collecting DNA is no more invasive than its twentieth-century counterpart, the fingerprint. But King and opposing groups filing friend of the court, or amicus, briefs respond that unlike fingerprints, DNA is a trove of personal, medical and ancestral information. What’s more, DNA solves cases far less frequently than the state suggests. In 2011, Maryland police collected 10,666 DNA samples; only nineteen led to an arrest. The state’s interest is thus not identification but investigation—and the Court has never permitted suspicionless searches of suspects without a warrant. If it does in King, there will be no principle limiting when our DNA may be collected in the name of fighting crime.

But beyond privacy concerns, there is another reason to reconsider DNA collection on arrest. Because people of color are disproportionately stopped, searched and arrested, they will disproportionately bear the burden of this genetic dragnet. And because DNA samples can be used to establish family relationships, it has the potential to widen the surveillance to entire communities.

Maryland’s petition argues in favor of further incorporating DNA “into established criminal procedure.” But this is precisely the danger. Many criminal procedures, no matter their original intent, disproportionately affect people of color. An amicus brief filed by Howard University provides three examples: the “war on drugs” and two of its symptoms, the New York Police Department’s “stop-and-frisk” policy, and pretextual traffic stops—in which police seize on minor violations for the chance to investigate “suspicious” drivers.

The latter examples show why putting the power of DNA collection in the hands of police is so risky. “The wider the discretion that law enforcement officers have in implementing policies to serve their crime control ends,” Howard’s brief argues, “the more likely that these policies will be used to harass and infringe upon the rights of people of color.” Maryland’s petition cites the National Research Council on the “objective standards of DNA comparison.” But we should not confuse the objectivity of how samples are tested with the subjectivity of how they are collected. DNA is a value-neutral biological molecule, but DNA databases are mirrors that reflect the bias in justice systems. A cautionary example: by 2008, Britain’s National Database stored DNA from 27 percent of the black population and 77 percent of young black males.

This is already happening here. By 2011, African-Americans made up 40 percent of the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS), according to Jeremy Gruber, executive director of the Council for Responsible Genetics. Established by the DNA Identification Act in 1994, CODIS is used by the FBI to store and search DNA profiles collected by federal, state and local law enforcement. When exact matches cannot be found for an unknown sample, many states resort to partial matches, using different markers to track down potential family members.

Because African-Americans are significantly overrepresented in CODIS, it is possible to use the database to identify up to 17 percent of the country’s entire African-American population, researchers at Duke University’s Center for Genome Ethics, Law and Policy found in 2011. Although only four states explicitly permit familial searches, the ACLU has found that nineteen have used a partial match to connect an unknown sample with a potential relative of someone in CODIS—even though fifteen of those states prohibit using the database for this purpose. In California, which permits familial searching, an “initial candidate list” of up to 168 people is created. That list is then narrowed and nonrelatives removed. A potential relative who remains on the list becomes vulnerable to police investigation. This is why Howard University’s brief calls these efforts a “probable cause” generator.

Once a person is in the database, it can be hard to get out. According to the National Institute of Justice, only nine of the twenty-eight states that collect DNA from arrestees expunge the samples automatically if the person is not convicted. But even in these cases, the procedure is not straightforward. In Maryland, a sample can be expunged only when a charge is filed. What happens if a charge is never filed? In such cases, the Electronic Frontier Foundation points out in its amicus brief, “the arrestee must take the effort to get the sample expunged.” And in some states, such as California and Ohio, there is no right to counsel for expungement proceedings. California arrestees, if not charged, must wait until a statute of limitations expires before they may initiate the expungement process. The ACLU calculates that 19 percent of California felony arrestees in 2011—55,768 people—were never charged with a crime.

The Court is expected to hand down a decision in King before summer. How it will rule is difficult to predict. While it may turn, as usual, on Justice Anthony Kennedy, the alignment may be unusual. When Maryland’s chief deputy attorney general, Katherine Winfree, recited the number of convictions won through DNA matches, Justice Antonin Scalia fired back, “If you conducted a lot of unreasonable searches and seizures, you’d get more convictions, too. That proves absolutely nothing.” On the other hand, Justice Stephen Breyer pushed back against King’s attorney, saying DNA tests are “no more intrusive” than fingerprints but “much more accurate.”

Forensic DNA collection, as a modern method, reveals old truths about how we criminalize entire populations. In a racially biased system, DNA collection on arrest creates a racial dragnet. But that bias becomes invisible when the data are considered neutral. When one group is overrepresented, whether in statistics or a database, its members become coded as criminals—and clearly in need of additional surveillance. If the Court permits DNA collection upon arrest, law enforcement may solve some crimes, but only as it tracks a wider and wider pool of innocent people.

Jason Silverstein is a PhD student in anthropology at Harvard University, where he also works with the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African-American Research.
Eric Alterman
Anthony Lewis, 1927–2013

In announcing the death of Anthony Lewis at the age of 85, the New York Times headline somewhat anachronistically focused on how he “Transformed Coverage of the Supreme Court.” This was true: Lewis did bring “an entirely new approach to coverage of the Supreme Court, for which he won his second Pulitzer, in 1963.” And yes, his 1964 book, Gideon’s Trumpet, which told the story of Gideon v. Wainwright, the Court’s decision of the previous year that guaranteed lawyers to poor defendants charged with serious crimes, “has never been out of print since it was published.”

But the obit was written by Adam Liptak, who, like Anthony Lewis fifty years ago, is a Times legal correspondent. Had I been assigned the piece, I would have focused instead on the remarkable three-decade career that followed his Supreme Court coverage: the period, beginning in 1969, when Lewis established himself as the bravest and most eloquent columnist of the Vietnam and post-Vietnam eras.

The Times never planned to give Lewis a column. He had been sent to London owing to his close friendship with Robert Kennedy, which some feared might compromise his objectivity. But when publisher Punch Sulzberger picked the volcanic A.M. Rosenthal to be the paper’s executive editor, he asked the far calmer Lewis to return to New York to be his deputy. Rosenthal, however, had already offered the job to Seymour Topping. Sulzberger decided to respect this, but forgot to mention it to Lewis. So when the latter showed up for work on what he expected to be his first day as deputy, Sulzberger apologized for his error and offered the op-ed column as consolation.

Lewis planned to write his column from Washington and even found a house in the capital. But he decided, almost immediately, “that I could not live [there] because I could not write about public figures the way I wanted to”—that is, “unashamedly critical.” So he moved to Boston and, occasionally teaching at Harvard Law School, remained there for the next four decades, writing not only for the Times but also, following his retirement, for The Nation and The New York Review of Books.

By moving out of town and, more important, by refusing to countenance the assumptions of official Washington rhetoric regardless of who was president, Lewis willfully forfeited the direct influence over policy that his prominent perch at the Times might have accorded him. Instead, he played the role mapped out in the 1920s by Walter Lippmann: to educate the public in the hope that they would make more intelligent choices about their leaders.

Nobody had ever written anything in the paper of record the way Lewis did. The Vietnam War, he thundered, was “a crime against humanity,” causing “the most terrible destruction in the history of man.” He continued to speak, over the coming decades, as perhaps the most prominent of establishment voices for the antiracist, antiwar, human rights and civil rights movements. Indeed, he lit up his biweekly corner of the Times op-ed page with the kind of political passion that is typically roped off in Washington at marches and rallies.

In addition to his unforgettable columns on Vietnam, Lewis proved a lonely and prophetic voice on behalf of the Palestinians, who were routinely treated as either terrorists or backward-looking Bedouins in the US media. For this he found himself under fire not only from the likes of The New Republic’s Martin Peretz, who Lewis thought was “obsessed” with him, but also from Noam Chomsky, because Lewis—always the unapologetic liberal—refused to recognize what Chomsky believed were the evil intentions that lay behind America’s nefarious activities.

Reading Lewis’s scholarly but passionate prose twice weekly in high school and college during the late 1970s and early ’80s helped inspire thoughts of my own future career. I never got to know him well, but I spent a long afternoon with him in late 1989 while researching my history of punditry, first published in 1992. We spent hours examining the trade-off he’d made by abjuring the insider influence generally accorded a Times columnist in exchange for the ability to speak in the language of simple fairness and morality. Lewis said he could not judge the degree to which his work had any influence and had given up trying. He explained that he had recently written a column on events in the Palestinian village of Beit Sahour, which had been under siege by Israeli occupation forces, and another about a human rights case in the West Bank in which he believed someone was being unfairly accused. After the first column, the Israelis lifted the siege. After the second, “they sentenced the guy to a year without even a trial. Did I have anything to do with that unhappy result? I certainly hope not. Did I have anything to do with the siege of Beit Sahour being lifted? I doubt it.”

As it happened, we were meeting the morning after it was discovered that six Jesuit priests and two others had been murdered in El Salvador by military officers trained and funded by our own government. Nobody in the mainstream media wrote more about the case than Lewis, or with greater clarity or passion. “We have created the system that makes that possible,” he explained in his matter-of-fact manner. “I don’t know what clear policy should be; I just have a general skepticism about the utility of American military force in these places.”

But as ugly as the US role in that crime may have been, it never shook Lewis’s instinctive patriotism or his belief in his fellow citizens’ essential decency. Lewis laughed when I told him, toward the end of the afternoon, that I thought him to be the most radical voice in the American mainstream. “It’s absolutely hilarious to me,” he said. “I mean, I’m a pro-capitalist, middle-of-the-road, tepid centrist. Is it ‘left’ to insist that presidents and CIA directors adhere to the law? I don’t think so. I think it’s American.”
What Difference Will Marriage Equality Make?

In his essay “Message in the Stars,” the American Presbyterian writer and theologian Frederick Buechner conducts a thought experiment. What if God decided to prove—dramatically, irrefutably and publicly—that God does exist by writing across the night sky. Buechner imagines the heavenly author arranging the stars to read—GOD IS—and the subsequent hope, terror, regret, joy and utter astonishment that such a message would bring. He fantasizes that God would write the message in all the different languages of the world, so that on any given night one might go outside, look up and see, in French, Mandarin or Arabic: GOD IS.

He invites us to envision the sense of relief that would come with the utter certainty that God exists. Then he imagines this:

Then the way that I would have it end might be this. I would have a child look up at the sky some night, just a plain, garden-variety child with perhaps a wad of bubble gum in his cheek…. and then I would have the child turn to his father, or maybe, with the crazy courage of childhood, I would have him turn to God himself, and the words that I would have him speak would be words to make the angels gasp. “So what if God exists?” he would say. “What difference does that make?”

I’ve been thinking a lot about this question of “so what, what difference does that make?” in recent months, never more so than this week. As the Supreme Court prepared to hear challenges to the Defense of Marriage Act and to Proposition 8, the substance of their eventual judgment seems less and less relevant. This Court may offer the watershed legal justification for marriage equality, or it may erect one final barrier to this bundle of civil rights for gay couples. But it no longer seems to matter much.

Marriage equality has won. Democrats are flocking to a pro-marriage position in the most rapid case of mass evolution in history. Virginia’s Mark Warner, Missouri’s Claire McCaskill, West Virginia’s Jay Rockefeller, Montana’s Max Baucus and South Dakota’s Tim Johnson are among the more than a dozen legislators who changed their minds and now express support for same-sex marriage. President Obama “evolved” and then so did Bill and Hillary Clinton. Even Republican Rob Portman got on the marriage-equality bandwagon after his son came out to him. And conservatives unprepared to embrace full marriage equality are inching toward civil unions as the new default position.

These elected officials like to tell stories of resetting their inner moral compass after wrestling with ethical dilemmas and discovering compassion for gay friends and relatives. But it is hard to ignore the likely reality that their change of heart has been precipitated by the stunning change in opinion among Americans. Just days before the Court heard oral arguments, Pew reported that 70 percent of Americans born after 1980 support same-sex marriage. And though justice delayed is justice denied, whether the Roberts Court upholds or strikes down these particular provisions seems almost irrelevant given this cultural and political paradigm shift. Marriage equality, the stars seem to be telling us, is just a matter of time.

Those of us who have struggled as principals or allies to bring this moment into being are feeling a bit like the awe-struck citizens of Buechner’s story, standing with our mouths agape and hearts full of wonder as we look up at the sky and realize this is real. But soon the astonishment will give way to the question asked in Buechner’s text: What difference does that make? What do we believe marriage equality will do?

Marriage equality will extend a basic civil right and allow a broader swath of Americans to opt into the bundle of economic protections and cultural privileges associated with matrimony. But this year, which has seen such tremendous movement toward marriage equality, also marks the fiftieth anniversary of Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique. Surely progressives have not forgotten her key insight: that marriage is wholly inadequate to ensure public equality or personal fulfillment. If we are to move beyond mere jubilation at the message in the stars—MARITAL EQUALITY IS—and provide a deeper answer to the question of what difference it will make, advocates may have to shift their tactics fairly radically.

The successful, pragmatic strategy of gay activists has been to assert that same-sex marriage will not change the institution itself. Their argument is that there is no need to defend marriage against loving same-sex couples, because these couples don’t want to alter it; they just want to participate in it. But as we race to a victorious finish, it is time to begin forcefully articulating that, in fact, maybe we do want to change marriage—because while marriage should be a choice, it should not be an imperative. For decades, LGBTQ communities have generated new forms of family built on foundations of shared commitments, collective responsibilities, nonconjugal love and parental devotion not predicated on shared genetics. Shut out of social-normative options for making families, they queered the very idea of family. It would be tragic to allow marriage equality to destroy or marginalize the pioneering work of queer families who have taught us that family is more complicated and more fulfilling than traditional models of marriage can ever capture.

It is astonishing to be alive in this moment when marriage equality is written in the stars, but I hope we will be like the child who asks what difference it really makes. Because I suspect the goal of achieving this right is less about the ceremonies, the lovers, the love or even the economic benefits. I suspect the real goal is to achieve a more inclusive recognition of the authentic and enduring ways that we connect ourselves to one another, without needing the words “husband,” “wife” or even “spouse.” The difference we want this movement to make is bigger than that.
The Nation.

THE UNTOLD STORY

OBAMA’S CRACKDOWN ON WHISTLEBLOWERS

The NSA Four reveal how a toxic mix of cronyism and fraud blinded the agency before 9/11.

by TIM SHORROCK

n the annals of national security, the Obama administration will long be remembered for its unprecedented crackdown on whistleblowers. Since 2009, it has employed the World War I–era Espionage Act a record six times to prosecute government officials suspected of leaking classified information. The latest example is John Kiriakou, a former CIA officer serving a thirty-month term in federal prison for publicly identifying an intelligence operative involved in torture. It’s a pattern: the whistleblowers are punished, sometimes severely, while the perpetrators of the crimes they expose remain free.

The hypocrisy is best illustrated in the case of four whistleblowers from the National Security Agency: Thomas Drake, William Binney, J. Kirk Wiebe and Edward Loomis. Falsely accused of leaking in 2007, they have endured years of legal harassment for exposing the waste and fraud behind a multibillion-dollar contract for a system called Trailblazer, which was supposed to “revolutionize” the way the NSA produced signals intelligence (SIGINT) in the digital age. Instead, it was canceled in 2006 and remains one of the worst failures in US intelligence history. But the money spent on this privatization scheme, like so much at the NSA, remains a state secret.

The story goes back to 2002, when three of the whistleblowers from the National Security Agency: Thomas Drake, William Binney, J. Kirk Wiebe and Edward Loomis—asked the Pentagon to investigate the NSA for wasting “millions and millions of dollars” on Trailblazer, which had been chosen as the agency’s flagship system for analyzing intercepted communications over a smaller and cheaper in-house program known as ThinThread. That program was invented by Loomis, one of the NSA’s top software engineers, and Binney, a legendary crypto-scientist, both of whom began working for the NSA during the Vietnam War. But despite ThinThread’s proven capacity to collect actionable intelligence, agency director Gen. Michael Hayden vetoed the idea of deploying the system in August 2001, just three weeks before 9/11.

Hayden’s decisions, the whistleblowers told The Nation, left the NSA without a system to analyze the trillions of bits of foreign SIGINT flowing over the Internet at warp speed, as ThinThread could do. During the summer of 2001, when “the system was blinking red” with dangerous terrorist chatter (in former CIA Director George Tenet’s famous words), they say the agency failed to detect critical phone and e-mail communications that could have tipped US intelligence to Al Qaeda’s plans to attack.

“NSA intelligence basically stopped in its tracks when they canceled ThinThread,” says Wiebe, sitting next to Binney at an Olive Garden restaurant just a stone’s throw from NSA headquarters in Columbia, Maryland. “And the people who paid for it were those who died on 9/11.”

The NSA Four are now speaking out for the first time about the corporate corruption that led to this debacle and sparked their decision to blow the whistle. In exclusive interviews with The Nation, they have described a toxic mix of bid-rigging, cronyism and fraud involving senior NSA officials and several of the nation’s largest intelligence contractors. They have also provided an inside look at how Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC), the government’s fourth-largest contractor, squandered billions of dollars on a vast data-mining scheme that never produced an iota of intelligence.

“That corruption was the heart of our complaint—the untold treasure spent on a program that never delivered,” Drake explained to me one morning in Bethesda, Maryland, across the street from the local Apple Store where he now works. He wants it understood that the NSA Four’s case was not primarily about President Bush’s warrantless domestic surveillance program, as outrageous as that was. “Some in the press think we blew the whistle on Trailblazer because, oh, it violated people’s rights,” he said. “Well, it didn’t violate anybody’s rights, or create any intelligence, because it never delivered anything.”

But there’s a direct link between their case and domestic spying: the technology developed at the NSA to analyze foreign SIGINT—including programs created for ThinThread—was illegally directed toward Americans when the agency radically expanded its surveillance programs after the 9/11 attacks. In response, Drake, Wiebe and Binney have taken to the media to
expose and denounce what they say is a vast and unconstitutional program of domestic surveillance and eavesdropping.

By using the NSA to spy on American citizens, Binney told me, the United States has created a police state with few parallels in history: “It’s better than anything that the KGB, the Stasi, or the Gestapo and SS ever had.” He compared the situation to the Weimar Republic, a brief period of liberal democracy that preceded the Nazi takeover of Germany. “We’re just waiting to turn the key,” he said.

James Bamford, the world’s foremost authority on the NSA, said Americans should take Binney seriously. “Remember, he was the equivalent of a general because of his rank” at the NSA, he said. “In terms of going public with their names and faces,” the NSA Four rank as the most important whistleblowers in NSA history, he added. “Obviously, I think they’re very credible.” Because of their experience in some of the NSA’s most secret programs, the NSA Four are “indispensable” to understanding the agency’s unconstitutional operations, said Jameel Jaffer, deputy legal director for the ACLU. “NSA is an extraordinarily powerful agency with sophisticated technology that is poorly understood by many experts. It operates behind a veil of secrecy that is penetrated only occasionally by whistleblowers like these.”

In 2011, the Pentagon’s Office of the Inspector General (OIG) declassified parts of its 2005 audit of Trailblazer and ThinThread, which was triggered by the NSA Four’s complaint. Its report severely admonished the NSA for “wasting” its resources on Trailblazer (the amounts are redacted). It also found that the agency had overlooked fraud and abuse and “modified or suppressed” studies that put ThinThread in a positive light.

The NSA, the Office of the Inspector General concluded, “disregarded solutions to urgent national security needs.” And in a chilling comment that foreshadowed the government’s persecution of the whistleblowers, the OIG noted twice that some of the NSAers and contractors who came forward were in great fear of retaliation. “Many people we interviewed asked not to be identified for fear of management reprisal,” it stated.

The OIG report is the government’s only public response to the extraordinary charges made by the whistleblowers. The NSA would not comment on any aspect of this story. Neither would SAIC or any of the other contractors involved with Trailblazer. Eventually, one intelligence source responded to the most serious charge, but only if promised anonymity. “Essentially, what they’re saying is that we missed 9/11,” said a former high-ranking government official with intimate knowledge of the NSA’s SIGINT capabilities. “That’s absolutely bizarre. I mean, how hard is it to prove a negative? The only way I can respond is to violate a sacred oath I take very seriously, and I won’t do that.”

In fact, none of the whistleblowers were convicted of leaking classified information. Yet all have paid dearly for speaking out. “This is all about retaliation, reprisals, revenge and retribution,” said Jesselyn Radack, the Government Accountability Project lawyer who represents the whistleblowers before the OIG. She describes the charges against Drake as ludicrous. “Tom was not charged with disclosing classified material but retaining information for possible disclosure,” she told me.

In 2010, Eric Holder’s Justice Department indicted Drake on ten felony counts, including five under the Espionage Act, based primarily on Drake’s conversations with a single reporter. Those charges were dropped in 2011 after he pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge of exceeding the authorized use of a computer. The FBI’s investigation of the other three ended at the same time. But like Drake, they lost their security clearances and thus their ability to work in intelligence.

None of the whistleblowers have any doubt about who is responsible for the intelligence failures. “No NSA director did as much damage to the agency as Gen. Michael V. Hayden,” Binney told me. Hayden is now a principal with the Chertoff Group, the intelligence advisory company led by former Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff. His primary job there is advising government agencies and corporations about cybersecurity, which keeps him in constant contact with the NSA. The press office at the Chertoff Group never responded to my requests to interview Hayden, so I tracked him down myself. In February, after he made an appearance at George Washington University, I asked Hayden if the NSA would have been better off not wasting “hundreds of millions of dollars” on Trailblazer and going with its in-house system, ThinThread. In his first public comments on Trailblazer since 2005, Hayden admitted that the NSA and its contractors “overreached.” The agency “outsourced how we gathered other people’s communications,” he said. “And that was a bridge too far for industry. We tried a moonshot, and it failed.” But he wouldn’t comment on ThinThread (which, as Drake wryly pointed out to me, “did get to the moon”).

Last October, at a conference on cybersecurity at the National Press Club, I asked Hayden about the whistleblowers’ charges regarding the NSA’s domestic surveillance program. At the mention of the term “whistleblowers,” he suppressed a smile. “As a former NSA director, I can tell you there is no workforce in the federal government more conscientious” about privacy and Fourth Amendment rights, he told me, avoiding any direct mention of his critics from the agency. “But that’s a trusting sort of thing, and I realize it doesn’t have much purchase in America.” The public, he added, must understand that the agency “has a problem. To be good, NSA needs to be powerful, and frankly it needs to be a bit secret.” The message was clear: people like the NSA Four should stay quiet.

But here’s the irony: Even though Trailblazer failed, the massive enterprise it created set the model for the wholesale privatization of national security work after 9/11. As I described in my 2008 book Spies for Hire, this tsunami of taxpayer largesse reached into every nook and cranny of the intelligence-industrial complex that had slowly been built over the 1980s and ’90s to service the vast CIA and Pentagon needs for surveillance, reconnaissance and advanced IT. In the end, a handful of contractors earned at least $1.2 billion from Trailblazer, and probably several billion more, since huge amounts were squeezed from other parts of the NSA, including its detachments in the Army, Navy and Air Force.

Tim Shorrock, who has been contributing to The Nation since 1983, is the author of Spies for Hire: The Secret World of Intelligence Outsourcing. Research support provided by the Investigative Fund of the Nation Institute.
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“It was a feeding frenzy,” recalls Drake.

One incident in particular crystallized the greed and hubris that gripped the NSA’s top officials at the time. It happened right after the 9/11 catastrophe, when Samuel Visner, a former SAIC executive who ran Trailblazer for the agency’s SIGINT division, held a meeting with contractors working on ThinThread (one of them still works inside the NSA; he is the source for this anecdote). Now that Trailblazer was the NSA’s chosen SIGINT project, the contractors were worried that they would be cut out of the money loop. But Visner assured them that, in the wake of the attacks, their worries were gone.

“We can milk this thing all the way to 2015,” he said, according to separate accounts by Drake, Binney and Wiebe, who heard it directly from the contractor. “There’s plenty to go around.” In 2003, Visner returned to SAIC as a director of its Intelligence, Security and Technology Group. Visner is now a vice president in charge of cybersecurity policy at CSC, one of the NSA’s most valued contractors (neither CSC nor Visner would comment).

Trailblazer marked a dramatic shift for the agency, away from small, government-led research projects that hired contractors only for specific functions to huge projects run by contractors who answer only to the senior leadership of the NSA. Since its origins during the Cold War, the NSA had led the world in encryption, computer and voice-processing technologies. But all of its development work was done by an elite corps of government scientists and mathematicians. Until the 1980s, “virtually everything was done in-house,” says Loomis, who spent much of his career in the agency’s telecommunications and computer services directorate. “As for contracting for development,” he added, “that did not happen.”

That began to change around the turn of the century, when the NSA was forced to wrestle with enormous technological changes. For most of its existence, the agency had been focused on radio and microwave signals traveling through the atmosphere. The telecom revolution and the Internet altered the game forever. Suddenly the NSA was deluged with digitized cellphone traffic and e-mail flowing across fiber-optic cables that were almost impossible to intercept. It was an “explosion,” Hayden told me at George Washington University. “And if you’re a signals intelligence organization—we eavesdrop, right?—if your technology isn’t the technology of the target, then guess what you are? Deaf!” Hayden was appointed director in 1999, when the agency was struggling to figure a way out of this conundrum.

His solution was to turn away from the NSA’s historic legacy and privatize. “Hayden made a fateful choice,” says Drake. “If we’re not going to make it, we’re going to buy it. That was the mantra.” Hayden couched his plan as “transformation.”

In the early 1990s, after a stint in Air Force intelligence and the CIA, Drake was assigned to a top-secret NSA project called MINSTREL that was digitizing intercepted voice communications. But he came in as a contractor and his actual employer was the now-defunct GTE Government Systems. There, he encountered his first corruption, including massive cost overruns and fraud; in 1992, he reported GTE to the Pentagon hotline. “That’s how I became a whistleblower,” he told me (MINSTREL, like Trailblazer, was canceled without becoming operational). Drake later worked inside the NSA for Booz Allen Hamilton and other contractors before finding work in the late 1990s as a private consultant in Silicon Valley. He returned to the NSA in 2001 as a member of the agency’s senior executive service. As a result of these experiences, Drake knew that hiring big corporations to develop new technologies ran against the grain of the information revolution. Trailblazer “was an industrial-age model so inappropriate for the digital age,” he said. The model of innovation in the computer industry was “very small teams, skunk teams, developing the next critical applications. And here we were going in the completely opposite direction.”

That’s because corporations—and their moles inside the NSA—ran Trailblazer from the start. The fix began in 2000, when Hayden hired Bill Black, a wily NSAer who had worked at the highest levels of SIGINT in Europe as Hayden’s deputy. For the previous three years, from 1997 to 2000, he’d been working for SAIC, then a rising San Diego defense contractor with extensive contacts in the intelligence community. Black’s new job at the NSA was to carry out Hayden’s “transformation” plan by siphoning the NSA’s SIGINT analysis, over to the private sector, from the development to the operations stage. The idea was to use cutting-edge technologies to analyze intercepted cellphone and e-mail traffic for clues to plots against the country. But Drake, who had extensive experience as a contractor and in the private sector, says it was flawed from the start.

‘NSA intelligence basically stopped in its tracks…and the people who paid for it were those who died on 9/11.’ —J. Kirk Wiebe

Trailblazer, its centerpiece, involved turning the NSA’s most precious asset, SIGINT analysis, over to the private sector, from the development to the operations stage. The idea was to use cutting-edge technologies to analyze intercepted cellphone and e-mail traffic for clues to plots against the country. But Drake, who had extensive experience as a contractor and in the private sector, says it was flawed from the start.
$280 million. SAIC’s team included Northrop Grumman, Boeing and CSC—the company where Visner now works.

By this time, Drake was a senior “change leader” reporting to Maureen Baginski, who was the agency’s director of signals intelligence and number three in the hierarchy, behind Hayden and Black. Drake sat in on many of the Trailblazer meetings and claims the concept setup was a scam. He told me that the four companies agreed secretly that the prime contract would go to SAIC, while they would divvy up big chunks of the sub-contracting among themselves. Later, as a material witness for the Pentagon’s OIG, he provided investigators with hundreds of documents relating to the bidding and award process for Trailblazer; they remain classified, and Drake can talk about them only indirectly. Most crucial, he says, were statements he collected from NSA officials showing that agency leaders had told their procurement office to hand the award to SAIC. “The orders came from the very top,” Drake says. “They just ensured it was weighted in a way to award it to SAIC and its subcontractors. That was the deal.”

I went over these details with a government procurement analyst who once worked for the Pentagon’s OIG and has had access to classified contracts. He could not comment on the record because of his current position in government, but was shocked at the evidence of collusion. “That’s the fraud, waste and abuse right there,” he said. “You’re steering the contract to a favored client. That’s blatant and outright favoritism. The impropriety is apparent.”

The primary showcase for Trailblazer was a large building leased by Northrop Grumman in the “National Business Park” next to the NSA. There the agency and its contractors showed their system off to congressional overseers and intelligence leaders. The sessions took on increasing urgency after 9/11. “Basically, they took one whole portion of their facility to turn into a demonstration room, a showcase,” Drake recalls. “But that’s all it was: show and tell, a dog and pony show. Very large screens, fancy computers stacked up, a director’s place in the middle. But I have to tell you, there was nothing behind it.” Congress and the NSA finally agreed. After millions of dollars in cost overruns, Trailblazer was quietly terminated in 2006 by the current NSA director, Gen. Keith Alexander.

If Trailblazer was a massive corporate boondoggle, ThinThread was the embodiment of the “skunk team” approach that had made the NSA the crown jewel of US intelligence. It cost less than $3 million, was small enough to be loaded onto a laptop, and included anonymization software that protected the privacy rights of US persons guaranteed in the 1978 Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). And while Trailblazer employed hundreds of contractors, ThinThread was the work of less than a dozen NSA employees and a handful of contractors.

It came out of the NSA’s SIGINT Automation Research Center, or SARC, where Loomis was director of R&D. In the late 1990s, he began working on tackling the Internet and the rapidly growing use of cellphones and e-mail. “I knew more and more intelligence and law enforcement targets would be making use of these cheap commodity electronics,” Loomis told me, sitting in the living room of his Baltimore home. “So I jumped in with both feet.”

The genius of the group was Bill Binney, Loomis’s deputy at SARC. An amiable man who suffers from diabetes, Binney joined the NSA in 1966 while in the Army and began working as a civilian in 1970. In 1997, he was named technical director of SARC’s World Geopolitical and Military Analysis Reporting Group. “That’s when I started looking at the world,” Binney told me.

While the NSA brass and their corporate advisers believed the Internet could be tamed only by a massive corporate-run program, Binney found that cracking it was relatively simple. The secret was in the numbering system established by telecom providers: every phone has a number, every e-mail has an address, and every computer linked to the Internet has a unique identifier. The encryption systems from the past were “so much more complex,” he says. “This was simple shit.”

ThinThread was basically three programs. The front end, analyzing incoming streams of Internet traffic, had been developed by Loomis. “It could take massive amounts of input and reassemble it in a sensible order,” he says. “And then, with a minimum amount of bandwidth requirements, could provide it to whoever was interested in a particular topic and do it while accommodating all privacy concerns that are required by FISA.” The middle portion was the anonymization software that hid the identities of US persons until there was sufficient evidence to obtain a warrant (Trailblazer had no built-in FISA protections). The back end, built by Binney, was the most powerful element of the system. It translated the data to create graphs showing relationships and patterns that could tell analysts which targets they should look at and which calls should be listened to. Best of all, “it was fully automated, and could even be remotely controlled,” Binney says.

But there was another crucial difference with the Trailblazer model: ThinThread did its automated analysis at the point of interception; Trailblazer downloaded everything flowing over the Internet and analyzed it after the fact with key words and phrases. “Trailblazer made no distinction up front,” says Binney. “They didn’t try to determine ahead of the interception what to listen to. They just took it all.” This model of “taking it all” remains the NSA’s modus operandi, and it is why, Binney and Wiebe say, the agency is building a massive data center in Utah.

The ThinThread prototype went live in the fall of 2000 and, according to my sources, was deployed at two top-secret NSA listening posts. One was the Yakima Research Station in Washington State, which gathers electronic communications from the Asia-Pacific region and the Middle East. The other was in Germany and focused primarily on Europe. It was also

By using the NSA to spy on American citizens, Binney told me, the United States has created a police state with few parallels in history.
Timeless Whoppers

“Our intelligence sources tell us that Saddam Hussein has attempted to purchase high-strength aluminum tubes suitable for nuclear production.”

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH
2003 STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS
installed at Fort Meade. In addition, several allied foreign intelligence agencies were given the program to conduct lawful surveillance in their own corners of the world. Those recipients included Canada, Germany, Britain, Australia and New Zealand. "ThinThread was basically operational," says Binney. "That's why we proposed early deployment in January 2001."

As ThinThread was being tested, word spread throughout the intelligence community that the NSA had a "cheap Trailblazer" that could help with surveillance. One day, Charlie Allen, a legendary figure who was head of collections for the entire intelligence community under George Tenet, came to see it. Black, Baginski and Visner were given demonstrations as well. "But Hayden never visited the SARC," says Binney. "Not once."

Yet on August 20, 2001—"at 4:30 in the afternoon," Loomis says, reading from his notes of the meeting—Baginski informed him that ThinThread would not become operational. Why? "It would have made Trailblazer meaningless," says Binney.

During this time, Binney and Wiebe, who was working on the ThinThread team as a SIGINT analyst, were called in to describe their system to congressional oversight committee staff, in particular a GOP staffer named Diane Roark. Long concerned about the NSA's technical problems, she demanded that it keep ThinThread alive and provided funds to keep it going (she declined to be interviewed).

According to the whistleblowers, the 2002 intelligence budget, which was signed by President Bush, included $9 million for ThinThread and an order to Hayden to install it at eighteen sites around the world considered the most critical for counterterrorism. But the NSA, they say, defied the spending directive (ironically, considering what happened after 9/11, Hayden's general counsel told Loomis that ThinThread did not meet the agency's FISA requirements).

Then came the shock of 9/11. With the entire intelligence community frantically working to find who was responsible, the SARC team tried to persuade Baginski to put ThinThread into operation. "With each passing day," Wiebe e-mailed her on October 8, "more and more information is coming out regarding the facts re what Al Qaeda is using for communications, yet the only relevant weapon in your arsenal continues to sit on the sidelines 27 days after the events of September 11."

Baginski, who is now the CEO of Summit Solutions, a contractor specializing in SIGINT interception, told me, "I'm not going to talk about it."

But she did take action. According to Drake, Baginski approved a plan to plug ThinThread's automated analysis system into an enormous NSA database called PINWALE that included records of thousands of cellphone calls and e-mails. They found actionable intelligence—links between individuals and organizations—that had not previously been discovered or had not been shared before 9/11. Drake, who was ThinThread's program manager by this time, still can't talk specifics because the information remains classified; but he insists it could have alerted US intelligence to the 9/11 plot. "And that's what caused them to finally shut ThinThread down, because of the severe embarrassment it could have caused," he told me.

In the weeks after the attacks, NSAers became aware that Hayden had changed the rules of engagement by throwing out the warrants required for surveillance of US persons. As the public was to learn in December 2005, when the secret wiretapping was exposed in The New York Times, the NSA was sifting through oceans of cellphone and e-mail traffic from AT&T, Verizon and other carriers. This massive data-mining program was given a secret code name: Stellar Wind. It came as a shock to many NSA employees. "People came to me and said, 'My God, they're pointing our system toward the United States,'" recalls Drake. For Binney, the last straw came when he learned that the graphing software he had developed for ThinThread had been attached to the NSA's database to begin the "hot pursuit" of Al Qaeda suspects—but without the privacy restraints he and Loomis had built in. "They took the graphing software and began tracking relationships on a gargantuan scale," he told me. "They considered it domestic intelligence."

On October 31, 2001, seven weeks after 9/11, Binney and Wiebe walked out the NSA's doors for the last time. "I couldn't take the corruption anymore," Binney told me. Loomis left too, taking a job with a nearby contractor.

In September 2002, they signed an official letter of complaint to the Pentagon OIG that was joined by Roark, the House staffer. Drake, who stayed on at the NSA until 2008, testified as a material witness. When the OIG released its report in 2005, it exonerated the whistleblowers. The NSA, it concluded, was developing a "less capable long-term digital network exploitation solution that will take longer and cost significantly more to develop" than ThinThread.

After they left the NSA, Binney, Wiebe and Loomis were granted permission to form a company and sell the analytical skills they had developed for the NSA and ThinThread to other government agencies. But they quickly found they'd been blackballed. All three told me the NSA contacted every agency approached by the whistleblowers—including the Army Intelligence and Security Command and the National Reconnaissance Office—and persuaded them not to do business with the three. "We've been denied untold hundreds of thousands of dollars in potential income as a result," Wiebe told me. The three are considering a lawsuit against the NSA officials responsible. But redress is going to be difficult: in late March, Binney and Wiebe were informed by the Pentagon's inspector general that their 2012 request for an investigation into reprisals against whistleblower and a review of their clearances had been rejected. "The alleged personnel actions occurred...over a decade ago" and are "outside the scope of whistleblower provisions"of US law, the OIG said in a letter made available by their attorney, Jesselyn Radack (Drake's complaint is still outstanding).

Meanwhile, the NSA Four watch in grim fascination as the crackdown on whistleblowers continues, and Congress and the Supreme Court approve laws legalizing the surveillance state they've spoken out against. They see some hope in President Obama's recent order extending legal protections to intelligence whistleblowers. But like other observers, they are waiting to see if its implementation will have any effect. Without real protections, they say, accountability is impossible. "When you permit something like Trailblazer and no heads roll except for
Media-savvy conservative nonprofits take aim and fire at progressive power bases in the states.

by LEE FANG

The mood at the beginning of the meeting matched the weather: gray and dreary. The warm-up speaker told a joke about how local Republicans could merit placement on the endangered species list, which met with polite laughter. Talk of the most recent presidential election elicited audible groans.

Days after Barack Obama took the oath of office for his second term, about 400 GOP donors gathered in a downtown San Francisco hotel to hear Jim DeMint—who had just resigned from the Senate to take a $1-million-a-year job as head of the Heritage Foundation—explain the way forward.

“This is a battle we can win, and we are winning in many places around the country,” DeMint told the assembled donors confidently. He implored them to look beyond Washington, DC, and see that conservatives were scoring victories in state after state, citing the December move by Michigan Republicans to ram through anti-union legislation, as well as similar laws passed in Wisconsin and Indiana. Some of these victories would influence the Beltway as well. After all, the GOP’s control of state governments guaranteed that congressional districts were drawn in such a way that, in the 2012 elections, Republicans retained a thirty-three-seat majority in the House despite Democrats earning 1.3 million more votes for their candidates.

“You may not have heard about it,” DeMint continued. “We’ve been cultivating bright ideas, building coalitions and working with others like the State Policy Network to make these things happen.” SPN is a nonprofit that nurtures conservative think tanks in all fifty states; its president, Tracie Sharp, was sitting near the front at the event and was warmly acknowledged by the speakers several times.

By the end of DeMint’s presentation, which was punctuated by roaring applause, the audience—whose members included food processing tycoon Jerry Hume and wealthy Bay Area investor Nersi Nazari—seemed decidedly more cheerful. But DeMint’s pitch about promoting state-based political organs in networking groups like SPN wasn’t just bluster or salesmanship: Sharp is among the leading strategists who have made the right’s under-the-radar resurgence possible.

Other conservative leaders have spoken even more glowingly of the way that state-level political investments can shape the future of conservatism. “We have, us fellow warriors for liberty, a rendezvous with destiny,” said Henry Olsen, an American Enterprise Institute vice president, at a meeting of conservative think tank leaders last November at the Ritz-Carlton resort on Amelia Island, Florida. “Reagan’s generation did too, and their task was to plant the tree of liberty, a rendezvous with destiny; our task is to plant the tree of liberty for the children of the future.”

At the same event, Grover Norquist proclaimed that with SPN’s support, Republican governors might “turn their states into Texas or Hong Kong”—laboratories of the free market. “It’s a wonderful opportunity,” he added.

Though Democrats largely outperformed electoral expectations at the federal level last year, Republicans made significant gains in several states. The GOP is using this shift to redistribute wealth by cutting taxes on the rich while raising them on working-class citizens, largely through sales tax increases. What makes this year different from past Republican realignments, however, is the massive increase in funds available to conserva-

This article was reported in collaboration with the Investigative Fund at the Nation Institute, where Lee Fang is a reporting fellow. It is adapted from his new book, The Machine: A Field Guide to the Resurgent Right, which is scheduled for publication on April 24 by the New Press.
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tive think tanks operating on the state level, as well as how these groups have made the goal of consolidating power through attacking unions and similar tactics central to their agenda.

These media-savvy organizations—which frequently employ former journalists to churn out position papers, news articles, investigations and social media content with a hard-right slant—bolster the pro-corporate lobbying efforts of the American Legislative Exchange Council. Like ALEC, State Policy Network groups provide an ideological veil for big businesses seeking to advance radical deregulatory policy goals. Interviewed at the San Francisco event this past January, SPN’s Sharp maintained that her organization is loosely connected and has no coordinated agenda. But if the last four years are any guide, conservative think tanks are on the march, working from a similar script to tear down organized labor and promote extreme right-wing policies in state capitols from Alaska to Florida.

Financial support for SPN-affiliated think tanks has increased by tens of millions of dollars over the last four years, disclosures show. In areas with the most concentrated investments, para-

The upgraded state echo chambers are fast-paced, social-media-focused and dedicated to eliminating their perceived opposition.

mericans for Prosperity, known largely for its affiliation with the billionaire Koch brothers and for organizing Tea Party rallies, is part of this state-focused spending spree. The group has opened new local chapters or more than tripled the funding for existing chapters in key states. This increased spending has helped Americans for Prosperity recruit conservative activists and deploy them during contentious policy debates. Audit reports collected by the New York State Attorney General’s office show that Americans for Prosperity went from spending about $4.9 million on state chapter activities in 2009 to $10.6 million in 2011, the last available disclosure. Those figures do not necessarily account for the television, radio and Internet advertising purchased by the group when lobbying on state policy issues (which has reportedly reached over $4 million in places like Wisconsin), or the ubiquitous bus tours it has sponsored around the country.

A key area of growth among state-level conservative think tanks involves efforts to develop nonprofit media. Founded in 2009, the Franklin Center for Government and Public Integrity has partnered with SPN and Americans for Prosperity to hire and train conservative reporters in nearly every state capital. In fact, many Americans for Prosperity officials now lead the center.

As Joe Strupp of Media Matters has reported, the Franklin Center’s stated mission is to take advantage of cutbacks at local papers: “Cash-strapped and under-staffed, local and regional newspapers often can’t provide the real information that voters need to make good decisions.” Strupp, who interviewed several local editors who reluctantly run the center’s syndicated content, noted that some stories covered by the group—including one claiming that a union traded free barbecue for votes in Wisconsin—turned out to be false.

The head of the Franklin Center, a former executive director of the North Dakota Republican Party, boasted that by 2011, the group had hired more than 100 journalists in forty-four states—virtually all of them placed at SPN-affiliated think tanks. In Tennessee, it hired an award-winning journalist, Clint Brewer, for over a year, while in Hawaii and other states, its affiliates ran multiple stories questioning Obama’s birth certificate.

Consultants associated with State Policy Network have also set up supposedly nonpartisan “government transparency” websites. These sites, which neglect the topic of highly paid government contractors while at times exaggerating the pay of public sector employees like teachers—have recently cropped up in almost every state. In Ohio, the Buckeye Institute, an SPN-affiliated think tank, provided the underlying data for a database on public employee pay, which came under criticism after the Associated Press reported that it was “riddled with errors and omissions.”

This latest project in conservative infrastructure building comes at a time when power is drifting away from political parties and other long-established organizations. The Supreme Court’s Citizens United decision has accelerated this trend, with new Super PACs and attack-ad nonprofits springing up almost as fast as donors can write checks. The upgraded state echo chambers, led by SPN think tanks, seem particularly well-suited for this environment: they are fast-paced, Internet-savvy and dedicated to eliminating their perceived opposition.

Months before Scott Walker took the oath of office as Wisconsin’s forty-fifth governor, the groundwork for his controversial “budget repair bill,” which severely curtailed public sector collective bargaining rights, had already been laid. The John K. MacIver Institute for Public Policy, founded in 2009 as the second SPN think tank in the state, had—along with the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, an older state affiliate—published several studies calling for government leaders to tackle public sector employee bargaining. Specifically, they targeted teacher pay and benefits as the driver of the state’s budget ills. Unlike the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, the MacIver Institute waged its advocacy through YouTube videos and social media, including its own blog.

Brett Healy, president of the MacIver Institute, explained later that it was “critically important” that the state think tanks...
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used “digital media” advocacy and “not the traditional research and analysis...that we’re normally accustomed to doing.”

In January 2011, as Walker began his term, conservatives opened two new reporting outfits in the state. The Franklin Center helped sponsor one called Wisconsin Reporter, while American Majority, a group that helps train conservative activists, started another called MediaTrackers.org. The MacIver Institute bloggers, joined by these new reporting organizations, moved quickly to frame the debate, interviewing protesters who had gathered in Madison to try to stop the bill. The interviewers highlighted the radicals among the group, harshly criticized child participants and sought to rebut union arguments against the budget.

Meanwhile, the Wisconsin chapter of Americans for Prosperity began a “Stand With Walker” campaign in partnership with the MacIver Institute. The group aired over $342,000 worth of advertising to support the governor’s budget and also began a bus tour crisscrossing the state to drum up support. A turning point came when the MacIver Institute’s bloggers reported that a group of teachers on sick leave were being given fake doctors’ notes by volunteer physicians among the protesters. The story took off, garnering coverage by the local and national media; there was so much Internet traffic to the MacIver Institute’s website that the server crashed. “Tracie [Sharp] probably remembers the panicked phone call that she received from me trying to figure out a patch to fix the situation,” Healy recalled.

The Wisconsin groups went on to help re-elect a pro-Walker State Supreme Court judge and successfully fend off the attempt to unseat Walker himself in a recall election.

The strategy in Wisconsin—with several think tanks and nimble media outlets all coordinating to enact laws to weaken labor unions—also played out in Indiana, where Republicans enacted a right-to-work law, and in Ohio, where a bill to limit collective bargaining was passed (Ohio’s law was subsequently repealed by referendum in 2011). Then, in December 2012, Republicans in Michigan reversed a previous promise and enacted a right-to-work law during the post-election lame-duck session. Happening as it did in the cradle of private-sector union activism, this was perhaps the crowning achievement of the state-based conservative movement. (The Taft-Hartley Act allows states to enact right-to-work laws, which quickly erode unions by allowing workers to benefit from union contracts and negotiations without having to pay dues.)

While many legislators were caught off guard by Michigan Governor Rick Snyder’s announcement, space in the front of the capitol had been reserved weeks in advance by Americans for Prosperity’s state chapter to set up a booth in support of the effort. Likewise, the Mackinac Center for Public Policy—the SPN affiliate in Michigan, with two recently opened media outlets, Michigan Capitol Confidential and Watchdog Wire Michigan—produced an array of content, from a Pinterest page to short videos on why the state should change its law governing labor unions.

Labor unions, on the other hand, spend the majority of their limited resources on member services like bargaining; their political money is mostly spent on candidate donations rather than the kind of rapid-response permanent campaign now embraced by their opposition. The only labor-backed political group that could be compared to the SPN-affiliated Mackinac Center and its allies—an organization called Progress Michigan, which does political research and media outreach—has far fewer resources than its counterparts on the right. In 2010, according to the latest available disclosure for the three groups, the Mackinac Center and Americans for Prosperity’s state chapter outspent Progress Michigan by $4.6 million to a little over $700,000.

MediaTrackers.org sites and news outlets mirroring Wisconsin Reporter now exist in states across the country, augmenting the advocacy of the expanded Americans for Prosperity and SPN chapters. “There’s no counterweight,” says Lisa Graves, head of the Center for Media and Democracy, a watchdog group in Madison. Graves notes that Wisconsin Reporter, among the other Franklin Center news sites set up in more than two dozen states, has acted as a syndication service, providing right-leaning news coverage to local media. “There’s no progressive wire service,” she adds.

Though many of the conservative groups involved in this strategy have claimed that their interest in promoting right-to-work laws or ending collective bargaining is about creating jobs or cutting spending, there is evidence to suggest that they are really seeking to eliminate unions across the board.

“Freedom is the issue at the core of this debate, and we want to ensure the citizens of Michigan understand this,” said Scott Hagerstrom, Americans for Prosperity’s state leader, in a press release following the passage of the right-to-work law. In a meeting for activists, however, Hagerstrom described his goals differently. “We fight these battles on taxes and regulation,” he said, “but really, what we would like to see is to take the unions out at the knees so they don’t have the resources to fight these battles.”

Speaking at a panel discussion in Dallas a year before the right-to-work law’s passage in Michigan, Mackinac Center president Joseph Lehman conceded that his group’s campaign to promote government transparency through hundreds of Freedom of Information Act requests was really an effort to hurt the unions. “The strategic idea we had in mind was defunding unions,” he said. And while it’s too early to predict the result of the Michigan law, new figures released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that Wisconsin and Indiana recorded the sharpest decline in union membership in recent history. Last year, Wisconsin’s union membership rolls dropped by 13 percent. The only state with a higher decrease was Indiana, which reportedly declined by 18 percent.

In their aggressive effort take out the opposition, SPN and its allies have at times used unscrupulous tactics. A MediaTrackers.org story late in the campaign last November claimed that the husband of Mark Pocan, a Democratic candidate for Congress, “threatened and harassed” a Republican volunteer named Kyle Wood over text messages. Wood, who also claimed he was beaten in his apartment for not supporting Pocan, later recanted his entire story as a hoax. But the MediaTrackers.org reporter never viewed
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the alleged text messages before spreading the claim.

MediaTrackers.org’s founder, Drew Ryun, the son of former Republican Congressman Jim Ryun, calls his group an “attack bloc component.” As he explained at an event with Sharp: “For so long, we as a conservative movement have thought good ideas will win the day. Nothing could be further from the truth.” Ryun added that public opinion could be shaped with technology like “search engine optimization” as well as with “a little bit of pushing back and punching back.”

Before Ryun started working at MediaTrackers.org, his group American Majority had been training Tea Party activists to manipulate the rating systems on sites like Rotten Tomatoes and Amazon and create lower ratings for left-leaning movies and books. “Literally 80 percent of the books I put a star on, I don’t read,” said a staff member at an American Majority training session. “That’s how you control the online dialogue.”

And before State Policy Network focused its attention in 2011 on eliminating unions, the group helped propel the campaign against the low-income advocacy group ACORN. In 2008, one of its affiliates filed a racketeering suit against ACORN, alleging it was a criminal gang designed to commit voter fraud in Ohio—though no evidence existed of any illicit voting.

After James O’Keefe’s edited tapes of ACORN brought the organization to its knees the following year, the conservative videographer was invited to speak at multiple events held by these state-level think tanks. And when O’Keefe was caught tampering with wires in Senator Mary Landrieu’s office some months later, it was revealed that he’d plotted the idea at the Pelican Institute for Public Policy, SPN’s Louisiana think tank, where he was scheduled to give a talk on “Exposing Truth: Undercover Video, New Media and Creativity.” Indeed, the Pelican Institute’s Robert Flanagan was one of his accomplices, dressing up as a telephone repairman in order to enter Landrieu’s office.

Considering these organizations as the spokes on a wheel. When a group of for-profit education companies sought legislation allowing online charter schools greater access to taxpayer dollars, it hired dozens of state lobbyists from coast to coast. In addition, however, the virtual-school companies tapped SPN to provide academic studies, talking heads for the local media, flip-cam-equipped journalists to quiz critics, and busloads of activists at state capitols.

Lobbyists with the school companies—including K12 Inc. and Connections Academy—drafted the legislation through ALEC. The State Policy Network groups acted, in essence, as ALEC’s public relations team to promote the laws. And it worked: by the end of 2011, sixteen states had passed laws expanding virtual education. The flow of campaign dollars and closed-door influence peddling still happened, as in any traditional corporate campaign to pass major legislation. The difference in this case, however, was a well-oiled operation that could deliver the appearance of a well-oiled operation that could deliver the appearance of a groundswell in demand for proprietary online charter schools, when little public support existed. Worse, the lobbying by SPN-affiliated think tanks overshadowed serious questions about these charter-school businesses, which despite their soaring profit margins have been roundly criticized for abysmal test scores and high dropout rates. Together, these new state-level groups have remade the political map, providing ideological cover for extreme conservative policies once thought of as politically toxic.

State Policy Network’s organizations have also operated as fronts for corporations seeking to cloak their business interests under an ideological veneer. The Commonwealth Foundation for Public Policy, a Pennsylvania-based affiliate of SPN that is pushing to pass right-to-work legislation, is financed in part by the Pennsylvania Manufacturers’ Association, a lobbying group that represents US Steel, Hershey Foods, Sun Oil and many smaller firms. The lobbying group even provides office space for the Commonwealth Foundation and its media outlet, Pennsylvania Independent. The foundation has surged in size, with its budget climbing from $890,000 in 2008 to $1.95 million in 2011, the last available figure. The head of the Pennsylvania Manufacturers’ Association, Frederick Anton, has pushed right-to-work legislation for years. But this time, he’s being aided by grassroots organizers from Americans for Prosperity, as well as the media work of Pennsylvania Independent.

The pattern seen in the online education debate has been duplicated to pass corporate tax cuts, reductions to health and education programs, a rollback in state environmental laws, and other corporate and conservative priorities. In places like Minnesota and Louisiana, the playbook has been deployed to provide telecom companies with a greater monopoly by pushing to outlaw municipal fiber-optic broadband networks, a faster, cheaper alternative for consumers. (Notably, Comcast and Time Warner Cable helped sponsor the last State Policy Network retreat.)

When the Free State Foundation, a Maryland affiliate of SPN, testified in Congress in opposition to so-called net neutrality rules, which prevent Internet providers from setting discriminatory download and upload speeds based on content, the National Cable and Telecom Association quietly provided the small think tank with a grant of $85,000.

In 2010, when the Texas Public Policy Foundation filed similar comments to the FCC in opposition to net neutrality, the think tank received $76,500 from AT&T and $34,950 from Verizon, according to a leaked donor list.

Meanwhile, several family foundations financed by Koch Industries—a firm that produces chemicals and transportation infrastructure for hydraulic fracturing (better known as fracking) and horizontal drilling for oil and natural gas—have helped with State Policy Network’s expansion. In turn, SPN think tanks from New York to California have attacked bills intended to create state-level regulations over fracking.
State Policy Network was founded on March 24, 1992, in South Carolina by Thomas Roe, a wealthy businessman, Reagan adviser and leader of the South Carolina Policy Council, a state think tank modeled after the Heritage Foundation. Now headquartered in Arlington, Virginia, SPN began as an effort to mobilize more than twenty state think tanks. Political Research Associates, a left-leaning investigative team, reported that the group quickly became a “government-in-waiting” for the wave of Republican governors elected in 1994. As SPN affiliates proposed broad tax cuts and privatization schemes, the Republican governors frequently hired policy professionals from the think tanks to help enact those ideas.

Though backed by some of the largest Republican donors in the country, including the Coors family and Richard Mellon Scaife, SPN also thrived in the 1990s by assisting the tobacco industry in packaging its resistance to tobacco taxes and health regulations as part of a “freedom agenda” for conservatives.

Sharp herself gained experience working at this nexus of influence. Records stored with the University of California, San Francisco, reveal that Philip Morris not only gave generous financial donations to SPN affiliates, but was heavily involved in drafting and disseminating content for the think tanks. Before assuming her current position, Sharp served as executive director of the Cascade Institute, a State Policy Network affiliate in Oregon. The UCSF archive shows that during her tenure, the Cascade Institute corresponded with Philip Morris’s state lobbyist in Salem on promoting opposition to tobacco taxes, including one instance where Cascade published an opinion piece by a doctor. The doctor’s column, which was faxed to the Philip Morris representative, warned that high cigarette taxes could lead to “drive-by shootings and mob-style assassinations—turf wars—over the control of black market cigarette sales.”

At a 2001 meeting for SPN, Sharp invited Joshua Slavitt, Philip Morris’s director of external affairs, to give a talk. “I know that many of you have worked with Philip Morris,” Slavitt said, according to a prepared text, adding: “It won’t surprise you that we believe it is in our enlightened self-interest to be part of the policy discussions that ultimately shape the environment in which we do business.” He ended his speech with specific recommendations for SPN leaders in requesting corporate contributions.

A look at the donors to the Texas Public Policy Foundation, the SPN affiliate in Austin, provides a rare window illustrating how these think tanks operate today. The evidence shows that the Big Tobacco-era strategy has been embraced by other large corporations.

The Texas Public Policy Foundation, whose leaders recently stirred up controversy for surreptitiously lobbying on behalf of the government of Malaysia, received the bulk of its money from more than seventy-five business interests, including firms like ConocoPhillips, Boeing, TXU Energy, ExxonMobil, AEP Texas and Devon Energy. The largest company on the donor list, Koch Industries, gave $159,834 through its Austin lobbyist, J. William Oswald, in addition to a $69,788 donation from the Claude R. Lambe Foundation, a Koch family foundation run in part by Richard Fink, another executive with Koch’s lobbying operation. As The Texas Observer noted, the Texas Public Policy Foundation has focused much of its advocacy on issues pertaining to its corporate benefactors, including energy deregulation and opposition to Environmental Protection Agency rules to curb mercury, smog and carbon pollution.

The Texas donor list also reveals that Sharp has played a larger role in directly financing the expansion of her affiliates than was previously known. Public disclosures indicate that SPN distributed only $19,500 to the Texas Public Policy Foundation in 2010. That modest amount, which is similar in size to grants given to other state think tanks, suggests that many of the groups do not rely on a central source of cash. But the leaked document shows Sharp as the contact for a donation of $300,000 from the “State Think Tank Fund,” as well as $195,000 from the “Government Transparency Fund” and $49,306 from SPN itself— a discrepancy of $524,806 compared with the disclosed grant. Neither the State Think Tank Fund nor the Government Transparency Fund appears on Guidestar.com or the Foundation Center, repositories for nonprofit and foundation disclosures.

Like many SPN affiliates, the Texas Public Policy Foundation has seen its budget steadily rise. In 2011, the group brought in $5.5 million in contributions, $2.4 million more than it raised in 2008. How the other state think tanks in SPN’s orbit are funded largely remains a mystery, since they, like many overtly political nonprofits, do not disclose their donors. A recent investigation by the Center for Public Integrity shows that Donors Trust, a donor-advised fund that caters to wealthy individuals, has provided much of the funding for the recent expansion in state think tanks backed by the Franklin Center and SPN.

Under Sharp’s leadership, State Policy Network has grown, opening new think tanks (now numbering fifty-nine) and forging close relations with ALEC, which brings together conservative state lawmakers and corporate lobbyists to draft “model legislation.” In 2009, ALEC gave Sharp an award to thank her for “getting SPN members more involved” with the organization. “This special acknowledgement belongs to those who have put in dedicated time and energy through ALEC,” said Sharp, who accepted the award onstage with lobbyists from Verizon and Altria.

While progressive donors have also sought to fund targeted think tank and state media outlets in certain states—namely Colorado and, reportedly, Texas—there is no comparison in terms of size and scope, or in the underhanded tactics embraced by their ideological opponents.
Brian Rothenberg, head of ProgressOhio, notes that while family foundations exist on the right and the left, corporate money has flowed almost exclusively to conservative think tanks. “Especially after Citizens United,” he says, “the right is inherently better funded than the left.” In 2011, during the effort to repeal Governor John Kasich’s collective bargaining law, unions still provided less than 20 percent of ProgressOhio’s budget.

As far as local labor activists like Brett Banditelli (who also produces the Rick Smith radio show in Harrisburg) are concerned, their side is already overwhelmed. The Franklin Center’s Pennsylvania Independent “doesn’t have much readership, but does an incredible job of setting the tone on attacks on unions before the attacks come,” says Banditelli, who notes the Legislature might first go after union pensions before changing any membership or collective bargaining rules. Banditelli says labor has been slow to adapt to the changing media environment, and teachers and workers now stand defenseless.

Also, Republicans who were newly elected in 2012 seem intent on consolidating power. Missouri’s GOP state legislators have contemplated using their supermajority to enact right-to-work legislation. The Advance Arkansas Institute, the SPN affiliate in Little Rock, produced content pushing for the strict voter ID laws recently passed by the legislature—which became Republican this year for the first time since Reconstruction.

Similarly, the Americans for Prosperity chapter in Kansas has pushed an effort to undercut paycheck dues to public sector unions this year, while the John W. Pope Civitas Institute, a North Carolina think tank, has rolled out attacks against Democratic efforts to reform the state’s infamously gerrymandered congressional lines.

Tim Phillips, the national head of Americans for Prosperity and a close adviser to David Koch, has been clear about his intention to make the most out of the Republicans’ state-level gains. Speaking at a recent press conference in Indianapolis, he declared: “We see a debate going on at the state level that is really going to define the nation.”

Meanwhile, at another Heritage Foundation gathering, Sharp and her colleagues said that their new strategy had been inspired in part by a Malcolm Gladwell article in The New Yorker called “How David Beats Goliath.” The piece, which details the ways that underdogs can win playing by their own rules, offers anecdotes on how insurgents have defeated well-equipped armies by harassing and weakening their opponents. It also describes how a computer scientist won a naval warfare simulation by spending his fictional trillion-dollar budget almost entirely on PT boats.

Referring to the Gladwell article, Sharp said PT boats are “an apt metaphor” for her network of groups because “they’re fast and maneuverable. A team of PT boats working strategically can defeat much larger and less maneuverable vessels—such as huge chunks of unions.”

Letters

(continued from page 2)

Art in the Time of War

Woodstock, Vt.

James W. Loewen’s “At War With Art” [March 11/18] suggests that the Smithsonian exhibit “The Civil War and American Art” may have overstated, in his words, “the ambiguous relationship between art and history”—particularly in reference to Albert Bierstadt’s paintings of Yosemite Valley. Art was in fact a valuable ally to conservation. Carlton Watkins’s striking portfolio of mammoth photographs of Yosemite Valley was first exhibited in the East not long after the battle of Antietam. Frederick Law Olmsted pointed out in the preface to his 1865 Yosemite plan and report, “It was during one of the darkest hours, before Sherman had begun the march upon Atlanta or Grant his terrible movement through the Wilderness, when the paintings of Bierstadt and the photographs of Watkins, both productions of war time, had given to the people on the Atlantic some idea of the sublimity of the Yosemite.”

In 1864, President Lincoln signed legislation setting aside Yosemite Valley for the benefit of the public, “inalienable for all time.” Olmsted, the visionary of Central Park, certainly understood and appreciated the extraordinary powers of scenery and art. Olmsted also believed that “establishment by government of great public grounds,” such as Yosemite, “for the free enjoyment of the people” did not stand apart from the Union war effort, but was consistent with Lincoln’s policies that redefined and expanded American freedom and the rewards of citizenship.

Rolf Diamant

Washington, D.C.

James W. Loewen gave readers the impression that I have written about Reconstruction, particularly in relation to the exhibition “The Civil War and American Art.” I have not, and I did not. Furthermore, Mr. Loewen speculates on my educational background. This is the kind of unprofessional meandering I would expect from a drunken Facebook post, not The Nation. Of course, I would also expect you to assign art reviews to someone with a professional background in or demonstrated knowledge of art.

Tyler Green

Loewen Replies

Washington, D.C.

Creating Yosemite Park, like continuing work on the Capitol dome, showed we were functioning as a nation while fighting the war. Tyler Green praised “The Civil War and American Art” as a work of “American history.” He shouldn’t have. That was my conclusion when drunk on Facebook, and I stick by it today when sober on decaf.

James Loewen

NB: In this review, an editor added that General Sherman burned Atlanta. Actually, 70 percent of Atlanta never burned.

‘Writing to Live’

Wiscasset, Me.

“Safety Net” [Feb. 18], Holly Case’s review of Thomas Bernhard’s writing life, is warmhearted and accurate, a sober analysis of how a violent world leads to loss of personal and collective narrative. He could survive only by “living to write, writing to live” in a world gone mad. Our only hope is in the arts and with true Lebensmensch. Glenn Plyler
ne day, when the queen is dead and Dickens is passing an irrelevant anniversary and the approach of an Olympic Games is consuming funds and space in some other world city, historians engaged in recovering the spirit of London during its greatest post-imperial moment of chauvinism and triumphalism will have no richer resource than the Evening Standard. A tabloid-format newspaper, the Standard—as it’s usually known—has existed in various forms for nearly two centuries, and continues to exert an influence. Ken Livingstone, in his recent memoir You Can’t Say That, suggests that his years in charge of the Greater London Council and, later, the Greater London Assembly (the mayoralty) would have been smooth sailing if it weren’t for the Standard, whose owners, the aristocratic Rothermere family, detested his socialist politics. At the beginning of 2009, soon after the mop-haired, fist-raising Conservative Boris Johnson, with Standard backing, displaced Livingstone as mayor, the Rothermeres sold the paper. The timing might have looked convenient—that is, suspicious—though annual losses as high as £25 million might also have influenced the decision to sell.

The new owners, the Russian businessman Alexander Lebedev and his son Evgeny, wasted no time making changes. They got rid of Veronica Wadley, the paper’s editor for seven years, and replaced her with Geordie Greig, a literary journalist who had been editing the society magazine Tatler. The paper was given a colorful new design and renamed the London Evening Standard. (In a previous, short-lived experiment back in the 1980s, it had been called the London Evening Standard.) More contentiously, the shake-up was accompanied by an advertising campaign dubbed “Sorry” that apologized for the neglectiveness of Wadley’s editorship, even though by bashing Livingstone’s London she was mostly following orders from on high.

Of course, an editor working under owners at peace with the incumbent mayor would find it easier to produce a paper that was, to borrow Greig’s terms, “celebratory” rather than “doom-laden.” That advantage has paid off. What the paper lost in skepticism it gained in vibrancy, and readers followed. (In October 2009, its fifty-pence cover charge was dropped, with great success: the paper soon realized higher advertising revenue and cheaper distribution costs.) A year and a half after the Lebedev purchase, the Conservative leader David Cameron formed a new coalition government. And the prime minister, along with the mayor of London and the new editor of the Standard—all in their 40s, all educated at Eton and Oxford—set the tone for discussion of the city; their view was that London had regained and Oxford—set the tone for discussion of the city; their view was that London had regained what the paper lost in skepticism it gained in vibrancy, and readers followed. (In October 2009, its fifty-pence cover charge was dropped, with great success: the paper soon realized higher advertising revenue and cheaper distribution costs.) A year and a half after the Lebedev purchase, the Conservative leader David Cameron formed a new coalition government. And the prime minister, along with the mayor of London and the new editor of the Standard—all in their 40s, all educated at Eton and Oxford—set the tone for discussion of the city; their view was that London had regained and the Greater London Council, replaced her with Geordie Greig, a literary journalist who had been editing the society magazine Tatler. The paper was given a colorful new design and renamed the London Evening Standard. (In a previous, short-lived experiment back in the 1980s, it had been called the London Evening Standard.)

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The novelists and critic Adam Mars-Jones has described the Wadley-era Evening Standard as a “hotbed” of “populitism”—a mode of discourse that “voices highbrow concerns with a tabloid immediacy, in a tone that is never more reassuring than when apocalyptic or disgusted.” Soon after Wadley’s departure, assistant art editor Norman Lebrecht, identified by Mars-Jones as the “populist’s populist,” walked out, or was eased out, taking his pecadilloes with him, and making way for the straightforwardly populist Lebedev-Greig regime, which would present London as, at the very least, busy and relevant—and at most, something to eulogize, often in global terms.

In the two and a half years after Greig took over, the paper quoted, paraphrased or offered on its own account the view that London had become, among other things, “one of the cigar capitals of the world,” “the gourmet capital of the world,” “the diamond capital of the world,” “one of the war criminal capitals of the world,” one of two “plastic surgery capitals of the world” (the other being New York), “the cocaine capital of the world,” “the financial capital of the world” (with much of the financial services industry based in the Docklands, the onetime “squatter capital of the globe”), the “e-capital of the world,” “the party capital of the world,” “the electric car capital of the world,” and “the world’s number one destination for foreign sports stars,” as well as the world’s capital of “dementia-friendliness.” The last phrase came in the wake of a portrayal of the syndrome in The Iron Lady, a film about Margaret Thatcher (from the makers of Mamma Mia!).

Greig moved on in March 2012—to edit the Mail on Sunday—and was replaced by his former deputy, Sarah Sands, under whose editorship the paper has stayed the course. (It has touted London as “the brewing capital of the

Leo Robson lives in London and is a regular contributor to the New Statesman, the Financial Times and the Times Literary Supplement.
world,” “the international billionaire capital of the world,” “the divorce capital of the world” and so on.) In the 2012 mayoral election, round two of Johnson vs. Livingstone, the Standard, none too surprisingly, backed the Conservative candidate. Three months after returning to office, on the morning after the Olympics’ closing ceremony, Johnson described London as, or as feeling like, the “capital of the world.” And soon after that, Johnson’s Life of London, a lifeless history book intended to publicize his campaign, was reissued with a new, told-you-so prologue (“we discovered that we could after all put on a great show”); a new epilogue on the runner Mo Farah, who won gold medals in two Olympic events; and a new title, The Spirit of London, carrying connotations of, among other things, the Blitz.

The image that Johnson, Greig and others have been trying to create is one of London as central and centripetal, an object of other cities’ envy. There have been times when this was unquestionably the case, and not so long ago either. Londoners still have a feeling of warm-weather giddiness about the tail end of the government of John Major, when the Tories were hemorrhaging votes in local elections. It was a period defined in memory by the Turner Prize (Damien Hirst’s sheep won in 1995), a Spice Girl in a Union Jack dress, the TV program Fantasy Football League, and the Savile Row postmodernism of fashion designers Ozwald Boateng and Alexander McQueen. The soundtrack was provided by a musical movement known as Britpop, which somehow included bands both Northern and Southern, androgynous and laddish, wonderfully parochial and abstract, nationalist and embarrassed by nationalism, engaged and indifferent, university-educated and barely literate.

The arrival of new sensibilities in pop, couture and conceptual art coincided with the arrival of youngish, self-consciously forward-looking, extravagantly promise-making politicians who sought to persuade American journalists and not a few other people that London was the home of a distinct contemporary set of ideals. (Though in a way, this was nothing new: in 1966, Time magazine had identified London as “the swinging city”—with people saying ever since that London swung for about thirty people for maybe half an hour—while in the mid-1990s, the “Cool Britannia” moment was announced by Newsweek and duly covered in Vanity Fair.) It was a time of jubilation, partly about what was happening, but mostly about what was going to emerge: a post-Thatcher, post-Major utopia populated by politicized guitarists and guitar-playing politicians. It lasted until late 1997, with—depending on where you were standing—the release of Oasis’s bloated album Be Here Now or the revelation that the new prime minister, Tony Blair, part of the generation pledging to end political “sleaze” (the word appeared in national newspapers 3,479 times in 1994–95), had exempted the Formula One racing empire, run by the Labour donor Bernie Ecclestone, from the government ban on tobacco sponsorship. It turned out that, despite what people believed, Oasis wasn’t infallible and, as many people suspected, Blair was a cynic. Blair’s friend Peter Mandelson later assured a Silicon Valley audience that New Labour was “intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich” (“intensely relaxed” doublet as an uncannily accurate description of Blair’s persona).

That short revival period remains a glowing touchstone in London’s recent past, showing that the capital can retain its appeal even as the country loses power and influence. The Lebedevs must have sensed opportunities being scuppered when, with an Olympics on the way, tourism at a high, the population growing and the cookery-sartorial complex in rude health, the city’s leading newspaper was complaining incessantly about misdemeanors at Red Ken Livingstone’s City Hall. Even Lonely Planet thought the city showed “glee.” Why hadn’t the Standard caught wind of this?

During the “Sorry” campaign, Veronica Wadley, taking full advantage of the Lebedevs’ nationality and overlooking their ownership of the bold, anti-Kremlin Novaya Gazeta (where the investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya worked until her assassination in 2006), complained of a “Pravda-style promise of good news” by her former employer. But the reality has been more nuanced. The Standard is a local paper—even if the locality is a vast and varied one—and so inevitably there are pages devoted to openings, photo calls, and stories about neighborhood associations waging war with soccer stars over their home renovations. When the highly entertaining and dazzlingly parochial gossip page, the Londoner’s Diary—long considered the paper’s most important feature—won a National Press Award in 2012, the citation stated that it was “great for London.”

But it’s not as if a daily reader of the Standard would be shocked to discover, on turning to The Guardian, that London’s boisterous high spirits are in fact marred by illiteracy, knife crime, homelessness, transport chaos, growing inequality, a housing shortage and corporate tax avoidance. (The Standard works with charities, public funding bodies, and private companies on campaigns to help tackle a number of these problems—an acknowledgement of the city’s flaws which doubles as an attempt to do something about them.) It has reported bad news thoroughly and well, and continues to provide a platform for full-throated dissent—anti-populist, anti-elitist or both. During the first week of the Olympics, at a point when we were all supposed to club together, stop worrying about the cost to the taxpayer and cheer on Team GB, the columnist Simon Jenkins, a former editor of the Standard, wrote that to talk of an economic legacy of the Olympics as “a publicity boost for tourism… is mere state propaganda.” A month after the closing ceremony, he wrote, “There is no such thing as an ‘Olympics Legacy.’”

The year 2012 was always going to be a tricky one for those Londoners who squirm when news anchors use words like “pageant” and politicians speak of “the people.” The causes of celebration were seemingly innumerable: the Olympics, the Diamond Jubilee of Queen
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Elizabeth II, Dickens's 200th birthday, the fiftieth anniversary of the Rolling Stones. The critic Michael Wood pulled off a miracle of English understatement when, considering the "wildly enthusiastic" reception of Sam Mendes's James Bond film Skyfall in England, he wrote: "It's not impossible that patriotism plays a part here." There was patriotism, certainly, but provincialism as well—a feeling of excitement about London, where much of the film takes place. Perhaps the year's most disheartening event was the mounting of a crude neoclassical memorial to the Royal Air Force Bomber Command at a noisy, tightly packed part of London, where Knightsbridge and Park Lane meet Piccadilly. But in terms of Londonitis—the yearlong, citywide fever whose symptoms included forced cheeriness, pandering whimsy, winky irony and disingenuous populism—the most characteristic symptom I noticed was an enormous banner, erected near Kensal Rise, the recently gentrified part of North-West London where I grew up, outside the offices of the smoothie company Innocent, on which were blazoned the words: "We're chuffed to be the official juice and smoothie of the London 2012 Olympic Games."

Throughout the year, straight talk was conspicuous in its scarcity. The government, national and local, heaped praise on itself—Cameron and Johnson would take credit for good weather if there ever was any—and most of the time the public and the media nodded along, especially after the successful executions of the Games showed that, in Simon Jenkins's words, a "passably competent" nation with unlimited funds could put on a fortnight of sport. During London boom times, people are discouraged from letting reality undermine the pleasure to be had from appearances. Louise Wener, the lead singer of the Britpop band Sleeper, said that during the Cool Britannia era you couldn't criticize New Labour "without getting slapped"—"it was verboten...so desperate was everyone to believe in the con that it was." The writer Iain Sinclair noticed something similar during the months leading up to the opening of the New Millennium Experience, staged at the Millennium Dome in Greenwich: "the moderately under-enthused were denounced as party poopers and whining lefties." The low-level national debate about the Olympics left some critics feeling, as Anna Minton put it in an expanded edition of her book Ground Control, "unpatriotic, subversive even." Minton's words were published at the beginning of 2012; at the end of the year, Simon Jenkins pointed to "the vitriol visited on those who dared question such priority by a government that had spent the entire year telling everyone to tighten belts." The naysayers were evidently not as lonely as all that, nor was it paranoid to suggest that too few questions were asked about the £9 billion of public money used to stage a series of events with restrictive ticket prices, some as high as £2,012.

The Olympics have served as the occasion or excuse for a new shelf (for those who have long shelves) of books not exactly about London, then with "London" in the title. "Authors have stored their projects up for this moment or rushed them through, publishers' catalogues showcase their metropolitan Olympians and booksellers' windows stack London titles high," the historian Jerry White wrote. As the author of London in the Eighteenth Century, published in England last year, White could be said to know whereof he speaks, but he was publishing his serial history of London long before the bandwagon passed through. The same cannot be said of the authors and editors of the majority of recent books concerning London in various epochs and contexts. A giant compendium of verse about London, edited by Mark Ford, was published to coincide with the Cultural Olympiad, which was the umbrella for several other projects, among them the documentary film London: The Modern Babylon, directed by Julien Temple, whose every archive clip and music cue could be guessed ten minutes in advance.

Little of the work published to coincide with the Olympics or the Jubilee was ambitious in anything other than scale. A book such as Nick Bannister's Greater London: The Story of the Suburbs offers 500-plus pages of detail while remaining, as John Carey noted, "unspeculative to a degree seldom met with outside railway timetables." Most of the novels published about London, by writers such as John Lanchester (Capital) and Martin Amis (Lionel Asbo), recycled at greater length talking points gleaned from headlines and op-ed pages. There was certainly no work of fiction that grappled with the city in the way that Fielding or Dickens or Conrad or, in their earlier work, Amis (Money, 1984) or Iain Sinclair (Downriver, 1991) had; and among the non-fiction books, there was no successor to such graceful ruminations as Paul Cohen-Porteheim's The Spirit of London, Steen Eiler Rasmussen's London: The Unique City and V.S. Pritchett's London Perceived. There has mostly been a fact deluge, with no narrative or focus to curb or control it.

At least Iain Sinclair's Ghost Milk offered the excitement of rage, bile and unorthodox sentences (some with no verbs). The book is an addictive and maddening first-person survey of the effects of Grand Projects like the Dome in Greenwich and the Olympics, and was first published in Britain in the summer of 2011 and in the United States in 2012. For Sinclair, the government tyranny necessary for the execution of Grand Projects (or GPs, as he puts it) is a desecration of the London he loves, with its disorganized communitarianism and gift for democratic gradualism. Sinclair's previous book, Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire, a "confidential report" on the London borough where he lives, made repeated reference to the coming upheavals, and repeated attempts at trying out the new book's terminology: "the grand Olympic project" sucking resources, "the tainted illusion of the Grand Project." In Ghost Milk, Sinclair picks up the same story a little further down the line, at a point when its visible markers are even harder to miss, and alternates the unfolding portrait of Hackney with excursions to Beijing and Berlin, among other places, to see how wrong GPs can go.

At one point in Ghost Milk, Sinclair explains that in 2008, a planned launch event for his Hackney book was scuttled by the local council:

The poor librarian deputed to give me the bad news kept insisting that it was not her fault, there was nothing she could do, orders from above.... I took it as a tribute, after all this time, to be thought worthy of being invited to leave the premises. It's a tough act to get yourself banned these days and I had pulled it off three months before my book was even published. Sinclair may have taken the cancellation as a tribute, but he also hoarded it as evidence—indeed, as no less than a confirmation—of his suspicion that "ugly truths were being concealed behind the Olympic smoke-screen." One adviser had argued against the ban, but the "advice was spurned in the thirst for retribution, making it clear to malcontents and naysayers that they would be up against the wrath of an all-powerful bureaucracy, happy to be in agreement, for once, with central government." What emerged, thanks to the efforts of two journalists working for a self-funded free newspaper, the Hackney Citizen, was that the order came from the mayor of Hackney, Jules Pipe, a man sarcastically praised by Sinclair in Ghost Milk's dedication as a "constant inspiration, as he makes the borough of
Hackney as a model surrealist wonderland.

A significant part of this surrealist wonderland is the Olympic Village, and though Sinclair can be negligent when it comes to explaining causes, his descriptions are brilliant and unappeasable as arguments. At one point in *Sorry Meniscus*, his book about the Millennium Dome, completed in 1999, Sinclair asked, “How could you acclaim a people’s park that was guarded like a penal colony?” In *Ghost Milk*, he again shows that when governments embark on populist ventures, it isn’t long before they call in private security to protect boundaries, block access, ban photography. As Sinclair sees it, there is certainly an Olympics legacy, and it isn’t pretty. “In boroughs affected by this madness, the 2012 game-show virus,” he writes, “long-established businesses closed down, travellers were expelled from edgeland settlements.” The Hackney marshes were turned into concrete car parks, and a spokesperson for British Waterways, the organization responsible for introducing new mooring fees ten times higher than the previous rates, explained, “We have to send the message that in future, living on the river will not be such a cheap lifestyle option.”

Broadly, the aim was to “monetize” an area previously known for philanthropy, affordable housing and underdevelopment. “By 2012,” Sinclair speculated, “there will be no perceptible difference in techniques of control employed in war zones and in homeland development zones: making the world a safer place for shopping.” He is referring in part to the vast shopping complex that was built in Stratford in time for the Olympics. But London has always been a place for trade and exchange—in 1711, Joseph Addison, a founder of *The Spectator*, called it “a kind of Emporium for the whole Earth”—and Sinclair risks sounding merely reactionary when he complains about these mercantile pursuits.

The chapter in which Sinclair tells the story of his canceled book launch ends with him encountering a neighbor who tells him, “It’s going to kick off very soon, mark my words, just like the ’80s.” (There were riots throughout the Thatcher years, usually in response to mistreatment by the police or the state of ethnic minorities or the poor.) Sinclair doesn’t say whether this prophet was an expert in urban history, but there is a strong connection between government interference—and lavish royal weddings—on the one hand, and rioting on the other. The August 2011 eruptions that Tina Brown described as a “sort of *Clockwork Orange*… scum-of-the-earth kind of uproar,” were closer to a cry for help.
he last few years have marked the height of the storm, then this one might offer a somewhat calmer vantage point. In July, Margaret Thatcher's first election victory will be as distant to us as it was from the 1945 election in which Clement Attlee won a Labour majority and introduced a series of reforms that built the foundation of the welfare state. Speaking a few months after Attlee's election, the historian A.J.P. Taylor said that the few Europeans who believe in “the American way of life—that is, private enterprise”—are a “defeated party,” with no more of a future than the Jacobites in England after 1688. It wasn’t to be the case. In broad terms, thirty-four years of social democracy have been followed by thirty years of Thatcherism, defined by the Conservative politician Nigel Lawson as “free markets, financial discipline, firm control over public expenditure, tax cuts, nationalism, ‘Victorian values’…privatization and a dash of populism.”

Although Lawson doesn’t explicitly mention the Thatcherite taste for centralization, he might have included it under “firm control over public expenditure,” because the local councils were thought to be profligate. But in reality, centralization was an offshoot of privatization: not of public assets (“selling the family silver”) but of public spaces. Thatcher despised local government all her life, and when it came to sorting out the notorious “inner cities,” she passed legislation that took power away from the elected, often Labour-dominated local government and gave it instead to Michael Heseltine, her secretary of state for the environment, a blond-maned magazine publisher who thought that the profit motive concentrated the mind far more effectively than any notion of public service. (The year 1986 would prove a symbolic one in this regard, with the abolition of the Labour-led Greater London Council and the passing of the Financial Services Act marking a transfer of power from left-leaning local government to a deregulated financial economy.)

One of Heseltine’s early acts was to place development Corporations, quasi-autonomous nongovernmental organizations—as ridiculed in Blur's song “Mr Robinson's Quango,” written after a visit to Thatcher's hometown—that would be run by appointed, right-leaning business and government officials. (with a dodgy grasp of chronology) that the New Labour “apparatchiks...were obsessed with American politics...preferring to watch The West Wing than question Denis Healey and Tony Benn about how to handle problems with the civil service.”

The ironies of the New Labour project were legion, but an especially rich one was how, in the run-up to the general election of May 1997, Blair courted pop musicians born and based in London, such as Damon Albarn of Blur, whose work singled out for scorn the very country Blair sought to emulate. Blur's second album, Modern Life Is Rubbish, was originally called England vs. America, which made allegiances clear, and Albarn was not alone in having become tired of the dominance of American music, grunge in particular. The April 1993 cover of Select magazine carried a photo of Brett Anderson from Suede in front of a Union Jack, with the headline “Yanks Go Home.” But Albarn has always made it clear that his antipathy to America is a matter of taste rather than moralism. Recalling an early US tour, he said: “Fun pubs really annoyed me—they just rip everything out and replace it with plastic. I saw it coming over, and I started to write songs about it.”

If Albarn diverged from Blair about the adequacy of English culture and traditions, he shared his concerns about “education, education, education.” But when Blair sent his oldest son, Euan, to the London Oratory, a Catholic school in southwest London, rather than to a comprehensive school near where they lived in Islington, Albarn concluded that Blair was a hypocrite and said so to the press. “I got a letter from his office saying ‘don’t talk about that,’” Albarn recalled. “Which is why, when they got in and there was this five minutes of thanking everyone who helped promote him, I didn’t really feel like I was part of [it].” Liam Gallagher, the lead singer of Oasis, wasn’t interested in Blair’s victory gathering at 10 Downing Street for different reasons: “Why would I go there? I’ve got nothing in common with any of them. Don’t know anything about politics, don’t want to. Looks like a shit house anyway.”

Blair knew that he could exploit some of Britpop's associations but not others. It helped his contention that Britain was a “young country,” and London a cool city, but he didn’t need to accept any of the more specific allegiances. In English life, London is all-important—it’s Manhattan and Washington and a lot of other things too—and the city Blair sought to evoke was a place not of Russian independence, but one where things were happening. It mattered greatly to Blair that he be seen as a conductor rather than a tagalong.

Adam Gopnik, who visited the city to write about “Blairism” for Tina Brown's New Yorker, later recalled that “the spirit of May, 1997” was “almost Kennedyesque in its exuberance and willed innocence.” At the time, he suggested, very plausibly, that Americans find the city exciting “because we think America is exciting.” One of New Labour's London legacies, along with the euphemistically named “public-private partnership” that ran the London Underground from 2003 to 2010, is the existence of what some call “an American-style mayor,” an executive position with no legislative powers. Its current occupant, Boris Johnson, was born in New York and loves the city, though not so much that...
he could resist taking advantage of Hurricane Sandy to bury the news of price hikes to his bicycle hire scheme.

ain Sinclair is mostly oblivious to calculated acts of Americanization, and he seems incapable of distinguishing between the politically pernicious and the gaudy. During a stroll along the South Bank, recorded in *Ghost Milk*, he spots a picture of William Shakespeare, “high-domed, full-cheeked…advertising tours on the side of the Globe Theatre,” and labels the scene “Heritage London.” But the reconstruction of the Globe has a particular story—it was a project, led by an American actor, Sam Wanamaker, and carried out mostly by American contractors, which aims to flatter London in a way that most Londoners claim to despise. Later, Sinclair writes of the “Funfair London of Ferris wheels and Japanese fish tanks,” but he doesn’t explain that the Sea Life London Aquarium is based in the old County Hall, former home of the Greater London Council until Thatcher’s government abolished it and sold the building off to a company based in Japan. The privately funded London Eye, on the other hand, offers a view of the whole of London and is in no sense an act of revenge by a powerful government against a popular but vulnerable local body. All the Globe and the Eye have in common is that, like “ethically sourced coffee,” “eco-boats,” “air-miles academics” and “wired joggers,” Sinclair happens not to like them. All tackiness is to be disdained equally, as a scar on a city that used to be uncoth. “The opium dens of Wilde, Conan Doyle and Dickens have been replaced by dockside bars with awnings and heaters,” Sinclair complains, in one of many sentences that leave you wondering what exactly he wants for and from his city.

*Ghost Milk* belongs to an unabashedly subjective genre of London writing, which on the surface overlaps little with a more traditional, sturdier approach. Sinclair identifies the two approaches as “the empirical and the poetic,” with “poetic” being used to cover the prophetic, mystical, Gothic and psycho-geography subgenres defined by one critic as “M25 flanerie and exurban poetics.” (The M25, the subject of Sinclair’s *London Orbital*, is a circular freeway.) If Samuel Pepys stands at the head of one tradition, William Blake presides over the other. (Certain writers, Dickens among them, have dual citizenship, *Our Mutual Friend* being notably less “empirical” than *David Copperfield*) In this arrangement, Sinclair knows where his allegiances lie, and his confères include his collaborator Chris Petit and his heroes doing what Peter has done, writing a biography of a city; you actually need this, in terms of the drama of a narrative. I think what works wonderfully well about doing a biography of a city is that the city obeys the same rules of good fiction.

Bragg: Well, it does if you make it do.
Later, Bragg again tried to elicit a respectable argument from Sinclair, or probe the mystic refusal of one. “Do you really believe that certain areas of the city are now unlucky?” he asks. “Yes,” Sinclair replies.

Contemplating the Great Fire of London in 1666, and the plans for regimentation designed by Christopher Wren and others, Sinclair says: “Of course, it doesn’t work out because London doesn’t work that way; it always has to be chaotic, and bodged, and a bit of this and a bit of that.” At which point in the segment, the third guest, Claire Tomalin, then working on a biography of Pepys, made one of her rare comments, pointing out that the people whose property was burned in the fire still owned the land and were reluctant to give it up, even for the pleasure of occupying more rationalized urban spaces. “The beautiful plans that were made for enlarging the streets and changing the pattern didn’t happen because of a quite simple practical fact,” she said.

Tomalin is drawn to the example—the practical fact—where Sinclair wants to connect it to other instances of failures to tidy London up, of which there have been a great many. But different vocabularies and attitudes aside, Tomalin and Sinclair are essentially in agreement. Everyone who writes about London, whether inclined to the poetic or empirical, on the left or the right, finds more or less the same city, and stresses more or less the same point. London developed haphazardly and continued that way; it has rarely benefited from central planning and often frustrates large-scale projects; it is the messiest and least monumental of great cities; it is foremost a mercantile and capitalistic space in which the arts, at intervals, have also flourished; its people have a sense of belonging, even cohesion, despite their status as strangers.
The city’s inhabitants tend to play a significant role in London propaganda. Sicinius’ line to the Romans in Coriolanus—“Is what the city but its people?”—is at risk of becoming as unavoidable as Samuel Johnson’s “When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life,” with romanticism about London’s inexhaustible riches often giving way to romanticism about Cockney market stall holders and gentlemen in bowler hats (and their modern equivalents, whoever they may be). The Shakespeare quote is used as the epigraph to both Boris Johnson’s The Spirit of London and Craig Taylor’s Londoners, a book that differs in every imaginable way from the mayor’s crude Whig history.

Taylor’s book starts, in its brief opening chapter, as a contribution to the vast literature of the immigrant or outsider, of which Boswell’s journal remains the classic. Taylor, who was born in western Canada, recalls his early days in London, though a reference to “eggplant” rather than “aubergine” shows that a decade on, he isn’t completely assimilated:

“I looked at people’s faces on escalators for a second too long, lurching around with an eggplant-colored backpack without any sort of grace. I hadn’t yet become an urban otter—one of those sleek Londoners who move through the city with ease, as if passing through warm liquid. They’re the ones who seem slow and graceful but are always covering ground; who cross streets without looking back and forth; who know how to fold a newspaper crisply in the middle of a packed Tube train.”

Much of this would be true of any city, but Taylor also writes about his experiences on the No. 159 bus and on Holloway Road, and most of the book is taken up by interviews about unique and irreducible aspects of the city with those who “love it, hate it, live it, left it, and long for it.”

Londoners doesn’t give the impression of being a cynical calculation. It was published in England a year before the Olympics, and its author-compiler had been wrestling with his interview transcripts for a long while before that. But Taylor was nevertheless aware that his book would be entering an already crowded field about to become more crowded, and he sets out his store with a mixture of cautious modesty and canny niche-finding: “There’s no point in trying to out-Ackroyd Peter Ackroyd, out-Sinclair Iain Sinclair, or cram in more sheer fact than Jerry White’s histories of the past two centuries.”

Taylor writes that he “came to feel that there was a different history…and I took the opportunity to set down the voices with whom I shared the city.”

This other history, the history of day-to-day megapolitan life, often goes unwritten. But Taylor chases the kinds of minute and ephemeral details available only to social history conducted in the present tense, and the result is a book that anyone with an interest in London might read with gratitude. The book comprises interviews with about a hundred people—among them an estate agent, a social worker, a personal trainer, a chef, an “eyewitness to the London riots” and, perhaps most brilliantly, Emma Clarke, “voice of the London Underground”:

“...they couldn’t decide how to pronounce Marylebone, whether it was MAR-le-bone, Mary-le-bone, Mary-lee-bone, or, most bizarrely, Mary-lob-on. So I had to voice all alternatives. I think they chose Maryle-bone…. I have a fondness for all the names, I really do. I suppose I especially like ‘Piccadilly Circus.’ I like the rhythm of it. My favorite is ‘Theydon Bois’ (they-don bo-is).”

Another interviewee, Tim Turner, who works for a bank, sets out his vision of “Londin,” to distinguish the city where he lives from the place depicted in, say, the Evening Standard’s Londoner’s Diary:

“I’m not living in a London of big pleasures and tourism and Russian billionaires and Saatchi Gallery and the London Eye, but in Londin…. It’s a bit shit in Londin, but there are little pleasures, like walking very quickly and listening to my headphones; like the taste of that ready-made pasta they sell at M&S, with chunks of feta the size of miniature golf balls; or like the big southbound platform at Angel station. There’s so much room on that one platform. I was there the other day and I thought to myself: Why did they make this platform so ridiculously big? It’s wonderful.

The purpose of Taylor’s book is to convey, using the form of a panoramic collage, the ordinary, pragmatic city, strewn with pigeons, marred by bad weather, and all but invisible in the majority of London books. His characters aren’t really interested in legislation, but they unavoidably register its outcomes. The accuracy that a book like this can achieve is of an impressionistic kind, and in testimonies such as that of Emily Davis, identified as a “cyclist,” casual observation goes straight to the heart of the matter:

My husband and I went for a bike ride round the Olympic site the other day. I find it impossible to believe that London will be capable of achieving all the things that the Olympic committee are pretending it’s going to be able to achieve. And I don’t mean the Games themselves, necessarily. I’m sure all stops will be pulled out and the Games will be fine and they’ll be efficient and they’ll work and there’ll be a lovely opening ceremony and there’ll be a lovely closing ceremony and nothing terrible will happen…. I think London will continue to muddle on and some things will work and plenty of things won’t work, and somehow that combination of the working and not working is what gives it a particular energy and a particular life…. This combination of not being able to get everything to work that we say will work seems somehow to give it an energy that makes it more appealing perhaps than a well-run, efficient city. I mean, if you’re always striving for success, you end up with something like America, and nobody wants to be like America, really.

“We have to have fun while trying to stave off the forces of darkness because we hardly ever win, so it’s the only fun we get to have.”

—Molly Ivins
The Nation. November 17, 2003

Make a statement with The Nation’s NEW Writer T-Shirts. Available at: UPGNation.com
by ANGE MLINKO

UNDERGRADUATES ENROLLED IN A contemporary poetry course—the young man now leaving class to put in a shift at Chick-fil-A; the mother who will drive an hour in bad freeway traffic to pick up her 2-year-old at daycare—are in for quite a treat. On the syllabus is a poem from the second edition of Postmodern American Poetry (Norton; Paper $39.95), Sharon Mesmer’s “I Never Knew an Orgy Could Be So Much Work”:

In our orgy, the Mole Person took Saddam down to Moleopolis, which is a gigantic ass vagina in the suburbs.
I got lots of noir work out of that one.
I got to orgy with a little monkey in a Mel Gibson movie.

In a solemn touch, an author’s note identifies the provenance of this poem as “Flarf.” According to the anthology’s editor, Paul Hoover, Flarf is a cyberpoetry practice that involves using search engines as phrase generators and assembling the results into poems: “With each copy and paste comes the cultural stain of the Web. This explains the tone of Flarf, a cyberpoetry noted for the outrageousness of its content.”

The distance between the Flarf mind and Gary Snyder’s “Riprap” is immeasurable:

Lay down these words
Before your mind like rocks.
placed solid, by hands
In choice of place, set
Before the body of the mind
in space and time:
Solidity of bark, leaf, or wall
riprap of things:
Cobble of milky way,
straying planets,
These poems, people...

The distance is immeasurable because there is a mind at work in “Riprap”—

Angélique Marzouk’s Marvelous Things Overheard is forthcoming from Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

finding metaphor and metonymy between rocks, words, and the arrangement of them by men and cosmic forces. But both texts are forced to occupy the same poetic universe called “postmodern,” a contested notion that Hoover, in his almost thirty-page introduction, is at pains to define in terms made famous by the theorist Frederic Jameson: “It is safest to grasp the concept of the postmodern as an attempt to think about the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place.” What a claim to make in a poetry anthology that starts with 1953 and trumpets Kenneth Goldsmith’s


But a fragmented market needs niche products. So is it any wonder that many of the poets dropped from the first edition to make way for specialists in Flarf, “Newlipo,” “plundergraphia” and “Google-sculpting”—such as Paul Violi, William Corbett, Charles North, David Trinidad and August Kleinzahler—lack a marketable label? What seems clear is that the patchwork of incomensurable, often vulger and nihilistic styles forced under the rubric of “postmodern” is designed for adoption at the universities where these constituencies reside, “Conceptualists” and “postlanguage lyricists” alike. The traditional anthologist gathers good poems according to his sensibility; the postmodern anthologist, eager to jettison sensibility, has only fashion and popularity to guide him. Poets become mere representatives of their niche, with no relation to their neighbors in the table of contents. Pity G.C. Waldrep, “affiliated with the Old Order River Brethren, a conservative Anabaptist group related to the Amish”: he’s sandwiched between Vanessa Place, whose Dies: A Sentence is one unrelenting 130-page sentence (only five pages of which are on offer here), and Catherine Wagner, who offers the ditty beginning “Penis regis, penis immediate, penis/ tremendous, penis offend us; penis...”. There is no transcendence in poetry anymore, according to Hoover. But I assure you, some Hells are real.

Why would you teach this textbook? Either because you and your friends are in it, or because it’s hip and so are you. I feel sorry for the student forced to rent, much less buy, this incomherent and dispiriting tome. I’m sorry he’s being handed even more processed meat; I hope the young woman with the kid finds “Riprap” on her own, or better yet Snyder’s wonderful “Axe Handles,” which ends on the hope of generational memory: Ezra Pound “was an axe,/ Chen was an axe, I am an axe/ And my son a handle, soon/ To be shaping again, model/ And tool, craft of culture,/ How we go on.”
Man in the Middle

by JONATHAN BLITZER

In 2008, when Satyagraha, Philip Glass's opera about Gandhi, came to the Met, one critic touted it as an unlikely triumph. “Good people,” the critic remarked, rarely make “good subjects for operas.” If Philip Glass succeeded against the odds with Satyagraha, it was because he had redefined the stakes: How deep into a person’s actual life did a profile have to dig in order to find something essential about him?

The composer had long been wrestling with the question—and almost always to rewarding effect. Glass jettisoned early the idea of a conventional plot or a straight-on likeness. In Einstein on the Beach (1976), the figure of Albert Einstein is a recurring image—but not a rounded character. He appears onstage in his iconic poof of whiteness, with a hoary mustache and wispy bouffant, but says nothing. Nearby, dancers careen in springy, staccato movements, while electronic music washes over the stage in repeating, wave-like ripples. However inescapable the forms and sounds, there is something searching and revelatory about it all. One attendee at an early performance, a musician who was initially irritated and bored by the five-hour spectacle, famously described a kind of conversion experience: “I began to perceive—a whole world where change happens so slowly and carefully that each new harmony or rhythmic addition or subtraction seemed monumental.” Einstein was a eureka moment slowed to a crawl. In a sense, it was a profile of genius—of illumination—more than it was a picture of a specific genius.

Thus began the composer's so-called portrait operas, reflections on revolutionary male figures from Einstein to Gandhi to the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten. Glass was after their auras. Satyagraha, for instance, which premiered in 1980, trained itself on specific portraits, reflections on revolutionary obsession and illness. There is hardly any need to embellish these highs and lows, operatic as they are in their own right. Disney's singular achievements made him into a larger-than-life cultural figure, but they also eventually flattened him into a generic success story and, in the end, a faceless brand. Take his signature, the puckish, semi-cursive scrawl that appeared on all of Disney's products: it was restyled by Wurlitzer with the question—and almost always to reward the version: “I began to perceive—a whole world where change happens so slowly and carefully that each new harmony or rhythmic addition or subtraction seemed monumental.” Einstein was a eureka moment slowed to a crawl. In a sense, it was a profile of genius—of illumination—more than it was a picture of a specific genius.

Yet the novel's allure as a source is plain enough: it provides an easy solution to the problem of how to structure the opera. Wurlitzer has organized the story around a series of set-pieces meant to draw out Disney's darker side. The first act shuttles between past and present and proves overly busy and uneven, if also entrancing at points. There is Disney visiting his hometown and inaugurating a local swimming pool (“Everything that I have/ And always wanted to have/ Comes from Marceline.”); Disney in a hospital room, by turns bemoaning his mortality and extolling his own greatness (“I'm afraid of the other side./ That my whole empire will collapse”); Disney at his studio headquarters talking politics and market share with his brother Roy; Disney at home with his family, in Bel Air; and finally Disney in “conversation” with a malfunctioning robot of Abraham Lincoln, who sputters out the words of old speeches while Disney remarks on the similarities between himself and Honest Abe (“Both sons of simple folks”) in spite of their contrasting views on race (“You were a supporter of the Negro Race./ That's a major difference between us.”).

Throughout the opera, Disney is haunted plicating the autograph himself. The ersatz public face won out over the real-life visage. And who was the genuine article, anyway? Relatively early in his career, Disney was no longer able to draw the figures that would make him famous. He had to rely on more skillful draftsmen in his studio, often acting out the mannerisms and characteristics of the figures so others could fill them in.

Jungk's novel takes Disney's authorship as its starting point, although not to plumb the depths of his presumably tormented psyche. Instead, Jungk is out to brand Disney a fraud. A disgruntled former draftsmen named Wilhelm Dantine stalks his aging employer and finally has it out with him. Chief among the indignities: Disney has stolen Dantine's work and passed it off as his own, and later sacks Dantine for signing a petition critical of Disney's stewardship of the company. At the climactic moment of their confrontation, Dantine disparages Disney with a remark that also appears in the libretto: “All you are is a moderately/Successful CEO/Nothing more than that.” It's a clunky, awkwardly unidiomatic dig, and the novel rarely works up much more nuance or fluency. This is no small problem for the version of the story Wurlitzer has transposed to the stage. If the guy was, to the core, nothing but an unremarkable CEO, then what are we here to watch?

Jonathan Blitzer is a writer and translator based in Madrid.
by the figure of an owl, a straggling memory from his boyhood. A childlike wail opens the piece and resonates throughout Disney's adulthood: "I drift between/ Not knowing/ What is real/ And not real," he gasps. Like many other lines in the opera, this one tantalizes and then trails off into stock expressions of Disney's megalomania and ambition. Its visual correlative, though, is arresting. A young child dons a mask with the plumage of a bird. Warbling soprano lines underscore the piercing source of menace; these are childhood demons that will spill into Disney's animated world. Fantastical, animal-like forms in this opera—played by a group of dancers known as the Impossible Skills Ensemble—conjure the Disney creations, sometimes to gawky effect. (Rabbits wear sagging, pillow-case-like masks that make them seem more like robbers than sylvan creatures.) Still, to the credit of set designer Dan Potra and director Phelim McDermott, these animals also hint at the darker realities tormenting Disney. Near the end, one rabbit writhe out of Disney's infirm grasp when he reaches to pet it plaintively. More powerful and suggestive still is these figures' garb. They are dressed like Wilhelm Dantine in the brown plaid pants, white shirt sleeves, vests and visors of the studio draftsmen. On their heads and backs are animal appendages—cloth masks, fluttering hands forming cottontails. Even as these figures populate the Disney dreamscape, each walks on its own two feet, partially incarnated by the draftsmen themselves.

A fixture at center stage is Disney's bed, and hovering above it are two rotating metal booms from which hang several white, rectangular scrims whirling around in a fevered circle. Onto them, and against the back wall, McDermott has projected a slew of flickering images. Some are from Disney's past, but most of them are rough-hewn sketches of Disney characters, flitting about as though in an animated reel, with repetitive forms filling in and taking shape before our eyes. It's an inspired vision, capturing the hurly-burly machinery of Disney's mind and studio.

The music is similarly fixed on the teeming, multiform figures at play (and perhaps at war) inside the man himself. The strings articulate a repeating interval that spreads, with the percussive crackle of castanets and triangles, throughout the rest of the orchestra. Overlaid onto the strings' two-note figures and occasionally rising and falling arpeggios are hurrying, clipped brass lines. The juxtaposition of textures heightens the driving, train-like feel. A deluge of strings plunges into minor-keyed undulations and then rises out with a sort of twinkle and glimmer confected by the fluid runs of a harp. These broad, shimmering tones summon Disney's glinty world.

At the end of the second act, and near the opera's finale, Disney chats with a young boy in the hospital. The CEO is dying of lung cancer. He is buoyed by the boy's wonder ("Mister Disney, you're my hero!"). The boy asks how it was possible for Disney to have created so much in so short a time; surely no one person could have done all that, he asks innocently. And with this unintentionally fraught suggestion, the music splinters into repetitive, angsty contrapuntal lines that snap back into unison, in an assured crescendo, when Disney responds: "I'm a storyteller./ And I'll do anything to tell my story." The man's magic was one part bluster for every part inspiration.

The second act is better conceived than the first: less cluttered with disconnected set pieces and more emotionally powerful. Thematically, the story is tighter; with the exception of an aimless Andy Warhol cameo (he appears at the Disney offices and praises its founder as an artist and patriot), the pathos of the story is entirely concentrated in the opera's second half. Dantine and Disney face off; later, Disney dies. Questions of authorship and self-regard finally rise to the surface, while the facile editorializing of the libretto softens and lets the music do the talking. During the Dantine-Disney confrontation, Glass conveys the seductive, even sinister charisma of this most imperfect American. Disney sets Dantine up for a harsh put-down with an alluring aside ("If I could only have my way," he begins, promisingly, drawing the bruised but hopeful Dantine close); the tempestuousness of the orchestra subsides to make way for a mellifluous harp solo that is as beautiful as it is short-lived. Disney even seems to believe himself, for a moment, that reconciliation with Dantine is possible. But soon enough he has thundered back with a volley of insults.

Before the opera's opening, Philip Glass told journalists that, like other great men, Disney was someone with his "feet in the mud, head in the clouds." His head held eternally high, Disney was, inevitably, a man bespattered by the muck and grime of his times and of himself. The Perfect American shows signs of acknowledging this. But all too often, Disney's two faces are unintegrated caricatures: a self-obsessed CEO, on the one hand, and a visionary in the eyes of his acolytes and propagandists, on the other. How did Disney grapple with himself—the brand and the huckster, the wide-open eyes and unsteady hand? This is where the portrait would be most provocative and valuable. In the first act, Disney likens himself to Lincoln ("We’re folk heroes,/ Mr. President."). And in the second act, Warhol says as much to Roy Disney: "Tell Walt that.... We are one and the same." In both acts, like bookends, are declarations of selfhood by analogy. But it was the man in the middle, with nowhere to look but inward, who stumbled over his own name.
Puzzle No. 3277

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO

ACROSS

1 Daunting challenge for an aspiring lawyer—or an alcoholic? (7,3,3)
2 Speak of zero value (5)
3 Madcap LA notions that can add spice to things (5,4)
4 Chief of Houston transportation company—one that’s susceptible to recession? (8)
5 Server to cut around tart’s filling (6)
6 Souvenir, like a gift from Barbie perhaps? (5)
7 Population of idiots to show contempt for Western capital, suppressing a hint of intelligence (9)
8 “Father Time” comes after such a serial (4,5)
9 Uncredited actor appears in complex tragedy (5)
10 King, for example, and god chasing gold (6)
11 Largely guarantee assessment of diamonds in a card game (8)
12 Wise guy’s awkward wait amid rise (4-2-3)

DOWN

1 Sibyl returns on the radio (7)
2 Cake sis baked will make you nauseous (7)
3 What we aim for when you cut? (5)
4 McDonald’s’ most basic need: street-level buzzer, loud (6,4)
5 Successor heard a song (4)
6 Suppression aplenty in Indian city (9)
7 Expanses with pines once again? (7)
8 Fix broken plates (6)
9 Type of book chain is in for retrospective (5,1,4)
10 In Borneo, “log” is Malaysian term of recent vintage (9)
11 Cross Kentucky with one of our gang? (6)
12 In fact, Southerner misbehaves (4,3)
13 Bug in pursuit of chewed-up tree, for the most part! (7)
14 Goddess is tamer, unfortunately (7)
15 Start to curtail brute’s influence (5)
16 Suffering in European country with loss of leadership (4)

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Chicago Doctor Invents

Affordable Hearing Aid

Reported by J. Page

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This new digital hearing aid is packed with all the features of $3,000 competitors at a mere fraction of the cost. Now, most people with hearing loss are able to enjoy crystal clear, natural sound—in a crowd, on the phone, in the wind—without suffering through “whistling” and annoying background noise.

**New Digital Hearing Aid Outperforms the Expensive Ones**

This sleek, lightweight, fully programmed hearing aid is the outgrowth of the digital revolution that is changing our world. While demand for “all things digital” caused most prices to plunge (consider DVD players and computers, which originally sold for upwards of $3,000 and today can be purchased for less than $100), yet the cost of all digital medical hearing aids remained out of reach.

Dr. Cherukuri knew that many of his patients would benefit but couldn’t afford the expense of these new digital hearing aids, which are generally not covered by Medicare and most private health insurance.

He evaluated all the high priced digital hearing aids on the market, broke them down to their base components, and then created his own affordable version—called the AIR for its virtually invisible, lightweight appearance.

**Affordable Digital Technology**

Experience all the sounds you’ve been missing at a price you can afford. This doctor-approved hearing aid comes with a full year’s supply of long-life batteries. It delivers crisp, clear sound all day long and the soft flexible ear buds are so comfortable you won’t realize you’re wearing them. Using advanced digital technology, the AIR automatically adjusts to your listening environment—prioritizing speech and de-emphasizing background noise.

**Try It Yourself At Home With Our 45 Day Risk-Free Trial**

Of course, hearing is believing and we invite you to try it for yourself with our RISK-FREE 45-day home trial. If you are not completely satisfied, simply return it within that time period for a full refund of your purchase price.

For The Lowest Price Plus Free Shipping Call Today

800-873-0541

Phone Lines Open
24 Hours EVERY DAY

www.MDHearingAid.com/GU22

Use Offer Code GU22 to get FREE Batteries for a Full Year!

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**Can a hearing aid delay or prevent dementia?**

A study by Johns Hopkins and National Institute on Aging researchers suggests older individuals with hearing loss are significantly more likely to develop dementia over time than those who retain their hearing. They suggest that an intervention—such as a hearing aid—could delay or prevent dementia by improving hearing!

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**Satisfied Buyers Agree AIR Is Best Digital Value**

“I am hearing things I didn’t know I was missing. Really amazing. I’m wearing them all the time” —Linda Irving, Indiana

“Almost work too well. I am a teacher and hearing much better now” —Lillian Barden, California

“I have used many expensive hearing aids, some over $5,000. The Airs have greatly improved my enjoyment of life” —Som Y., Michigan

“I would definitely recommend them to my patients with hearing loss” —Amy S., Audiologist, Munster, Indiana
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