BRILLIANT POOR ASIAN AMERICANS & THE PROGRESSIVE EFFORT TO HOLD THEM BACK

BY ABE GREENWALD
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Commentary

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The Murder of the *Weekly Standard*

JOHN PODHORETZ

The *Weekly Standard* will be no more.

There is no real reason we are witnessing the magazine’s demise other than deep pettiness and a personal desire for bureaucratic revenge on the part of a penny-ante Machiavellian who works for its parent company.

There would at least be a larger meaning to the *Standard*’s end if it were being killed because it was hostile to Donald Trump. But I do not believe that is the case. Rather, I believe the fissures in the conservative movement and the Republican Party that have opened up since Trump’s rise provided the company man with a convenient argument to make to the corporation’s owner, Philip Anschutz, that the company could perhaps harvest the *Standard*’s subscriber-base riches and then be done with it.

That this is an entirely hostile act is proved by the fact that he and Anschutz have refused to sell the *Standard* because they want to claim its circulation for another property of theirs. This is without precedent in my experience in publishing, and I’ve been a family observer of and active participant in the magazine business for half a century.

The creation of the *Weekly Standard* was my proudest professional moment. When Bill Kristol and I conceived the magazine at the end of 1994, our purpose was to create a publication that would help guide and keep honest the hard-charging Republican Party that had scored its stunning lopsided victory over Bill Clinton’s Democrats. This putative magazine would not cheerlead for Newt Gingrich’s Republicans but instead represent the best thinking about how to lead the country through a new conservative era. We were criticized for not being part of the team from the get-go. Indeed, after the first issue came out in September 1995, a wag at a weekly meeting in Washington chaired by Grover Norquist handed out a parody of the *Standard* based on the precept that we had gone off the reservation and weren’t being properly supportive of the Gingrich era.

As a matter of character, while the kindest and most generous of men, Bill is more the type for an ironic and deflating joke than a good “rah rah” about anything. And for better or worse, I was the kind of player on your softball team who would side with the other on a close call at second base if that’s what it looked like to me. Thus, not being a team player was part of the DNA of the *Standard* from the outset, for better or worse. Our loyalty was to the ideas in which we believed, not to the Republican Party. And to be truthful in our analysis. That sounds pompous, and I hate sounding pompous, but it’s true. And it has been ever thus in the 23 years of the *Standard*’s existence, from its opening personal essay (the “casual”) to the cultural essays of the back-of-the-book and even the parodies that bring the weekly issue to its close.

The compact between the *Standard* and its readership was that it would reflect an expansive conservative vision of America and the world and would evaluate the politics of the present moment as honestly as its writers and editors knew how. It would speak to, and from within, the conservative movement without being a Republican Party sheet. This approach was an immediate success. The *Standard* was the only successful high-end magazine launch of its time and, I believe, the last important print magazine created in America before the Internet began its search-and-destroy mission against those things published on the pulp products of dead trees.

To be sure, it has never made money. Magazines like it never make money. But its circulation has always been extraordinarily healthy in opinion-journal terms. And within the giant corporations run by the wealthy men who started the *Standard* and then bought it—Rupert Murdoch and then Anschutz—its annual losses were a rounding error, akin to the budget for the catering on one of their blockbuster movie productions. But if Anschutz had been motivated by an unwillingness to bear the cost any longer, he could have sold the *Standard*. He chose not to. He chose to kill it.

The cessation of the *Standard* is an intellectual and political crime. I hope and expect its subscribers, tens of thousands of whom have been with the magazine since its very first day, will demand refunds rather than serve as passive participants in this act of politico-cultural murder. If you are a *Standard* subscriber but not yet a *Commentary* reader, write to me at johnpodhoretz@commentarymagazine.com. Have I got a deal for you.

Your proper home is here.

As for me—I am heartbroken.

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To the Editor:

READING Christine Rosen’s article made me think that when some advocates of intersectionality insist that all men are rapists, it is because to admit otherwise would disprove their ideology. If individuals make choices that have consequences, rather than behaving in accordance with their identity groups, the claim that other groups are oppressed simply because of group identity is called into question.

One consequence of intersectionality is that it encourages thinking along racial, gender, and other identity lines, thus encouraging the behavior it claims to oppose. Is it a coincidence that racism and other prejudices have had a resurgence even as intersectionality has become the doctrine of choice on the left?

Putting feelings over facts is a return to the magical thinking that has always resulted in great horrors.

Intersectionality gives individuals who lack power a rationalization for their failure to attain it. It then allows them to claim it as an entitlement. This removes the need to consider possible or necessary changes to their own behavior.

Yale Zussman
Framingham, Massachusetts

To the Editor:

I’D ONLY ADD to Christine Rosen’s argument by noting that radical feminists tend to reject objective truth and see the world as a place of conflict with no hope for cooperative compromises (“Kavanaugh and the Assault on Men,” January 2019).
November). They see the world only through subjective reasoning and based purely on their limited experiences. Since they view themselves perpetually in conflict with others, they seek to beat into submission those with differing views. In this way, they hope to bring on the society they want.

Richard R. Allen
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Christine Rosen writes: Richard R. Allen is correct to point out the highly subjective nature of the feminist project. Personal experience—and the idea that follows it, that the “personal is political”—has been the lodestar of the modern feminist movement since the first consciousness-raising session in the 1960s. The idea has metastasized to give us the current demand, “Believe All Women,” and, as we saw during the Kavanaugh confirmation hearings, it brings with it contempt for due process and for the presumption of innocence.

Yale Zussman makes an insightful point when he notes the connection between the embrace of “intersectionality” and the abandonment of personal responsibility. The reassurance of belonging to a supposedly oppressed group offers a kind of protection from having to face everyday disappointments. Once one has gone down the intersectional rabbit hole, failure, rude people, or mediocrity become discrimination, microaggressors, or the exercise of incorrect privilege. As both correspondents note, whatever existential reassurance such magical thinking offers its adherents is far outweighed by the damage it does to facts and to people’s lives.

Commentary

Fascist Files

To the Editor:

IN HIS REVIEW of How Fascism Works, by Jason Stanley, Oliver Traldi counters Stanley’s claims effectively but does not address the larger historical context of the book (“Not So Fascist,” November). Consequently, his review could have been more satisfying.

President Obama set out to fundamentally transform America and held to his course for eight years. Consider what he did both at home and abroad. Obama told entrepreneurs that they did not build their own business, revolutionized health care, ignored our immigration laws, and used his pen and phone to circumvent Congress. In foreign policy, Obama led “from behind,” gave Iran, a state-sponsor of terrorism, a pathway to nuclear capability, and practiced strategic patience with regard to North Korea. Finally, he was caught on an open microphone passing a message to Vladimir Putin via Dmitry Medvedev about his, Obama’s, post-
Letters: January 2019

Election flexibility regarding missile defense.

The 2010 and 2014 midterm elections offered obvious proof of the country’s dissatisfaction. Nonetheless, those inside the Beltway who administer our laws understood the direction in which Obama was taking the federal government. Of no less importance, we know who they expected to succeed Obama in 2016. Without a confident reading of what the president wanted and what Hillary Clinton could tolerate, it is impossible to imagine that we would have seen such a purposefully flawed investigation of Clinton’s breach of national security or the canard of Donald Trump’s Russian collusion. Both demanded bureaucratic acts and deceptions from very experienced, smart, and self-serving actors. In 2016, the voters rejected this national trajectory and elected a president who campaigned to reverse it.

In sum, what Stanley observes is not fascism at all. Without the election of President Trump, our country would have stayed the Obama course and the media would have been committed to crushing the “deplorables.” That would be something much closer to fascism, and Stanley and his ilk would be cheering.

Martin Sattler
Reston, Virginia

Oliver Traldi writes:
I don’t really share Martin Sattler’s perspective on recent political events, so it seems to me that a review with more context would not have been any more satisfying for him. In particular, I don’t remember the Obama presidency the same way Mr. Sattler does. And when it comes to the issues on which I might be inclined to agree, such as the growth of executive power, I see Obama as having followed mostly in the footsteps of his predecessor, George W. Bush.

There is one point, however, on which I am in complete agreement with Mr. Sattler, and that has to do with the liberal and, to a lesser extent, the left-wing (and even sometimes the conservative!) treatment of the “deplorables.” After the election, I heard a lot of talk about how progress could be made only when all those people” passed away. My progressive friends have good hearts, and they don’t want people to suffer—and yet, here they were, yearning for the demise of millions (or at least for a politically significant fraction of those millions). Many of them spent their expensive college educations learning how not to think of people who were different from them as “the other;” as wholly alien and inhuman—and yet, here they were, comforting themselves with the explanation that those deplorable yokels were just thoroughly unlike them.

How does this happen so easily to people who seem to prize values diametrically opposed to such wishes and beliefs? In my review, I tried to suggest that Professor Stanley is right in one way—such pernicious political thinking is everywhere—and wrong in another—it is not only the “fascists” or the “deplorables” who are vulnerable to it. It is a deep irony that a word such as “fascist,” often used these days to indicate a person who is intolerant of others, is also often used these days as an expression of some speaker’s intolerance of precisely those he’s calling “fascists.” For years now, elites have comforted themselves with the work of Herbert Marcuse, which tells us that we must not “tolerate the intolerant.” But while this may be true in limited cases of genuine physical violence (as Karl Popper mentioned in his “paradox of tolerance”), progressives have applied it in simple cases of discussing politics with those with whom they disagree. Whether or not that is “fascist politics,” in Professor Stanley’s phrase, our political discourse is deeply harmed by this trend.

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Campus Diversity

To the Editor:

In her review of Heather Mac Donald’s book, Abigail Shrier wrote: “With administrators’ encouragement, charges of campus ‘microaggressions’ proliferate like bacteria and destroy like them, too” (“Ivy-Covered Dystopia,” November). She goes on: “In November 2013, nearly two dozen graduate students at UCLA marched into an education class and accused professor emeritus Val Rust of having created a racially hostile environment by correcting his students’ grammar and spelling.”

I entered Penn State University in 1960. The school ruled that every freshman had to take a basic English class—and for many, this
To the Editor:

KEVIN WILLIAMSON does an admirable job of debunking a number of Reagan myths in his review of Bob Spitz’s Reagan biography (“A Hollow Man,” November). I wanted to help him with another. I share a byline with Michael Reagan on Newsmax, and we discussed the well-known incident during which Reagan is said not to have recognized his son.

Michael says that his father was moving along the line of students and faculty and shaking their hands. There were the usual “Hi, how are you” exchanges that characterize fleeting encounters with politicians and celebrities. When Reagan got to Michael and said, “I'm Ronald Reagan, who are you?,” it was a joke that both of them enjoyed. The left later turned this harmless fun against Reagan to advance the image of him as a clueless figure. And they did so with more than a little success.

It was “fake news” before the term existed, and the media got away with it because there were not sufficient conservative media outlets to correct the story.

Michael R. Shannon
Montclair, Virginia

Remembering Reagan

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Michael R. Shannon
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ON JANUARY 19, 2019, women will once again take to the streets of Washington, D.C. to march in protest against...well, what, precisely, is not entirely clear. The mission of the Women's March, according to its website, is “providing intersectional education on a diverse range of issues.”

The third annual Women's March will no doubt again be energized by pussy-hat-wearing haters of Donald Trump, and this year's gathering is scheduled to begin outside the gates of the White House.

But although the organizers are branding the march with the hashtag #WomensWave, a nod to the success of Democratic women who ran and won in the midterm elections, it is the Women's March brand that has recently suffered a mortal blow. As a deeply reported and damning investigation by Tablet revealed, the leadership of the organization has spent the past two years avoiding tough questions about its finances and purging people who depart from its radical orthodoxy—all while cozying up to hatemongers like Louis Farrakhan.

In the two years since the Women's March came together in Washington, the fog of intersectionality descended over it. The umbrella organization lists a broad range of missions on its website, including gender justice, racial justice, economic justice, and environmental justice. It pursues these missions, it claims, on behalf of “all women—including Black women, Indigenous women, poor women, immigrant women, disabled women, Muslim women, lesbian, queer, and trans women.”

The four female public faces of the organization are Linda Sarsour, Tamika Mallory, Carmen Perez, and Bob Bland. Notably absent from this vision of gender justice and from the leadership of the Women's March organization? Jewish women.

This should come as no surprise to anyone who has been paying attention to the relentlessly anti-Semitic career of Women's March leader Linda Sarsour, a Palestinian-American professional activist who has been confidently tweeting her bigotry for years. “Nothing is creepier than Zionism,” she tweeted a few years ago. She’s also argued that “while anti-Semitism is something that impacts Jewish Americans, it’s different than anti-black racism or Islamophobia because it’s not systemic.” (Sarsour might want to examine the statistics on hate crimes in the U.S. The group most frequently targeted isn’t blacks or Muslims; it’s Jews.)

Similarly, Tamika Mallory (who has tweeted praise for Fidel Castro and cop-killing fugitives and proudly defended convicted serial rapist Bill Cosby) has been fawning over Louis Farrakhan for years, posting pictures of herself smiling next to Farrakhan at public events and “thanking God” for him on Instagram. Imagine a prominent conservative activist posting pictures of himself with David Duke, thanking God for the man’s existence. Perez has also commended Farrakhan for “speaking truth to power.” This is praise for a man who said Hitler was “a very great man” and who called Jews “termites” and Judaism a “gutter religion.”

Is it any wonder that, during the very first meet-
ing of the Women’s March leadership, according to Tablet, “Perez and Mallory allegedly first asserted that Jewish people bore a special collective responsibility as exploiters of black and brown people—and even, according to a close secondhand source, claimed that Jews were proven to have been leaders of the American slave trade.”

Feminists have long argued that corporate boards and C-suites should include more women because it would make those businesses more accountable and ethical. More women, the argument goes, means a greater diversity of perspectives, which presumably would be better for business. That sentiment seems to have disappeared at the door of the Women’s March when it comes to Jewish women.

Furthermore, the Women's March leaders have practiced their activist arts with a stunning lack of transparency about their organization’s financial dealings and status under federal laws governing nonprofit organizations. Where are the profits from all those $25 “Believe Women” T-shirts they hawk on their website? Who is in charge of the many millions raised online for the national Women’s March organization? Why did the organization delay filing its proof of non-profit status with the IRS? Why are local chapters of the organization seeing none of the money coming in while national leaders enjoy large salaries and budgets? The confusion and concern about the group’s finances have grown large enough that activists within the movement have called on its leadership to step down.

Women’s March leaders have demonstrated a near-pathological defensiveness when confronted about their behavior. When the New York Times’ Bari Weiss wrote an excoriation of the bigoted views of Women’s March leaders, Bland responded by calling her and other critics “apologists for the status quo, racist ideology, and the white nationalist patriarchy.” After the Tablet story appeared, Women’s March leaders hired a PR firm that sent out a bizarre series of emails to journalists who had tweeted or retweeted the story, hinting that Tablet would have to issue a correction but demanding that journalists would have to agree that the evidence the firm was offering for the correction be kept off the record.

In doing so, the Women’s March leadership offers further proof that the favorite feminist canard about women’s special leadership skills is bunk. Sarsour and her colleagues join a growing list of other feminist heroines who have lately been revealed as less than sisterly in their professional lives. Theranos grifter Elizabeth Holmes, who defrauded investors and lied about her company’s supposedly revolutionary blood test, set a new bar for corporate malefashion. Troubles and leaks at Facebook have recently shown Lean In guru Sheryl Sandberg to be less than empathetic and sisterly when it comes to taking on the company’s rivals, prompting some of her acolytes to distance themselves from the tarnished Sandberg brand. “Flawed people were involved in the civil-rights movement,” Shelley Correll, a gender-studies professor from Stanford, told the Times. “We don’t give up on a movement because people aren’t perfect.”

In the case of the Women’s March movement, maybe we should.

The strong reaction to the Tablet story about Sarsour and her fellow anti-Semites at the Women’s March is a heartening sign that perhaps the longstanding, casual anti-Semitism of the left will no longer be treated quite so casually (a similar unmasking of the left’s anti-Semitism has been happening with Jeremy Corbyn and his Labour party in the UK) The message to Sarsour-wannabes? Your bigoted tweets will find you out.

As well, perhaps it’s a sign (albeit an ironic one) of just how far women have come. Feminist leaders, who have for so long told us that, if only the patriarchy would give them a chance, women would prove better rulers and leaders than men, have instead proven themselves as inept and corrupt as many male leaders who came before them.

But the implosion of the Women’s March is also a reminder of the perils of a particular kind of professional activism. People often become anxious when large groups of leaderless protestors take to the streets—the Yellow Vest activists who set fire to Paris in December are a recent example. They fear (not incorrectly) that populist mobs, without leaders to guide them, will succumb to extremism and violence. But what happens when hatred is embraced by a movement’s leadership, as anti-Semitism has been by the Women’s March?

In that case, a different but no less disturbing form of destructiveness ensues—one involving hubristic self-dealing and the abuse of power that offer ample cover to a range of questionable actions and hateful ideas that should have no place in any movement for justice.

The leadership of the Women’s March likes to cloak itself in the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil-rights movement. As their bigotry, their comfort with anti-Semitic conspiracists, and their questionable ethics reveal, their behavior is much closer to the “white nationalist patriarchy” they denounce than it is to the ideals embraced by movements for equality. Sisterhood might be powerful, but the leaders of the Women’s March have now reminded us of another lesson about power: It corrupts.
It seems odd, if not completely bizarre, to speak of a journalist possessing moral authority, but that’s what Charles Krauthammer had, both in relation to his friends and to many of the millions who devoured his columns weekly and watched him discourse nightly on Fox News. How he reached this implausible station in life, and what the rest of us lost with his death at 68 last year, is made clear by a new collection of his newspaper columns and occasional writings, *The Point of It All: A Lifetime of Great Loves and Endeavors*, edited posthumously by his son Daniel.

It’s a sequel of sorts to an earlier collection of Krauthammer’s journalism called *Things That Matter*. By the time Krauthammer released that book, in 2015, collections of journalism, especially op-eds from magazines and newspapers, were increasingly rare, offered by book publishers only to the top-tier of face-famous columnists as a kind of status reward. No one, not even the publishers, expected them to find an audience large enough to make real money. Within a year of publication, *Things That Matter* had sold more than a million copies in various formats, which, however you do the math, translates into real money indeed. The book’s astonishing success was partly the result of incessant flogging on the part of Krauthammer and his loyal sidekicks at Fox, whose viewers are avid buyers of books if they are produced by the celebrities of the cable box.

But I like to think the sales were inspired by something more than a celebrity-crush pandemic. Krauthammer’s stuff was always worth reading, and often repaid rereading. He was even worth watching on TV, something that can be said of only a very few writers, who are trained to leave their best stuff on the page. His plain style was without affect, easily accessible, and often slyly funny. He had a vast range of enthusiasms beyond everyday politics. Crucially, he limited himself to one column a week, avoiding the temptation to go off half-cocked just because a deadline loomed. Also, he was immune to the usual charges of dilettantism and gasbaggery. Having received a medical degree and having served as head resident in psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital, Krauthammer spent his early adulthood in a genuine profession, requiring deep knowledge and prolonged study. Lots of journalists arrive at their trade after a process of elimination, life having foreclosed in serial fashion one reputable occupation after another. Intellectually, Krauthammer had been around.

There was also the crippling spinal-cord injury, suffered in his early twenties. His triumph over it was plain, indisputable evidence of a singular courage and determination. The cumulative effect all this had on his audience was profound. Fellow scribblers, especially on the right, revered him, but so did the civilians.

Andrew Ferguson is the author of *Land of Lincoln* and *Crazy U*.
who read him, watched him, and flocked to hear him speak. I was there on a couple such occasions when the crowds who had paid to see him rose en masse as he appeared from the wings; many of them wept, perhaps because they were realizing for the first time that their man had achieved what he had achieved while bound to a wheelchair.

Please don’t get the wrong idea: This wasn’t Aimee Semple McPherson descending in her silver bough from the rafters of the Four Square Gospel Church. He respected his readers too much to let them tumble into hero worship; he knew to quickly defuse it with wit and self-deprecation. I use the phrase “moral authority” to distinguish Krauthammer’s stature from something as silly and fleeting as hero worship. Michael Warren of the Weekly Standard caught an instance of it after he appeared with Krauthammer at a panel in Colorado. This was in June 2017, two months before cancer forced him from public life. A rift was opening between Krauthammer and many of his admirers. Krauthammer was resolutely, if not uniformly, critical of Trump, whose seduction of rank-and-file Republicans was soon to be complete.

A member of the audience used a metaphor to question Krauthammer’s criticism of Trump: What if an unknown player—presumably Trump—was sent to bat in the last inning of the seventh game of the World Series and won it for the Washington Nationals (Krauthammer’s team) with a grand slam? “Would anybody care what his batting average is?”

It would be, Krauthammer agreed, “a wonderful, splendid thing.” And then: “What if the ball hits the light tower, sparks an electrical fire, burns down the stadium, and thousands die?” Even the Trump-friendly crowd, Warren records, burst into laughter and applause. When it died down, Krauthammer added, “Everything has risks.”

The new book gives ample proof that Krauthammer had moved beyond skepticism to contempt for the man who was transforming his party. When Trump won the nomination in August 2016, Krauthammer wrote: “I used to think Trump was an 11-year-old, an undeveloped schoolyard bully. I was off by about ten years. His needs are more primitive, an infantile hunger for approval and praise, a craving that can never be satisfied. He lives in a cocoon of solipsism where the world outside himself has value—indeed exists—only insofar as it sustains and inflates him.” Trump, in rebuttal, called Krauthammer “a dummy who is on too many Fox shows.”

“Everything has risks.” Nothing comes without a cost, including Trump’s undoubted political successes: the tax cuts, the judicial appointments, the regulatory rollbacks, perhaps the rewriting of trade agreements on more favorable terms. It’s the refusal of pro-Trump Republicans to consider the costs of Trump’s behavior as president that frustrates their Trump-skeptical adversaries. (The frustrations that Trump’s Republican admirers have with his mulish detractors are a subject for another day.)

What does it mean in the long term when the nation’s conservative party becomes stamped with a style of governing that consists of casual lies, exaggerations, childish and personal and public attacks on subordinates and political opponents, hush money to old lovers, disregard for simple propriety and good manners? What does it cost when the lies and the other trademarks of Trumpism are deployed in service of the traditional Republican principles of small government and individual liberty? Sooner or later, those ideals must lose their appeal in the minds of the voting public, owing to their association with a leader two-thirds of them cannot abide. How long before the Trumpian means discredit the conservative ends?

There’s no consequence to me asking such questions. I can’t help but wonder, though, what would have happened if Charles Krauthammer had been here to ask them (much more elegantly) over the last 18 months. Nobody knows how many minds he would have turned from the Trump temptation. At least his stature would have opened enough space for anti-Trump arguments to be considered as arguments rather than rejected out of hand as expressions of class resentment or personal pique.

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Commentary
IN 1966, THE WORD WENT FORTH from Stockholm that Shmuel Yosef Agnon was to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, the first Israeli to be so honored. Journalists, and the Swedish Consul, excitedly assembled at Agnon’s home in Jerusalem to mark the moment. According to the New York Times, Agnon has an unusual reason for feeling “special pleasure” at the prospect of receiving the prestigious prize from the hands of the Swedish king. The Talmud, he explained, prescribes that a specific blessing be pronounced in the presence of a monarch. “There is a special benediction one says before a king, and I have never met a king,” he reflected. The closest he had come was “once when the Emperor Franz Joseph was being visited by kings [and] I was splattered by mud when the carriages went by.”

It was an odd comment, unless one understood how important the texts and liturgy of halachic life were for this Orthodox Jewish writer. In his Nobel address, Agnon, true to his word, began by pronouncing the obligatory blessing, and then he spoke about what rabbinic writings meant to him. “Who,” Agnon asked, “were my mentors in poetry and literature?”

First and foremost, there are the Sacred Scriptures, from which I learned how to combine letters. Then there are the Mishna and the Talmud and the Midrashim and Rashi’s commentary on the Torah. After these come the Poskim—the later explicators of Talmudic Law—and our sacred poets and the medieval sages, led by our Master Rabbi Moses, son of Maimon, known as Maimonides, of blessed memory.

It was because of the loves and longing of his Orthodox childhood, Agnon explained, that modern Israel meant so much to him: “I was born in one of the cities of the Exile. But always I regarded myself as one who was born in Jerusalem.” The address is one of the great speeches in the history of Zionism—but its power derives precisely from the fact that it joins the texts and traditions of Judaism with the miracle that is modern Israel.

This aspect of Agnon’s art was appreciated by his contemporaries, but it was also believed to be unrepresentative of Israel’s cultural future. “As an artist,” Gershom Scholem reflected in Commentary in 1967, “Agnon is unequaled, a classical master; but, because of the circumstances of his time and his position, he is also the last of his line.” Because Agnon’s writing was so profoundly affected by the belief in the normative nature of scripture and rabbinc texts, Scholem believed, his approach was outmoded. “Today’s writers,” Scholem continued, “for whom the Bible is no longer a holy book but a national saga, and to whom rabbincal and medieval literature is virtually unknown, are in a happier situation than Agnon and his contemporaries. They are free to wrestle with the words in a completely new emotional setting and on a level of freedom previously unattainable.” For Scholem,
Agnon’s anchoring of his literature in rabbinic texts was an artistic approach that would not be seen again.

Scholem were wrong. Today, one of the most interesting cultural phenomena in Israel is that of Orthodox Jews—in both the national-religious and Haredi communities—engaging in artistic endeavors that are fueled by their study of Talmud texts and their experience of rigorous Judaic observance. A half century after Agnon’s Nobel address, Haim Sabato published Adjusting Sights, a novel drawn on his own experiences in the Yom Kippur War. The book was received with much acclaim in Israeli cultural circles, and to this day, because of the power with which Sabato brings war to life, the novel is used by the IDF for soldiers suffering from trauma. But Sabato’s résumé is unusual for a novelist; he leads a yeshiva in Ma’aleh Adumim, where he teaches Talmud and Jewish law, and his own intimacy with rabbinic texts pervades the pages of his story. In one powerful passage, Sabato ponders the transformation his autobiographical protagonist has experienced from Talmud student to soldier whose only duty is to focus on killing. Maimonides had codified the rabbinic ruling that soldiers are forbidden to fear when entering battle. Preparing for war, he realized how unrealistic this seemed. Then, rethinking “Maimonides’ always impeccable language,” he understands that the rabbis meant to forbid a moral fear of engaging in violence: “It is this that the Torah forbids. And the truth is that as soon as we were in combat, we thought only of destroying the enemies’ tanks.”

Paragraphs such as these show that the power in Sabato’s prose comes not despite his faith, but because of it, and his faith is made more sophisticated through his artistic expression. In the war, Sabato reflected in an interview, “a wondrous thing happened to us. The innocent religious belief of youth, which the sights and sounds of the Yom Kippur War lacerated so brutally, and filled with questions, did not shatter. True, it changed. It is filled with pain and sadness, but it’s more mature, deeper—and intact.”

This Orthodox Israeli creativity is not limited to literature. The filmmaker Rama Burshtein, who grew up a secular Israeli but ultimately embraced Haredi Judaism, wrote and directed a Hasidic romance titled Fill the Void. The movie is one of the best ever produced in Israel, and is one of most sophisticated films exploring religious themes in recent history. The characters in Fill the Void are rigorously Orthodox, and the film unapologetically embraces the notion that marriage is about not only love but also family obligation and perpetuation—and that a shared commitment to these values can make love itself deeper. Burshtein reveals herself to be a sort of Orthodox Austen, giving us an account of human relationships that radiantly reveals universal human themes in this Haredi story.

The popular TV show Shtisel, focusing on the life of a Haredi portraitist, is based in part, on an actual artist in Jerusalem; and Bezalel, Israel’s most prestigious art academy, has a program specifically for Orthodox students. There has been much discussion of how Israel’s television shows have served to inspire others around the world. But even more interesting is what is happening in Israeli culture Jewishly—and how a form of Jewish art is emerging that is fully nurtured by a reverence for Judaism itself.

In 1899, the father of modern Hebrew poetry, Haim Nahman Bialik, composed an elegy for the yeshiva world that he had abandoned. The epic poem, titled Hamatmid (“The Diligent Student”), beautifully evokes the experience of rabbinical students. But many of its stanzas are soaked with cynicism, bemoaning the amount of Jewish intellectual energy expended on Talmud study: “Lord of the world! I cry within myself, / On what were all these lives, these powers spent?” His concluding lines about his former seatmates in the study hall would come to embody how many of Zionism’s secular leaders saw the world of diaspora Orthodoxy:

- How pitiful and bitter is your end!
- Oh, woe is me for you, my hapless folk.
- How parched the lot, and blasted how the portion,
- Wherein such grain could moulder and decay!

For Bialik, the world of the yeshiva was the past, Hebrew writing the future, and the two realms would not meet again.

He too was wrong. Modern Hebrew writing, which Bialik helped bring into being, is now a medium for the expression of those moored to the rabbinic way of life, part of an explosion of Orthodox artistic expression that many of Zionism’s secular leaders could never have imagined.>

Commentary

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THE WAR ON ASIAN AMERICANS

BY ABE GREENWALD

THIS ARTICLE IS A SECOND DRAFT. I had originally set out to write an essay defending meritocracy in the United States. I was responding to New York City’s mayor, Bill de Blasio, who had just proposed a two-pronged plan aimed at getting more African-American and Hispanic students into the city’s eight highly competitive elite public high schools. His proposal pivots on the Specialized High Schools Admissions Test (SHSAT), which is the sole means these institutions have to grant entry to students. • De Blasio is taking aim at the SHSAT. First, he wants to expand something called the Discovery program, which offers elite-school admissions (and tutoring) to underprivileged kids who just miss getting the necessary SHSAT scores. Second, he wants to eliminate the color-blind SHSAT altogether and instead force the schools to offer admission to the top 7 percent of students from all the city’s middle schools. It is de Blasio’s hope that his plan will raise the black and Hispanic presence in these schools from around 10 percent to approximately 45 percent of the total student population.

Abe Greenwald is senior editor of Commentary.
The problem, I thought, is that nothing could be fairer than a single objective measure that tests each applicant's academic ability. After all, the SHSAT was deliberately designed to provide some kind of uniform standard for students in New York City. Since the quality of the lower schools varies so widely, along with the quality of teachers and administrators, there is no reasonable way to gauge the relative abilities of students using grades, recommendations, or interviews. That is why, for 47 years, there has been one test, citywide.

De Blasio's proposal would prevent the admissions of thousands of students who could score high enough to get into these schools regardless of their class rank. And it would replace them with students who, under more objective circumstances, didn't measure up.

American meritocracy, I believed, needed defending against well-meaning but unjust liberal plans such as his.

But as I began to do research, my certainty was rocked by some painful facts. First, while many applicants to these schools work hard and pass the SHSAT fair and square, an unknown number come from families that can afford specialized tutoring for the test—tutoring that can cost somewhere between $500 and $5,000 in total. Whatever the better-off students represent, it's not meritocracy.

Second, and more important, what does pass for meritocracy in the present-day United States is a system that has already been largely disfigured by policies similar to the one de Blasio is championing. This is most evident in the country's colleges and has recently been exposed in acute form at Harvard University. In October and November of last year, the admissions process of the country's leading academic institution went on trial in a federal courtroom in Boston. By next summer, a judge will rule on whether the university uses discriminatory practices in picking its students.

And that brings me to the most painful truth of all. It became clear that what I had thought of as a liberal war on meritocracy was in fact a war of a very different sort. For both the proposed changes to New York's elite schools and the policies in question at Harvard do grave and disproportionate harm to one demographic group above all others: Asian Americans.

Because Asian Americans outperform every other group academically, they have become an obstacle to those who want student bodies to have a particular racial composition. In this light, Asian Americans are viewed by progressives as crowding out other minorities—namely African Americans and Hispanics—who, because of historical wrongs, are supposedly more deserving of opportunities to attend top schools. "The systems and structures give you what you get," said the New York City Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza, de Blasio's point man. "And what I've found is that what you get is low performance for kids of color, low opportunities for kids of color, poor kids, kids that have historically been underserved."

In reality, these schools and universities are now discriminating against Asian Americans in their admissions policies and showing an unfair comparative preference to people of all other races, including whites.

Since the 1980s, there's been large and consistent growth in both the Asian-American population and the number of Asian Americans attending college. Last May, the Center for Equal Opportunity (CEO) did a comparative study of the California Institute of Technology, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Harvard. The CEO wanted to know whether these schools were putting a limit, or ceiling, on the number of Asian Americans they accept. The study found that until the 1990s, all three schools reflected the general demographic growth trends among Asian Americans. In the early 1990s, however, Harvard's incoming classes went from being about 21 percent Asian American to about 17 percent and stayed that way for the next few decades even as the percentage of Asian Americans going to college kept growing. MIT showed a similar drop-off. And then there's Caltech, which is a state

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school and forbidden by California state law from using either race or alumni preference in choosing students. In 2015, Caltech had an undergraduate population that was 43 percent Asian American—the same percentage of Asian Americans attending other elite state universities in California.

This proves without a doubt that the ceiling is real. And a 2009 study by sociologists at Princeton showed in part how it is maintained. Researchers found that Asian-American students needed to score approximately 140 points higher than equivalent white students to gain admittance to elite universities.

But there’s much more than that to keeping Asian-American numbers down on campus. At Harvard in particular, the attack on Asian-American applicants is so clear, deliberate, and systematic as to be disturbingly similar to the most bigoted chapter in that institution’s history—its campaign to purge Jews from its student body throughout the early decades of the 20th century.

There are differences between the two episodes, to be sure. The limiting of Jews was an overt part of a broad cultural wave of bigotry and anti-Semitism, while the campaign against Asians Americans is cloaked in the language and ideology of diversity. But in any event, academia—as represented in New York’s elite high schools and Harvard University—is once again singling out one race for exclusion and perpetrating a great sin against thousands of individuals who are poised to seize the American dream.

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for Fair Admissions (SFFA), founded by the legal activist Edward Blum, filed a case against Harvard in late 2014. Arguments began in Federal District Court in Boston on October 15, 2018. The suit alleges that Harvard uses its admissions process to disadvantage Asian applicants in a number of ways. Whichever side loses this case is likely to appeal, and Blum has said he’ll take the fight to the Supreme Court if necessary.

The suit makes six claims in total. All arise from Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which states: “No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” Because Harvard receives tens of millions of dollars in federal funds annually, it must comply with Title VI.

Among SFFA’s claims are that Harvard is intentionally discriminating against Asian-American applicants, that it uses “racial balancing” to attain specific levels of racial representation in the student body, and that the university illegitimately uses the race of applicants as more than a mere “plus factor” in weighing an individual’s chances at admission. What is the “plus factor”? It was established by the Supreme Court in 2003 in the Grutter v. Bollinger case as the standard of permissible consideration of race in admitting someone to a university.

SFFA also alleges that Harvard is using race as more than a mere “tie-breaker” to pick candidates to fill the last available seats, meaning that if two students have exactly the same grades and scores, race can be used to break the tie. This standard was established by the high court’s 1978 Bakke decision.

Finally, the suit alleges that Harvard has failed to explore race-neutral options for achieving diversity—a rule established by the Court in 2015’s Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin.

In the courtroom, SFFA presented its analysis of six years’ worth of Harvard-applicant data. Through the discovery process, it also found a rich source of information in several reports generated by Harvard’s Office of Institutional Research (OIR) in 2013. The reports were initially commissioned when Harvard found itself under attack for its Asian-American admissions policy, and what they found evidently proved so damning that the school seems to have buried at least one of them (even though it contained some
The War on Asian Americans: January 2019

ON WHETHER OR NOT HARVARD USED RACE AS MORE THAN A ‘PLUS FACTOR’ OR A TIEBREAKER IN CONSIDERING APPLICATIONS, THE UNIVERSITY SCARCELY OFFERED UP A DEFENSE.

IN FACT, HARVARD’S OWN EXPERT WITNESS STATED THAT CANDIDATES GET AN APPROXIMATE 200 PERCENT INCREASE IN THEIR CHANCE OF ADMISSION IF THEY INDICATE THAT THEY’RE HISPANIC AND A 300 PERCENT INCREASE IF THEY’RE AFRICAN AMERICAN.

good news for the university).* These OIR reports go straight to the heart of the first count of discrimination. They show mathematically the degree to which Harvard is giving an advantage to white applicants over Asian-American ones.

Students applying to Harvard are rated “holistically” in a system that takes into account academic performance, extracurricular activity, athletic achievement, and personal qualities. Admissions officers assign numerical ratings for each of those categories to every applicant.

One report revealed that if Harvard used only academic performance as a determining factor for admission, its student body would be 38 percent white and 43 percent Asian. In reality, Asian admissions for the year in question made up 19 percent. Tellingly, as we’ve seen, the 43 percent estimation is the same percentage of Asian students seen at Caltech.

A second report showed that when the effect of preferences for legacy students and recruited athletes are factored in, white admissions shoot up to 48 percent while Asians drop to 31 percent. Add in extracurricular and personal ratings, and Asian Americans fall to 26 percent while whites rise to 51 percent. This study also compared white and Asian-American applicants who were not athletes or legacies. It found that while Asian Americans had better test scores, stronger academics, and higher extracurricular ratings than whites, they received significantly lower personal ratings.

What are personal ratings? They are purported to assess qualities such as character, “effervescence,” good-roommate potential, courage, and maturity. Harvard claims that personal-ratings scores do not take race into account. But it’s hard to see what else besides race could be driving down these scores for Asian Americans, given the fact that they excel in so many other aspects of the admissions process. And SFFA documented cases in which Harvard’s admissions readers described Asian Americans in stereotypical terms as reserved, numbers-oriented, and so on. One reader wrote of an Asian-American applicant: “He’s quiet and, of course, wants to be a doctor.” The outcome of the case largely rests on whether the lower-score phenomenon exposes racial consideration as a pure detriment for Asian-American applicants.

As for SFFA’s claim of racial balancing, Harvard's internal reports included a breakdown of its student body’s current racial composition and compared it with similar data from prior years. It reflected the fact that across Ivy League schools, Asian Americans have made up a consistent 18 to 20 percent of the student population for at least 10 years. Once again, in California, where racial preferences are not permitted, the number of Asian Americans in classes at elite colleges has climbed to 40 percent.

On whether or not Harvard used race as more than a “plus factor” or a tiebreaker in considering applications, the university scarcely offered up a defense. In fact, Harvard’s own expert witness stated that candidates get an approximate 200 percent increase in their chance of admission if they indicate that they’re Hispanic and a 300 percent increase if they’re African American.

Nor did Harvard strenuously deny the potential efficacy of using race-neutral alternatives for achieving diversity. The university’s own studies show that if it did away with preferences for legacy students, children of faculty and staff, and other special cases and instead just went with preference for students of lower socioeconomic status, Harvard could have a class with Hispanic and black percentages comparable to what they are now. But there would be one important difference: That class would be approximately 31 percent Asian American, not the current 19 to 22 percent.

Some of the trial’s most explosive revelations came from the testimony of William Fitzsimmons, Harvard’s dean of admissions for more than 30 years.

* The report found that Harvard was helping low-income students more than the administration had realized.
Fitzsimmons was testifying about the university’s policy regarding what it calls Sparse Country: 20 states in the U.S. whose students are underrepresented on Harvard’s campus. In trying to recruit from these areas, the school takes the extra step of sending letters encouraging those Sparse Country students who’ve scored at least 1310 on their PSAT (a test usually taken in 11th grade) to apply to Harvard.

The plaintiff’s lawyer pointed out that the only students in Sparse Country who didn’t receive letters of encouragement even though they had scored 1310 were Asian Americans. Asian males, for example, were sent letters only if they scored at least 1380. As Jeannie Suk Gersen of Harvard Law School pointed out in the New Yorker, this fact seems to suggest that Harvard discriminates against Asian Americans even before the formal admissions process begins. According to Gersen, Fitzsimmons defended this practice simply by offering vague pronouncements about the importance of diversity.

Fitzsimmons was also asked if he was aware of Harvard’s history of focusing recruiting efforts on areas with small Jewish populations. “I’ve certainly heard the charges,” he said.

What Fitzsimmons refers to as “charges” is a comprehensively documented historical reality, as irrefutable as the stock-market crash of 1929 or the fall of the Berlin Wall. As detailed in Jerome Karabel’s The Chosen, an authoritative account of Ivy League admissions, Harvard President Abbott Lawrence Lowell (1856–1943) worked tirelessly, beginning in 1922, to institute an anti-Jewish admissions policy at the university. By 1926, he had succeeded.

Lowell’s multiphase discrimination scheme brought the Jewish portion of the student body down from 28 percent in 1925 to around 12 percent in 1933. To do this, he instituted methods almost identical to those that are today on trial in Boston and being proposed in New York.

He started out with his own top-7-percent plan, one disturbingly similar to de Blasio’s. It was the recommendation by the Committee on Methods of Sifting Candidates for Admission, a body organized by Lowell. Lest there be any doubt about the committee’s purpose, incorporated into the notes of a Harvard faculty meeting on June 2, 1922, are Lowell’s words: “The primary object in appointing a special Committee was to consider the question of Jews.” He later wrote of the meeting:

We...attained by far the most important object, which was that of making substantially every member of the Faculty understand that we had before us a problem, and that that problem was a Jew problem and not something else. We had also brought the Faculty to the point of being ready to accept a limitation of the number of Jews, for their own benefit as well as that of the college, if the Committee should, on investigation, report that it is necessary. I have no doubt that they will so report, because I think I know the situation well enough to be persuaded that there is no other solution.

In April 1923, the Committee issued its final report. It didn’t grant Lowell what he wanted most: the leeway to restrict Jews at will. But, as Karabel explains, it did feature a “recommendation that Harvard admit students ‘whose scholastic rank places them in the highest seventh of the boys of their graduating class’ and ‘who have satisfactorily completed an approved school course’ at ‘schools which do not ordinarily prepare their pupils for college examinations.’” This was the best Lowell could get at the time, a tool to bring in students from parts of the country with fewer Jews.

Not satisfied, he next moved to put a ceiling on incoming class size in general. This would allow him to introduce nonacademic criteria in deciding who
gets awarded scarce seats in the class. A newly formed committee recommended limiting the freshman class to 1,000 students and using personal interviews and teacher’s letters to determine students’ “aptitude and character.” These subjective categories gave Lowell the cover he needed to turn away Jews for being Jews.

But Jewish enrollment at Harvard still rose. Ironically, this was in part a result of the failed top-7-percent plan. “Of the 276 students admitted under this plan, 42 percent were Jews,” Karabel writes. “Designed to bring Harvard ‘a new group of men from the West and South,’ the plan was in fact admitting more Jews from the Middle Atlantic states and New England.”

Finally, on January 11, 1926, after much campaigning on Lowell’s part, Harvard’s Board of Overseers approved the Report of the Special Committee Appointed to Consider the Limitation of Numbers. It made reductions on class size official and proposed that “the application of the rule concerning candidates from the first seventh of their school be discretionary with the Committee on Admission.” In other words, if a school had too many Jews, admissions officers could selectively reject its top 7 percent.

Moreover, the committee ended (forever, as it turns out) an admissions policy based solely on academic achievement. “It is neither feasible nor desirable to raise the standards of the College so high that none but brilliant scholars can enter,” the report stated before going on to say that “the standards ought never to be too high for serious and ambitious students of average intelligence.” The faculty approved the plan and determined that a photograph of each candidate was “required as an essential part of the application for admissions.” Additionally, they requested that Henry Pennypacker, Harvard’s chairman of the Committee on Admissions, interview as many applicants as he could to determine “character and fitness and the promise of greatest usefulness in the future as a result of a Harvard education.” We see here the forerunner to today’s personal-ratings score, which is also untethered from any objective measure of student achievement.

Pennypacker soon met with Dean Clarence W. Mendell of Yale. Harvard was “now going to limit the Freshman Class to 1,000,” Mendell later reported. “After this year they are going to discontinue—for the East at least—the ‘first seventh’ arrangement which is bringing in as high as 40 percent Jews. They are also going to reduce their 25 percent Hebrew total to 15 percent or less by simply rejecting without detailed explanation. They are giving no details to any candidate any longer.”

It wasn’t until 1949 that Massachusetts passed the Fair Educational Practices Act, which stripped away much of what Lowell had put in place. And it wasn’t until a few years after that that public polling revealed anti-Semitism to be dramatically on the wane. Sometime in the 1950s, Harvard’s anti-Jewish admissions system was finally rolled back.

The similarities between the old campaign of discrimination against Jews and the current campaign against Asian Americans go beyond the methods of exclusion. Foremost is the fear of the targeted group’s academic success and increasing numbers on campus. At a 1918 meeting of the Association of New England Deans, with deans from Brown, Tufts, Bowdoin, and MIT in attendance, Dean Frederick Scheetz Jones of Yale said, “I think we shall have to change our view in regard to the Jewish element…. A few years ago, every single scholarship of any value was won by a Jew. I took it up with the Committee and said that we could not allow that to go on. We must put a ban on the Jews.”

There are no comparatively explicit statements from officials about there being too many Asian-Americans on campus today. But what other motivation could there be for limiting their numbers? Even if defenders of the ceiling on Asian-American students frame the policy as being for the overall good, that means they’ve figured discrimination into their idea of virtuous school policy.

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And that, too, is reminiscent of Harvard’s move against Jews. Lowell himself successfully convinced one wavering faculty member that he was not advancing discrimination against the Jews per se. He was instead calling for “discrimination among individuals in accordance with the probable value of a college education to themselves, to the University, and the community.” It was just that “a very large proportion of the less desirable, upon this basis, are at the present time the Jews.”

There’s another similarity, a very powerful one whose understanding is almost lost to time. While Americans today largely consider their Jewish neighbors “white,” in the early 20th century, this wasn’t the case at all. And the popular scientific racism of the time, as Karabel points out, posited that Jews were “partly Asiatic” in origin and hence not genuinely Caucasian. So the Jew was in fact a type of Asian who was “contaminating America’s racial stock.”

In 1920, Theodore Lothrop Stoddard wrote *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy*, a massively influential racist tract that warned of invasion by “Asiatic elements like Levantines and Jews.”

Stoddard described Jews of “dwarfish stature, flat faces, high cheekbones, and other Mongoloid traits.” If, on elite campuses, Asians are the new Jews, then Jews were once the old Asians.

Stoddard was a Harvard man, and his brand of eugenics held sway with Lowell, as did the anti-immigrant fervor of the time. Indeed, Lowell was a vice president of the Immigration Restriction League, and the passage of the restrictive Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924 put the wind at his back.

This gets at the essential difference between the engineers of those anti-Jewish policies and the people behind the anti-Asian policies in place today. While Lowell’s anti-Semitic crusade was consonant with the rising nativist tide of the era, the liberals who are privileging white students by keeping Asian Americans out of elite schools are staunchly opposed to the racially tinged nationalism ascendant on the American right.

The history of left-wing social policy is the history of unintended consequences. The benefit that anti-Asian admissions policies grant to whites falls into this category. But the harm that ceilings, quotas, and academic double standards do to Asian Americans is the policy itself—and that policy exposes the emptiness of the left’s embrace of diversity. The kind of classroom that progressives are interested in creating is precisely as diverse and organic as a store-bought bouquet of human flowers.

**Commentary**

In the months since Bill de Blasio’s initial announcement of proposed admissions changes for New York’s elite high schools, the idea has inspired a formidable local backlash. Parents of students at I.S. 187 in Brooklyn are planning a lawsuit of their own. The Pacific Legal Foundation, a libertarian nonprofit, will take on the case and challenge de Blasio’s expansion of the Discovery program. Joshua Thompson, an attorney at Pacific Legal Foundation, told the *Wall Street Journal*, “We’re concerned the expansion of Discovery is done for the purpose, and has the effect, of discriminating against Asian kids.”

De Blasio wants to save 20 percent of the seats at each specialized high school for Discovery students. While this is technically an “expansion” of the program, he will change the qualifying criteria (using a more extreme definition of poverty) so that much Discovery assistance will just happen to transfer from disadvantaged Asian-American students to disadvantaged African-American and Hispanic ones. The Department of Education estimates that elite offers to African-American and Hispanic students would double, from 9 percent to 16 percent. Currently, black or Hispanic students represent 70 percent of students citywide. While Asian American students make up approximately 62 percent of students at the specialized high schools, they make up...
just 16 percent of the students in the city.

I.S. 187 is a predominantly Asian “feeder school” for the city’s eight elite high schools. Forty-four percent of the school’s students were considered economically disadvantaged in the 2016–17 school year. Under the “expansion,” these students would no longer be considered eligible for Discovery. De Blasio says that the law governing Discovery-type programs allows him simply to make the change in policy. Pacific Legal won’t fight that contention. Rather, it plans to challenge the move as violating the civil rights of Asian Americans.

De Blasio’s hope of eliminating the single standardized test and granting admissions to the top 7 percent requires legislative change at the state level in Albany, so he cannot act on that part of his scheme as readily. But the consequences of such a policy, should it also come to pass, would have further devastating effects on the students of I.S. 187. Last year, 205 kids there achieved the required SHSAT scores and received offers from elite schools. If the top-7-percent plan were operative, only about 24 students would have gotten offers.

In all this, again, we see shadows of Lowell. There is the top-7-percent plan, of course. But also, making new schools eligible for Discovery at the expense of the schools that used to get help reminds us of how Harvard, in the ’20s, tailored its recruitment-targeting efforts to non-Jewish areas.

De Blasio is facing a tough fight. In addition to dealing with the lawsuit against changing Discovery, he must reckon with the fact that local leaders such as Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams and President of the United Federation of Teachers Michael Mulgrew are set against scrapping the test.

Not all Asian Americans, however, are against changing the way things are done. The Coalition for Asian American Children and Families has released a statement calling for an end to the SHSAT on the grounds that it increases segregation, but the group would like to see something more nuanced than de Blasio’s plan of student replacement. And outside the courtroom in Boston, during the Harvard trial, some Asian-American protestors also defended that school’s admissions process. These were largely, it must be said, Harvard students and employees.

It is not always easy for Americans to figure out where their political passions run counter to their well-being. It can also be hard to determine how much relative weight to place on interests and ideals. When it comes to this dilemma, American Jews and Asian Americans once again have much in common. Jews in large numbers continue to vote faithfully for a Democratic Party that drifts ever further into anti-Israel activism and the functional anti-Semitism of intersectionality theory. And as the American Enterprise Institute’s John Yoo pointed out in the Los Angeles Times, 73 percent of Asian-American voters voted Democratic in 2012 and two-thirds voted Democratic in 2016. Yet it’s the progressive Democratic base that backs the discriminatory policies in New York and Cambridge.

American Jews are no strangers to political activism, either for the betterment of their own people or for others. Jews have mobilized on behalf of some of the most worthy causes in our nation’s history, including the civil rights of African Americans. Sadly, Jewish organizations have not yet explicitly taken up the cause of Asian Americans and their fight against the biased culture of academia. While most left-leaning Jewish groups consistently support affirmative-action policies, the overall historical picture is more complicated. At the time of Regents v. Bakke, both the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee supported Allan Bakke, who was refused admission to the School of Medicine at UC Davis because the university needed to fill a number of spots with minority students (at a time when affirmative action was still permissible in the state).

Liberal Jewish activists often wield the Torah
command “Love the stranger” in defense of affirmative action. But it is also permitted to love those who are not so very strange to us. In their achievements against tough odds, their passion for learning, their stunning success in the United States, and the very obstacles they face, Asian Americans today are so movingly like the American Jews of the past. Their cause is wrapped up in our own.

Progressives are working to make the American meritocracy into a self-protecting system of demographic determinism that stands in the way of recognizing actual achievement. Race-based discrimination is not only what academia practices but also what it teaches. To earn a degree from an elite school is increasingly to be indoctrinated into a philosophy of racial (and gender) identity and all its moral compromises. To call such a system “meritocratic” is a perversion of the term.

Minorities in today’s United States enjoy more personal and political freedom than the minorities in any other country at any time in history. The language of identity politics and liberation can be especially seductive to those minority groups that have benefitted greatly from America’s commitment to equality of opportunity. But leftist sloganeering cannot paper over flagrant injustice done in the name of diversity. It is faithfulness to our Constitution that brings the United States ever closer to the full realization of our founding ideals. And only that faithful adherence to it can deliver Asian Americans from the biased academic system that now, temporarily, seeks to hold back their full potential.
The Yellow Rise in Paris

What the protests mean

By Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry

D ON’T WORRY, I AM ALIVE and well. Judging from the concerned emails I am getting from friends across the Atlantic since the start of the protests by the French movement known as the Yellow Vests, I felt that I should get this out of the way first. Paris is not burning. As even the most casual observer of France knows, protests are part of our way of life, and few of our protests go without at least some violence, since sundry anarchists (and run-of-the-mill thugs) always show up, whatever the issue. Yet, does this mean the Yellow Vests are nothing more than another example of France’s protest culture, perhaps slightly more tremulous but otherwise unremarkable?

No—but not because of numbers of people burning things, or of vests on the ground, the Yellow Vests are important because of who and what they represent.

These are, as a chastened Emmanuel Macron admitted in an apologetic December 11 address to the nation, protests by the people who don’t protest. The Yellow Vests are drawn from France’s lower middle class, people who don’t protest because they have unglamorous jobs they must go to, unlike the welfare recipients, students, civil servants, and unionized workers who typically take to the streets.

In part, they fit the stereotype of the recently much-scrutinized Trump and Brexit voters—the losers of globalization and technological change, whose wages have stagnated for decades, who live on the cliff-edge of economic insecurity, who fear that their children will have it worse than they do. But in part, they are a product of the French system: people who make just enough money to fail to qualify for most social programs, but not enough to live comfortably, even as the country’s elite keeps doing better. They are people who are also reluctant to protest because they object
to interest-group handouts on principle, but they’ve become so fed up that they’ve taken to the streets anyway. They represent the specifically French failure of the country’s elite over the past 30 years to heal what Jacques Chirac, in 1995, called France’s “social rift.”

The French demographer Hervé Le Bras noted that the map of Yellow Vests protests overlaps nearly perfectly with the map of French districts that are experiencing population decline. The Yellow Vests live in the unglamorous French exurbs that foreigners never see. Tourists see our urban landmarks and our picturesque countryside. News consumers sometimes get a glance at our fearful immigrant-majority public-housing ghettos, the notorious banlieues. But those bleak exurbs are invisible, outside and inside the country. As the French economist Eric Maurin has shown, middle-class French people are increasingly defined geographically, stuck in semirural areas whose economic life is slowly drained, priced out of the glamorous city centers by NIMBYism, and driven even farther out to avoid the banlieues.

Little surprise, then, that gasoline taxes should have been the spark that set off the powder keg. In the city centers and banlieues, public transport is cheap, available, and high-quality. In the French exurbs, as in America, driving is simply a necessary part of life and work. But there is another layer to this: What set off the Yellow Vests protests specifically was taxes on diesel. For as long as I can remember, the French government has had a deliberate policy of encouraging the purchase of more-expensive, more-efficient diesel cars by keeping taxes on diesel fuel comparatively low. Far more than dissatisfaction with green-friendly policies, this dual aspect of the tax increase—raiding the pocketbooks of people who can scarcely afford it while betraying public trust—is what accounts for why dissatisfaction turned to rage.

The very fact of using yellow safety jackets as a rallying sign is a rebuke to France’s elites. All drivers must have them in their car because of a much-disliked government mandate; by contrast, Paris is proverbially a city where it makes no sense to own a car. Everyone who might be a protester already owns a yellow vest; as a member of the unrepentant Parisian elite, I wouldn’t even know where to get one if I wanted to.

**Commentary**

**The Yellow Vests are a symptom of the Great Stagnation—the slowdown in real productivity growth and technological progress that has occurred since the 1970s.**

**WHAT DO THE Yellow Vests want?** There is no black-and-white answer for a movement that is entirely organic and leaderless, born out of hundreds of Facebook groups. Still, the widely shared list of demands that seems to serve as an unofficial manifesto is a mix of:

- the left-wing—higher minimum wage, lower retirement age, a laundry list of public spending items;
- the right-wing—small-business tax cuts, a crackdown on illegal immigration, tougher policing;
- the crazy—paying for the above by defaulting on the national debt;
- and the interesting—investing in hydrogen fuel cells as an alternative to gas and batteries for cars, direct democracy via popular initiatives, a return to seven-year presidential terms.

The government’s early response was to sneer that it is impossible to have lower taxes and more public services at the same time. Cue policy wonks and serious people everywhere sagely nodding, perhaps smirking as they do so. Except that this is, strictly speaking, false. In a country that experiences real, long-run economic and productivity growth, lower taxes and increased spending are perfectly sustainable. In this sense, the Yellow Vests are a symptom of what the economist Tyler Cowen has called the Great Stagnation—the slowdown in real productivity growth and technological progress that has occurred since the 1970s. In a slow-growth environment, wealth tends to trickle up, as Thomas Piketty pointed out.

The lesson of the slowly worsening social and political situation of Western countries is that modern, social and liberal democracies work only where there is real long-run economic growth; under these conditions, wealth does actually trickle down, and an expanding pie enables positive-sum bargaining among various interest groups via peaceful democratic processes. In this sense, the Yellow Vests are much more “rational” than their sneering betters: What they expect is not Santa, but what our political economy, built on a bedrock assumption of long-run growth, says they should expect.
Meanwhile the elite expectation that the system can endure without these necessary preconditions and that the majority should simply settle for less seems supremely irrational. Elite dismay that everyday people would actually try to cash the check of future growth that the elites collectively wrote out is downright Marie Antoinette-ish—as the 17th-century cleric Bossuet wrote, “God laughs at those who deplore effects whose causes they cherish.”

This global phenomenon has been made worse by the specifically French failure of the country’s elites to build an inclusive political and social system. That failure transcends party. What foreigners need to understand about Macron’s presidency is that it is less about a person or an agenda than it is about the caste he represents—France’s technocratic and pseudo-meritocratic elites. Through him this caste has taken over the levers of the country, beginning with his election in 2017.

All of Macron’s actions can be explained by this caste’s unspoken belief that these democratic checks and balances must be overrun, and a technocratic agenda implemented full-bore, to restore French prosperity. Macron has duly concentrated more power in the president’s office than any other leader before him. And that is saying something given France’s already monarchical constitution. He turned Parliament into a rubber stamp, plucked cabinet ministers from the ranks of the technocracy, empowered senior bureaucrats over political appointees, sidelined unions and other groups traditionally included in the legislative process, and made Trumpish comments about the press (this is why it’s strange to see him hailed in the international press as a champion of small-l liberalism).

Several things can be reliably said about technocracy everywhere. It is never as competent as it thinks it is; its claims to nonideological competence mask an underlying commitment to deeply held ideological beliefs; and its supposedly neutral policies somehow always intersect with the technocrats’ class interests more than they do the general interest.

Freeing up innovators to create new goods and services is wonderful, but it won’t get you anywhere if people don’t have any money to buy those new things.
French governments left and right have added many small-bore reforms to France’s labor code, whose cumulative effect is that it is now easy to hire and fire in France.

In France, “reform” is most often mere crony capitalism. Historically, from Colbert’s investment in manufacturing in the 17th century to de Gaulle’s investments in nuclear and aerospace technology, economic progress in France has come from government’s running roughshod over private business, which is generally more interested in rent-seeking than actual liberalization. This history means that simply handing things over to the private sector might not always be growth-friendly. Since the 1980s, French governments left and right have privatized countless state-owned businesses and public services. Now, certainly some privatization was desirable. But whatever else it did, it created an extremely lucrative revolving door, with senior government offices moving pieces on the economic chessboard, investment banks advising on those same moves and on the senior management of government-linked companies. This created a unified French managerial class of people who went to the same schools and now rotate between the senior jobs in government and the private sector. French senior civil service was always a path to power and prestige, but in the 1980s it also became a path to making vast sums of money quickly. The cohort of senior civil servants who came of age in the 1980s is collectively known as “the cash-grab generation (la génération fric).”

Furthermore, whatever the abstract benefits of privatization, France has a unique, two-century tradition of government engineering schools and highly successful government-driven civil engineering, which has given it some of the best infrastructure in the world, and world-beating innovations in fields such as aerospace and nuclear technology. Meanwhile, the academic case for privatizing natural monopoly infrastructure is, on a most generous reading, mixed. Some privatizations were successful, but others were atrocious failures. Perhaps the most egregious example is the 2000s-era privatization of highways by French governments left and right. Given the excellent state of French highways—I still have fond memories of a friend, a student at an elite school for government engineers, waxing lyrical about how French highways have a unique high-tech, rain-absorbing, and therefore life-saving coating—a conservative should be forgiven for wondering what was
broken that needed fixing. I have an idea what: The government's independent auditor later found that the government-linked companies that bought the highways underpaid by 40 percent, and tolls later increased by 20 percent with no corresponding increase in quality. Had this happened in Venezuela or Russia, everyone would know what to call it, but here in France it is “reform.”

Today, Macron intends to implement an EU mandate to liberalize France's railways, generally regarded as among the best in the world. Why? Just because, the answer seems to be. He also means to privatize France's national lottery and the Paris airports—in other words, two businesses that are essentially licenses to print money—ostensibly to pay down the debt. Apparently Macron, the former Rothschild managing director, is unaware that an investment banker who advised a CEO that he should sell assets returning 10 percent a year to pay for debt that costs him 2 percent a year would be summarily fired for gross incompetence. Does the vaunted expertise of French technocrats not extend to arithmetic?

Where is my yellow vest?

That France's senior executives tend to be either inheritors or bureaucrats probably explains why large French corporations routinely plumb the depths of rankings of companies that people want to work for. A landmark book called *The Logic of Honor*, by the French sociologist Philippe d'Iribarne, perfectly described how French business-management practices are obsessed with status-seeking and measuring rather than results. In *The Society of Defiance*, economists Pierre Cahan and Yann Algan show how this mentality creates a self-perpetuating cycle of distrust and hostility between employees and management. I have lost count of friends who will say things like, “Never again in my life will I work for a French company,” which they can say because they went to an elite school and can pick and choose among employers, unlike the Yellow Vest protestors.

This cultural history also explains a lot of the hostility to “labor-market reform.” In France, if you think your boss will use any legal loophole to screw you over, well, you're probably right. A tight labor market punishes bad bosses as a class, as employees simply vote with their feet. France rewards exploitive bosses. With mass unemployment, employees will tolerate a lot more abuse for fear of walking, and with no growth, squeezing employees is a much more rational path to profit than investment or innovation. Is it any wonder that most French people will hold on to their labor protections for dear life? That they have such a negative view of private business and anything labeled “market reform”?

By tweaking things at the margin, just enough to make his friends richer but not enough for any benefits to trickle down to the average voter, Macron is predictably exacerbating French people's anger and their alienation from institutions. The senior ranks of the Chinese Communist Party have certainly been exemplars for feeding at the trough and robbing the public trust blind, but they also consciously spend time improving their average subject's lot.

Perhaps it is because they have some idea what they're doing. The same cannot necessarily be said for France's incompetent mandarins. In another example of hollow “reform,” while the worst of the bureaucratic mindset has infested private business, the worst of business-school pablum has infested government. French mandarins earnestly believe that government should “learn from the private sector” to be “more efficient.” Sounds wonderful, right? In practice, this has turned into a drive to merge government agencies in order to “generate economies of scale” and “synergies”—word salads closer to something generated by an algorithm out of *Harvard Business Review* back issues from the 1980s than anything anybody with real private business experience would contemplate.

The overwhelming consensus in the academic literature is that most private-sector mergers destroy value and that the vaunted synergies most often fail to materialize. In any case, the concept of “economies of scale” applies only to specific types of private businesses that have commodity inputs or depend on supplier relationships, which is not at all comparable to most of the things government does. Those tend to be more analogous to labor-intensive service providers, a type of business notorious for its lack of economies of scale.

Nevertheless, the hot thing in French government from the late 1990s onward has been merging various government services together, with the typi-
cal result being many years of dysfunction and, at the
tail end, an elephantine bureau that, in the best case,
doesn’t do its work any better than its combined pre-
decessors but certainly costs more money.

This has incinerated countless amounts of tax-
payer money and deteriorated the quality of public ser-
vices. And sometimes lethally—parliamentary as well as
independent investigations have found that the intel-
ligence failures that enabled the 2015 terrorist attacks
can be attributed to the botched merger of France’s two
domestic intelligence services during the 2007–12 presi-
dency of Nicolas Sarkozy. That might be bad for most
French people, but it is very good for France’s manageri-
elites, since it creates endless opportunities for high-
priced bureaucrats-turned-consultants and public-ser-
vice contractors to “advise” these Alice in Wonderland
projects and, perhaps even more important, enables
them to play office Napoleon (which studies say is the
real goal of most mergers, public or private).

Another example of failed French “reform” has
been the multi-decade drive toward decentralizing
government power. Now, doesn’t that sound like an
anti-mandarin move, and a generally praiseworthy di-
rection for public policy? Again, in theory, yes, but in
practice, not so much.

As social historian Jacques Julliard put it, his-
torically France was “a dual electoral monarchy of
president and mayor.” French people typically hold
their officials in contempt, but mayors are the stand-
out exception. Mayors tend to be highly popular. The
typical French town is small—France has 36,000
townships, more than the rest of Europe put to-
gether—which means mayors are inevitably close to
their constituents. The average French person prob-
ably can’t name his member of Parliament or half the
cabinet, but he has probably had the mayor round the
house for a beer at least once.

Municipal government is one of the quiet won-
ders of French life, both in terms of policy delivery
and, what’s important in an age of rock-bottom trust
in public institutions, democratic engagement. Natu-
really, this offends French policy wonks, who want to
merge townships together to, you guessed it, generate
synergies and economies of scale.

Paris is too large for anyone to know the mayor,
so it makes sense that Parisian mandarins don’t un-
derstand what mayors mean to French small-town
life. And so instead of improving on a good thing, giv-
ing municipalities more power, decentralization laws
have invested more prerogatives in intermediate lev-
els, départements, and, especially, the highest level, re-
gions. The idea is to imitate France’s neighbors, which
have a federal system of government; a typical reflex
of French mandarins is to hold in contempt whatever
is uniquely French and want to replace it with some-
thing foreign. Now, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the UK
have a federal or quasi-federal system of government
for reasons having to do with their own history and
culture, while France has a very different history and
culture. But the idea that imitating their system might
not work for France for cultural and historical reasons
simply does not compute for a technocrat.

Thus, François Hollande decided to merge re-
gions together to “generate economies of scale”—and
later audits found, surprise, that this disrupted the de-

delivery of public services and failed to deliver expected


savings. A popular idea among wonks is to finish the
work by putting all power in the hands of regional gov-
ernments and merged mega-townships—that’s right,
they can’t help it, even when they want to decentral-
ize, French technocrats centralize. That this approach
has been a dismal failure over the past 30 years does
not enter the equation, even with government spend-
ing ballooning while the quality of public services and
public trust in local government have deteriorated.

It is telling that Macron has been the first sitting
president in living memory to decline to address the an-
nual convention of the French mayors’ association—and
that one of his moves to try to appease the Yellow Vests
was to promise to consult with mayors on future policy.

So what about the Yellow Vests? French history
has always been a sort of dialectic between elites and
the masses, and yes, this dialectic sometimes turns vi-
olent. The French people revere good leaders; they are
angry first of all because they despise mediocrity. Over
my lifetime, France’s elites, the product of the best of
one of the most advanced cultures on the planet, have
grown cowardly, insular, increasingly arrogant as they
have become less competent, increasingly entitled as
they have become less public-spirited, and greedier as
the country has grown poorer. The country I love has
become weaker, smaller, and more fragile.
Caravandalism

The disgraceful immigration confrontation before the election and what it revealed about our national unseriousness

By Tod Lindberg

Before the advent of political polarization radicalized by the election of Donald Trump, before the emergence of Twitter as the preeminent platform for political debate, and before the advance of a “caravan” of would-be refugees or migrants through Central America and Mexico toward our southern border, the United States was home to a very contentious and long-running debate over immigration policy. What we have now instead, thanks to these new political wrinkles, are contrasting works of political performance art on the subject of immigration, detached from all reasonable considerations of national sovereignty, American history, and international politics.

Maybe you were in middle school when you learned a few homey truths about the United States of America. For example, that this is a nation of immigrants. Apart from Native Americans, who were here when the Europeans arrived, and African slaves, whom Europeans brought here against their will, the ancestors of everybody else came to America because they wanted to. They saw better opportunities in the New World than they did in the Old, a better chance of pursuing happiness or what they saw as a good life. This immigrant society of the United States thus has an origin story different from that of most nation-states, where ethnic groups have histories running to centuries.

Then maybe when you got to college you learned something about what makes a nation-state a state. For starters, a nation has borders that other states generally recognize—a territory of its own. True, sometimes there are disputes with neighboring countries about where the borders are, and sometimes subnational groups (you maybe learned this part in an upper-level undergraduate class) contest with states for autonomy or independence. But within its borders, a nation is sovereign, formally accountable to no one outside for its decisions about its affairs. In whatever fashion a state may be organized politically—as a kingdom, an oligarchy, a democracy—the state has a monopoly on

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the legitimate use of force within its borders. If you commit a crime, the state can lock you up; even if you offend your neighbor, he's not allowed to shoot you (except in self-defense).

From the American experience as a nation of immigrants and from the formal principles of what is often called Westphalian sovereignty, a few basic principles flow. First of all, nations need to have fairly good control over their own borders. If they don’t—if anybody can come in at any time for any reason—then the state would cease to function as a state. It wouldn’t really have borders, and there would be no distinction between those who lawfully reside within its territory and those who simply assert a claim on the territory on their own behalf—a claim that, should it go unchecked, is really nothing more than surrender of the state’s monopoly on the use of force.

But, and consistent with the American tradition, some level of lawful migration is appropriate. That’s how the country was populated in the first place, and not just during the colonial period of American history. For several hundred years now, people have sought to live in the United States for the same reasons the first Europeans came here: to live in freedom and pursue opportunity. And the United States has adopted laws and public policy governing who can lawfully migrate here and under what circumstances.

Another useful principle from college is that the United States is one nation among many, and that nations including the United States have often decided to agree among themselves on how to deal with certain problems that come up internationally, between particular states or for states as a whole system. One of those problems is persecution—up to and including the point of genocide. Some sovereign governments choose to lock up, expel, or kill large numbers of people from their own territory—or are unable to prevent subnational groups from undertaking similar activities. States generally agree that individuals have the right to flee such persecution, that it is wrong for the originating states to prohibit their departure and make them stay to face whatever fate the state has in store for them. States have generally agreed that people fleeing persecution need somewhere to go: They can’t simply be turned around and forced back whence they came. They need a place of refuge. They seek asylum on the basis of their well-founded fear of persecution. They are refugees, and states collectively codified this understanding in an international treaty, the 1951 Refugee Convention, which applied to displaced persons in Europe before that date, and the 1967 Protocol, which removed the time-and-place limitations of the original convention, thus making refugee status available wherever and whenever a well-founded fear of persecution at home arises.

At the policymaking level and among those who seek to influence policy, people also understand that not everyone who leaves Country X for Country Y is a “refugee.” Some migrants may indeed have a well-founded fear of persecution. But some may make such a claim falsely or without adequate foundation in order to further their economic or other opportunities. Thus it’s necessary to have a process to distinguish legitimate requests for asylum from cases unsupported by a well-founded fear of persecution. While provision for refugees is something states have codified as essential, nations have never collectively sought to establish a treaty purporting to govern the decisions of all states on immigration policy—on whom they may choose to lawfully admit for permanent or time-limited residence. That’s up to the sovereign nations themselves to decide in accordance with their internal political procedures.

From all this commonplace knowledge, a few policy conclusions follow. First, countries must maintain practical control of their borders—over who crosses into their territory. This is always true. For example, even though many European states have pooled this aspect of their sovereignty under the Schengen Agreement, which allows free movement across national borders of member states, the Schengen countries maintain a sharp distinction between themselves and the world outside Schengen. You can’t legally enter the Schengen area without proper papers, though once you have been legally admitted, you can cross from France to Belgium unimpeded (with certain exceptions).

The second policy conclusion is that nations that want to allow immigration at some level still adopt laws and policies to regulate the practice. Some states have been very reluctant to grant permanent residency to outsiders. Japan is one. Now, however, a serious labor shortage as a result of the aging Japanese population has prompted policymakers to allow more migrant workers entry and legal residency. Some
Central and Eastern European states have allowed minimal immigration, perhaps with the exception of members of the dominant ethnic group returning from abroad. Poland, for example, especially under its current government, has been subject to sharp criticism from European Union states to its west for its unwillingness to take in refugees from the turmoil in the Middle East. And indeed, some of the statements of Polish politicians in the Law and Justice Party have been indefensible, for example Jaroslaw Kaczynsky’s warning of the danger of infection from “all sorts of parasites and protozoa” supposedly borne by refugees. Nevertheless, Poland has admitted hundreds of thousands of ethnic Poles from Russia and additional hundreds of thousands of ethnic Ukrainians fleeing the violence in their country’s east resulting from Russia’s unacknowledged incursion there.

Other states are selective in other ways. Israel, constituted as a Jewish state, offers permanent residence and citizenship to Jews from anywhere abroad. Costa Rica is famously welcoming to American retirees and the income they bring. Germany, meanwhile, admitted about a million refugees from the Middle East in 2015 and has been struggling with the political consequences ever since. One very safe conclusion at this point is that the country is unready for a million more.

According to the 2017 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics published by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 1,127,167 persons received lawful permanent residence status in the United States in 2017—that is, a green card. The number is down a little more than 50,000 from 2016 but still ahead of the 1,051,031 in 2015. Most migrants to the United States come from India, China, and Mexico. In short, and consistent with middle-school teaching, the United States remains open to lawful migration and has laws and policies that encourage it, such that immigrants and their U.S.-born children constitute 27 percent of the current U.S. population of 325.7 million. In September 2018, the U.S. government also issued 38,788 immigrant visas and more than 620,000 non-immigrant visas for temporary stays here.

Note that 1.1 million green cards is equal to neither 2.2 million nor zero. U.S. law could allow for twice as many new legal permanent residents each year—or some large multiple of that number—without thereby fulfilling the wishes of everyone worldwide who might like to move here permanently. And the United States could, in principle, close the door on legal migration by reducing the number of green cards to zero, among other policy measures. But neither a lowering to zero nor an increase to double or triple is what U.S. law currently provides for.

The fact that some migrants are able to cross the border illegally and live in a country without documentation, as happens not infrequently over the U.S. southern border, does not mean that the United States has given up its practical control over the border. Nor does the fact that some people enter the country legally subject to time restrictions and then overstay their visas. The complicated role of such migration in U.S. politics, the American economy, and society writ large is one worthy of debate, and a contentious debate it has long been. But regardless of how the debate comes out, the law governing the border doesn’t get repealed because it’s violated. Nations have borders, and they have laws setting the terms by which people can lawfully cross them.

Or so one might once have thought. But our two principal contending political camps these days, however—to judge by the competing visions of the Central American caravan that dominated cable news in the weeks before the midterm election—have decided they can do without such considerations and, in so doing have voluntarily parted with their senses to advocate for political positions that are incompatible with reality.

Let us briefly examine the alternative visions being propounded in this strange corner of the multiverse of the imagination. We will do so without recourse to the current convention of quoting tweets, on the ground that doing so only makes matters worse.

Those seeking documentation for the visions described here will readily find it—and, regretfully, not only on Twitter.

Thus, we were told by one camp that the caravan was an invasion force seeking to breach the sovereign territory of the United States and establish a beachhead through which countless numbers of follow-on invaders could swiftly flow. The foot soldiers of the caravan, we were told, included dangerous numbers of criminal-gang members bent on exporting murder and rape to the United States as well as Middle East jihadists intent on installing a caliphate to impose Islamic law.
on the United States. Their supporters in the United States, who, it is said, created and subsidized this caravan, welcomed them in an effort to undermine the U.S. Constitution and American institutions as well as to increase the supporters’ political power. Such a would-be invasion deserved a commensurate response. An essential element had to be the deployment of the U.S. military on a mission of territorial self-defense. And yes, the use of lethal force against those trying to invade the country en masse was considered appropriate, since repelling the members of the caravan would be the last chance to preserve the United States.

No, said the other side. The caravan was a column of desperate refugees pressing legitimate claims about their well-founded fear of persecution at home. They were mostly impoverished families fleeing abusive governments and seeking vindication of their rights under international law. The United States had a legal duty and a moral responsibility to admit them—and anyone suffering under similar circumstances. This was not happening because the once-immigrant-proud United States now drips with the privilege of affluence, and the main beneficiaries of that affluence are trying to preserve it through racist and restrictionist policies that seek to shut the door on immigration permanently. A true embrace of the ideals that America supposedly stands for would entail openness to migrants as partial redress of past injustices and as a step toward a more inclusive, less racist society. The United States should therefore abolish ICE, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The use of tear gas against refugees, including little children, is a war crime and a violation of the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention. The failure to admit members of the caravan simply betrayed the promise of the United States.

According to those who outlined these two arguments, if you don’t embrace one of them, you are objectively in favor of the other. The choices available in this niche of the multiverse are strictly binary: There’s no wigging out. The dispute will be resolved once and for all only by the complete victory of the side you favor over the side you oppose.

Gone is a just assessment of those in the caravan, all of whom are poor and seek better opportunities for themselves and their families, many of whom likely qualify as refugees (though not necessarily for admission to the United States), many of whom do not and should be considered through regular immigration law and policy, some of whom are seeking to make a political point, and all of whom are being used on Twitter to make a political point. Likewise gone is an acknowledgment that the United States, like all states, has borders that need to be respected; laws governing the crossing of them that, in our case, allow for substantial immigration; and international obligations voluntarily undertaken to victims of persecution.

Except that those things are not really gone. A culture seized by the desire to live through performance art may dispense with them temporarily, but nevertheless, they persist. The issues here are real, they are complicated, and they will continue to be tested—by reality.
The Trump Boom and the Threat to It

A roaring economy is still in structural danger

By John Steele Gordon

WHAT UNLEASHED the animal spirits in the American economy with the advent of Donald Trump, and how long will they stay unleashed?

While the deep recession of 2008–9 ended when Barack Obama had been in office only five months, the recovery from it for the rest of his two terms was sluggish at best. This is contrary to what is usual. Steep recessions tend to be followed by steep recoveries. After the deep recession of 1981–82, for instance, when unemployment rose higher than it did in 2008–9, economic growth was robust, with annual GDP growth averaging 3.9 percent and reaching 7.2 percent in 1984. In the seven years after the recovery began in 1982, the United States economy added the equivalent of the GDP of Germany to its own.

But the Obama presidency never saw annual growth of even 3 percent, and in 2011 it was a dismal 1.6 percent. With the election of Trump in November 2016, however, that changed with startling speed. GDP growth accelerated. In the second quarter of 2018, it reached 4.1 percent on an annual basis.

The stock market is what economists call a leading indicator, because it pegs current prices to expected future earnings. Thus it moves before similar trends begin to show in other parts of the economy. For instance, although the stock market began to recover in March 2009 from the financial crisis of 2008, it was not until June of that year that the recession officially ended as the American economy stopped contracting and began to expand again, however slowly.

On Election Day 2016, the Dow-Jones Industrial average closed at 18,332. As, over the course of that night, an improbable Trump victory began to look ever more probable, markets plunged. Nobel Prize–winning economist Paul Krugman famously predicted they would never recover. But by the next morning, Dow futures were down only 15 points, and by the end of that day, the Dow was up a solid 251 points.

And it just kept going. On January 26, 2018,
one year into the Trump presidency, the Dow closed at 26,616.71, a spectacular 41 percent rise in only 15 months. The market has been much more volatile for the rest of 2018, but as yet there has been no correction (defined as a drop of 10 percent or more).

Why has the stock market flourished so abundantly during the Trump administration? Tax reform and regulatory relief, the very things Trump ran on. The Obama administration had refused to address the country’s very high corporate taxes (the highest in the developed world) and had piled on new regulations, especially those favoring labor unions and the agenda of environmental activists, at an unprecedented rate, lowering corporate profits and diminishing economic opportunities.

Hillary Clinton had made it clear that neither tax reform nor regulatory relief would be addressed in a Clinton administration. So when Donald Trump defeated her, traders foresaw quickly rising corporate profits, and the market took off. The animal spirits were unleashed. Although Trump had campaigned on a corporate tax rate of 15 percent (down from a stifling 35 percent), he had to settle for a 21 percent rate. Still, that made a big difference. Under the old rate, a $1 million profit yielded an after-tax profit of $650,000. Under the new rate, the after-tax profit is $790,000, a whopping 21 percent increase. No wonder the market took off in anticipation.

Further, under the old tax law, corporate profits earned abroad were taxed at 35 percent as well, although foreign corporate taxes paid could be deducted from what was owed. (The United States was the only major country in the world to use a “global” taxation system as opposed to a “territorial” system, where taxes are paid only in the country where the profits are earned.) But the American tax applied only when the money was brought home.

The result of this law, inevitably, had been that companies kept their foreign earnings abroad whenever possible. By 2017, nearly $3 trillion in American corporate earnings was parked in foreign banks. That is more than the annual GDP of all but four countries. Under the new tax law, this money can now be repatriated at a flat 8 percent rate. Further, the United States joined the rest of the world, and future foreign earnings will be taxed only by the country where the profit is earned. Thus there is no longer any incentive to keep that money abroad.

All of this means that not only are corporations more profitable under the Trump tax law, but they now find it easier to invest in the United States out of their own foreign after-tax profits, increasing the pool of American capital. That in turn will help keep interest rates down and investment up.

The Trump tax bill also benefitted most individual families. Some companies immediately shared some of the extra profits with their employees, giving them one-time bonuses after its passage and some raising the wages of their lowest-paid employees. The new tax law also lowered income-tax rates for individuals, although it capped state and local tax deductions at $10,000, which will mean federal taxes will go up for many individuals and families in high-tax states such as New York and California.

Higher take-home pay in millions of households powered a “wealth effect.” People who feel richer, thanks to higher pay and more valuable financial assets, tend to spend more freely, boosting the economy as a whole. Although the tax bill was not signed until December 2017, its anticipation helped power the economy that year.

So did the steady repeal of regulations under the Trump administration. Indeed, on the very first day he came into office, President Trump signed Executive Order 13771. It directed government agencies that intended to issue new regulations to find and repeal simultaneously out-of-date or excessively costly regulations. A companion order required new regulations to have a net cost of zero.

As a result, while an average of 13,000 new regulations had been added annually in previous administrations, virtually none were added on net in the first 10 months of the present administration, a trend that has continued.

And the administration took advantage of the Congressional Review Act of 1996 to repeal, by act of Congress, regulations already in place. This had been passed as part of Newt Gingrich’s Contract with America in 1996. The act allowed Congress to repeal regulations that had already been issued by the executive branch. Congress had 60 “legislative days” (i.e., days...
The steady repeal of regulation along with the anticipated tax reform caused the economy to expand in 2017 at its briskest pace since before the financial crisis.

when Congress was actually in session, not calendar days) to do so by joint resolution. As a joint resolution, any such repeal could not be filibustered in the Senate but would be subject to a presidential veto.

The act had been used successfully only once before (in the early days of the George W. Bush administration). When the Republicans got control of Congress during the last two years of the Obama administration, they passed five joint resolutions repealing regulations. President Obama vetoed all of them, nearly half of all the vetoes he issued in eight years. The Trump administration has used the Congressional Review Act no fewer than 16 times to repeal Obama-era regulations.

The Trump administration also stopped a practice, especially popular with the Obama Environmental Protection Agency, known as “sue and settle.” In this tactic, an environmental group, often at the implicit invitation of the government, sues the government, demanding that it take a particular regulatory action. The agency then quickly settles the case, agrees to implement the regulation, pays the group’s legal fees, and imposes the action without the public hearing-and-comment period that the ordinary regulatory process requires.

All in all, the steady repeal of regulation along with the anticipated tax reform caused the economy to expand in 2017 at its briskest pace since before the financial crisis.

Unemployment, which had stood at 4.8 percent in January 2017, trended down all year, reaching 4.1 percent in December. As the tax cuts kicked in, the employment rate continued to decline, reaching 3.7 percent in September 2018, a rate that has held steady since. That’s the lowest rate in nearly 50 years and a rate economists regard as “full employment.”

And while wages stagnated during the slow recovery of the Obama administration, the very tight labor market in the Trump years has begun to accelerate wage growth as employers increasingly have to compete for scarce workers. There are, for the first time, more job openings than job seekers. Wages increased in the last 12 months at a 3.1 percent rate, the highest since before the recession.

The American economy has been creating an average of 200,000 new jobs every month during the current administration. The total number of jobs created since Trump took office now exceeds 4 million. Construction jobs have increased by over 800,000. Black unemployment, at 7.8 percent in January 2017, is now 5.9 percent, the lowest figure since the statistic was first gathered in the 1970s.

Manufacturing jobs declined over the eight years of the Obama administration by 173,000, as manufacturing moved increasingly abroad. But in the first 22 months of the Trump administration, they have increased by 526,000, although manufacturing as a percentage of GDP has been declining for decades, as has the percentage of manufacturing jobs vis-à-vis total jobs. That trend will undoubtedly continue as the technology of robotics continues its rapid advance.

With the reduction in American corporate income taxes, foreign plants are more likely to open in this country, for they will be more profitable after tax than they would have been under the old rates.

U.S. ENERGY PRODUCTION has been soaring in the Trump era, thanks largely to the revolutionary technologies of fracking and horizontal drilling, both pioneered in the United States. For the first time in decades, the United States leads the world in both oil and natural-gas production.

The country imported about half its oil as recently as 2006, when it brought in 12 million barrels a day. Today, daily oil imports are down to 3 million barrels, and the U.S. is exporting oil for the first time since the oil shocks of the 1970s. By next year, the country is expected to be a net exporter of petroleum and already has been in certain weeks of 2018.

While President Obama recently claimed credit for the country’s rapidly increasing energy production during the Trump administration, in fact the Obama administration did all it could to restrict energy production. It dragged out the permitting process, closed many areas of federal land and offshore areas to oil and gas exploration, and refused permits for pipelines. The Trump administration has reversed many of these policies. For instance, it quickly authorized the completion of the Keystone pipeline over which the Obama administration had dawdled for nearly eight years before finally turning the project down. With fewer restrictions, the energy industry will probably grow at an
Even a faster rate than before.

Rapidly increasing American oil production has produced a global oil glut, and prices, which had been rising earlier in the year, have fallen sharply since early October, when oil topped $75 a barrel. In early December, it stood at $61. As the U.S. oil industry is highly efficient, it can still make a profit at a price where many other countries cannot.

Lower oil prices are a positive for the American economy as a whole. A lower cost at the pump puts more money in the pockets of consumers. Just a 30-cent-a-gallon drop in the price of gas per gallon, as has occurred over the last three months, makes a fill-up about $5 less expensive. Multiply that by the nearly 300 million vehicles in the United States, and a lot of money gets freed up for other purposes of American families and corporations. In addition, oil is a cost factor in practically all products and services. A drop in the price of oil reduces inflation and makes companies more profitable.

Besides the domestic economic effects of increasing American energy production, there are profound geopolitical implications, all of them favorable to the United States, which stands to become the world’s dominant energy producer. In early December, the secretary of the interior announced that the Delaware Basin in southeast New Mexico and West Texas holds a staggering 46 billion barrels of recoverable oil and 281 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, more than twice the amount to be found in the great Midland Basin to the east, which has been exploited for decades and is currently pumping about 2 million barrels a day. That’s enough oil and gas to power the entire United States economy for seven years.

There are weaknesses in the Trump economy. One of these is the participation rate, the percentage of the population over the age of 16 that is in the workforce. It has been declining for years, especially in the 21st century as the baby-boom generation (born between 1946 and 1964) has been reaching retirement age in increasing numbers and the life expectancy of the elderly has increased substantially. The participation rate was 65.7 at the beginning of 2008, as the economy was already in recession. It was down to 62.5 percent in January 2017. Despite the booming economy and very tight labor market, it is now only 62.9.

Another worrying metric is that among men ages 25 to 54, the prime working years, 19 percent are not working or looking for work. At the peak of an earlier business cycle, in 1989, the percentage of nonworking men in this age bracket was only 13.6. Part of this increase is surely statistical, where various metrics fail to capture men in a workforce that has a rapidly growing number of self-employed and contract workers. (And some of these nonworking men, to be sure, are in the underground economy, working for cash legally or illegally and thus trying hard not to be captured.)

How long can the Trump boom go on? No one knows that, obviously, but the recovery from the bottom of the last recession, in the first quarter of 2009, has been a very long one by historical standards, now 98 months of expansion.

And all booms must end, for the business cycle, which is an artifact of human nature, cannot be repealed. When times are good, people are optimistic about the future and businesses look to expand and exploit opportunities. Equally, they tend to put off difficult or unpleasant things, such as laying off surplus workers, closing obsolescent plants, and seeking greater efficiency. Excesses get built into the economy until something changes, such as the end of rapidly rising housing prices in 2006. Then families and businesses begin to retrench and the economy cascades downward until the excesses are cleared and a new upward cycle begins.

Economic growth in recent years has been aided by the Federal Reserve keeping interest rates at historically low levels. But the Fed has been raising rates in recent months, and the increasing cost of money inherently slows down an economy as it makes capital more expensive.

The biggest looming problem in the short term is the global economy as a whole. In today’s world, no nation, and certainly not the United States, can exist in isolation. And while the American economy is currently robust, other major economies have been slowing and even slipping into recession. Germany and Japan, the third- and fourth-largest economies in the world—and the fourth- and fifth-largest trading partners of the United States—have both been contracting in recent months. No nation can exist in isolation. And while the American economy is currently robust, other major economies have been slowing and even slipping into recession.
If the global economy, which has been slowing, were to slip into recession as a whole, it is hard to see how the American economy would not follow soon afterward.

Even China, the world’s second-largest economy and our largest trading partner, whose rapid growth in recent decades has been near miraculous, is now slowing down. China is trying to evolve from an export-driven economy to a fully mature one, one dominated by local consumption. That might turn out to be a rocky road. Already total debt in China has been rising rapidly, and there are vast amounts of empty housing stock overhanging the Chinese real-estate market. Wealthy Chinese have been exporting capital in increasing amounts, which is never a good sign in a still developing economy.

And while lower oil prices are good for the United States, they are bad for such petro-states as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Nigeria, much of whose GDP is earned from the foreign sale of oil.

If the global economy, which has been slowing in recent months, were to slip into recession as a whole, it is hard to see how the American economy would not follow soon afterward. And a global recession will be much more likely if a full-scale trade war results from President Trump’s hardball tactics and mercantile instincts when it comes to trade.

In the long term, by far the biggest problem for the American economy is the inability of the federal government to live within its means. Fiscal 2018 was a year of abundant economic prosperity, and yet the annual deficit was $779 trillion, 18.9 percent of total spending, a level not seen since the depth of the 2008–9 recession and its early aftermath. The national debt is now at World War II levels as a percent of GDP, over 100 percent, having been as low as 34 percent in 1979.

Even a country as rich as the United States cannot indefinitely sustain this level of overspending during peace and prosperity. And yet there is little or no interest in Washington to do anything about it because politicians—always in the reelection business—tend to think in the short term.

Congress, dominated by local interests, controls the budgeting process, as it has since the early 1970s, when serious overspending began. The president, the only person in Washington elected by the nation as a whole (along with the powerless vice president), is largely sidelined. It will take a president with rare political skills and armed with a powerful electoral mandate to change that.

But change it must. Just consider: In 2018, the Treasury paid $523 billion in interest on the outstanding debt, 12.7 percent of total outlays. At the interest rates prevailing in 2007, the last year before the recession set in, the interest would have been nearly $1 trillion, equal to 22.7 percent of outlays. That would have resulted either in drastic—and politically difficult—cuts in other federal spending or the beginning of a fiscal death spiral as the interest on the debt was financed with more borrowed money.

American prosperity is at risk, even in the midst of this economic boom.
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How the embrace of other media made New York’s theater district iconic

By Terry Teachout

IN THE 2017–18 THEATER season, 63 percent of the 13.8 million tickets sold to performances of Broadway shows were bought by tourists who live outside New York City and its suburbs. No other American city can make a comparable claim. Despite the high quality of theater elsewhere in the U.S., New York remains America’s only “destination city” for live theater, as has been the case since the 1920s, when Times Square became its theater district. Of the shows that out-of-towners go to see, musicals make up 83 percent. Indeed, Broadway and musical comedy are for most people one and the same thing. Yet despite the diminished place of the stage play in Broadway’s latter-day economy, it is also true that an American play must sooner or later be produced there for it to be generally acknowledged as significant.

When and how did America discover Broadway? Laurence Maslon, a professor at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts, tells part of the story in Broadway to Main Street: How Show Tunes Enchanted America, a fully sourced, engagingly written study that is a model of its kind. It is as fine a book as could possibly be written about the way in which the Broadway musicals of the 20th century have come to be woven into our cultural fabric. The story begins in 1891, when Charles Hoyt and Percy Gaunt wrote a musical comedy called A Trip to Chinatown that ran in New York for two years, a record that would not be broken until 1919. Freely based on an 1842 farce by the Viennese playwright Johann Nepomuk Neustroh, it was so successful that several road companies performed the show throughout America simultaneously with its New York run.**

A year after A Trip to Chinatown opened, T.B. Harms, one of the first companies to publish musical-comedy scores, brought out a folio of songs from the show. Around the same time, a singer in one of the road companies interpolated into the production a sentimental waltz by Charles K. Harris called “After the Ball.” This song soon became even more popular than the show in which it was performed, ultimately selling 5 million sheet-
music copies. Each one bore on its cover a prominent note identifying the song as having been sung “in Hoyt’s ‘A Trip to Chinatown,’” a form of advertising that became standard practice for sheet-music editions of songs drawn from the scores of hit shows. It was from ads like these that ordinary Americans first learned that New York was the center of theatrical activity in the U.S.

The mass production of phonograph records had only just begun in 1892, and amateur music-making was still a routine part of middle-class life. Even though “After the Ball” was recorded for the first time a year later, most turn-of-the-century Americans became familiar with the song by buying a copy of the sheet music and gathering around their parlor pianos to sing it themselves. And long after the phonograph and radio had definitively supplanted amateur music-making, it scarcely ever occurred to record companies to bring Broadway stars into the studio to document their personal interpretations of the songs that they sang on stage, much less to release original-cast albums that would make it possible for listeners outside New York to become acquainted with the dramatic contexts of those songs. The individual songs themselves were all that they knew.

Once sound came along in 1927, Hollywood fully embraced the musical form—up to a point. The first talking picture, The Jazz Singer, featured Broadway’s biggest star, Al Jolson, warbling a song by Irving Berlin. The second Best Picture Oscar was awarded to The Broadway Melody. Like 42nd Street after it, The Broadway Melody was a backstage drama with musical numbers ostensibly performed on the stages of actual theaters in front of live audiences. But as a rule, Hollywood did not adapt existing Broadway shows, instead producing original musicals and creating their own singing and dancing stars (although they did sometimes employ established stage performers like Fred Astaire). There was good reason for this: Most of the stage musicals of the ’20s and ’30s were either purely frivolous confections whose books were devoid of dramatic conflict or plotless revues that were ill-suited to translation into cinematic terms. Some of the best-remembered films of the period, and received prominent billing for having done so. Indeed, George Gershwin’s name became so well known that he hosted a 1934 radio series called Music by Gershwin that aired on NBC and, later, CBS. And while their shows were never heard on the radio airwaves, the songs they wrote for those shows were broadcast regularly. According to Maslon, six of the 10 songs that aired most often in the 1927–28 season, including Berlin’s “Blue Skies,” Gershwin’s “S Wonderful,” and Kern’s “Ol’ Man River” and “Can’t Help Lovin’ Dat Man,” were show tunes.

Nonmusical theater, by contrast, was treated with more respect by Hollywood. Many noteworthy American and English plays, among them The Little Foxes, The Man Who Came to Dinner, Our Town, Private Lives, and Strange Interlude, were turned into more or less faithful film versions whose stage origins were deemed to be prestigious and so were prominently advertised by studio publicists (“Now on the Screen! Robert E. Sherwood’s Sensationally Successful Pulitzer Prize Play ABE LINCOLN IN ILLINOIS”). In addition, road-show companies of these plays toured the U.S., and they were also made available for amateur and summer-stock production and were broadcast in abridged form on radio programs like Theatre Guild of the Air.

The combined effect of these undertakings was to heighten public awareness of Broadway’s status as a center of stage entertainment and, on occasion, of high art. Yet further innovations were needed before New York could become a full-fledged theatrical destination city. The most consequential was the 1943 release by Decca Records of 12 songs from Oklahoma! that were performed by the original cast.
Broadway cast. This album, the first of its kind to be widely distributed, made it possible for out-of-towners to hear the most popular musical of the '40s without going to New York. Within months of its release, all the other major labels were putting out original-cast albums of their own. Their cultural impact is suggested in a 1946 Saturday Evening Post ad for Decca's first five original-cast albums that is reproduced in Broadway to Main Street:

Big Broadway shows were only for the fortunate few. Tradition had always said so. But Decca said No! Believing that the best is none too good for all Americans, Decca put Broadway's best on records. Much of the magic of these plays came from the players' personalities. So Decca smashed tradition to record the original casts!*

Five years later came Ed Sullivan's weekly TV variety show, which was broadcast from Times Square and regularly presented scenes and songs from the original Broadway productions of popular musicals and stage plays. Sullivan's competitors followed suit, and by the mid-'50s it was common for the major TV networks to air Broadway-related fare. The most successful such program, NBC's 1955 telecast of Jerome Robbins's Peter Pan, was viewed by more than 65 million people, one out of every three Americans. Jack Gould, the New York Times' TV critic, wrote that it was “no rare treat just for those with the ability to pay a box-office price or for those in the right geographical location. Thanks to television, the proscenium arch of Broadway was moved to wherever there was a home screen.”

In the same year, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II decided to assume an active role in the production of big-budget widescreen film versions of their musicals that would be faithful in spirit to the way in which the shows had been presented on stage. The popular success of the first of these films, Fred Zinnemann's Oklahoma! (1955), persuaded Hollywood executives that it was indeed possible to turn stage musicals into commercially viable movies. It also showed Americans who lived outside New York exactly what they were missing. From then on, Broadway was solidly established as a bona fide national institution, one of whose existence and significance all Americans were aware.

The centrality of the Broadway musical to postwar American popular culture cannot be exaggerated. Consider this statistic cited by Maslon: “Between 1945 and 1969—13 different original-cast albums hit No. 1 on the Billboard charts... If one factors in the soundtrack albums directly derived from Broadway scores during those same decades (Oklahoma, West Side Story, etc.), the number of weeks at No. 1 for albums of Broadway-originated material surpasses all the weeks at No. 1 of albums by the Beatles, [Frank] Sinatra, Elvis Presley, the Rolling Stones, and the Monkees combined.”

Maslon puts it well when he observes elsewhere in Broadway to Main Street that “for decades practically every family had at least one cast album in the record cabinet or a cassette of show music in the glove compartment of the car.” By the same token, even those Americans who had never set foot in a Broadway theater were more than likely to have seen the screen versions of such well-known plays as (say) The Odd Couple, Picnic, A Raisin in the Sun, and A Streetcar Named Desire. In one way or another, Broadway had by midcentury left a mark on American culture that was grossly disproportionate to the limited number of Americans who actually saw shows there in person.

Those days are long gone. In 1964, Louis Armstrong's record of the title song from Hello, Dolly! became the bestselling pop single in the U.S. Since then, though, no recording of a traditional show tune has topped Billboard's Hot 100 chart.

* For a detailed discussion of these albums and their history, see my “The Rise and Fall of the Original-Cast Album” (Commentary, September 2011).
Commentary

In the Season: A Candid Look at Music. In his otherwise prescient book of the 1967–68 Broadway season, the late William Goldman argued that the rise of rock had nothing to do with the fact that Hair was the only musical to succeed at the box office that season: “Musical comedy is under no obligation to reflect the music of its time than [George] Balanchine is to put the New York City Ballet through an evening of the Frug. There is no reason under this or any other sun why an audience of teen- and pre-teen-age children, the popular record audience, should force the middle-aged men and women who make up the Broadway audience to listen to its sound.”

What Goldman did not realize was that those same teenagers would be no more interested in traditional show tunes when they graduated from college than they had been in 1969. Like most of us, they would spend the rest of their lives listening to the music that was popular when they were young—and it was rock, not Stephen Sondheim or Fiddler on the Roof. Only after the turn of the 21st century did Broadway scores finally start to reflect the musical language of postmodern pop with any consistency, and it took even longer for shows to be written that were (as I wrote in my review of the original 2015 production of Hamilton) “plugged straight into the wall socket of contemporary music.”

A half-century is a long time to be out of touch with the zeitgeist. It may well be that the success of shows like Hamilton and Dear Evan Hansen will trigger an outpouring of new musicals that make idiomatic and creative use of contemporary pop music. But if the other hit shows of recent seasons, most of which have been uncreative “commodity musicals” based on hit movies of the past, are any indication, then it is more likely that musical comedy has entered a period of stasis that will not end anytime soon.

This does not mean that musicals will become extinct, or that New York will cease to be America’s theatrical destination city. The need for light entertainment is a permanent aspect of popular taste, and the big-budget Broadway musical, even in its present state of decline, satisfies that need with awesome efficiency. But I cannot imagine that musicals will ever again regain the cultural currency that they had between 1943 and 1964, the years when Fiddler on the Roof, Oklahoma!, and all the other classic shows of that golden age of musical comedy were known to and beloved by Americans of all ages and backgrounds. Like the common culture of which they were one of the most glorious manifestations, such shows are now—as is Broadway itself—period pieces whose day has passed.

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A Gaslight Unto the Nations

How a word became the cliché of the Trump years

By James B. Meigs

The word “gaslighting” has lately become an all-purpose term of abuse in political arguments. Its journey from the pages of Psychology Today to the flame wars of Twitter offers us a useful perspective to examine the way our language is changing in this age of polarization. Words are becoming weaponized, and the old-fashioned idea that we can reach mutual understanding through honest debate is breaking down. The excessive use of “gaslighting” is a case study in how political speech is evolving from a discourse of persuasion to one of demonization.

Take the example of the New York Times columnist Michelle Goldberg. In a column about the “churning knot of terror” women felt in their stomachs after the Kavanaugh confirmation, she writes, “gaslighting,’ a term taken from a play about an abusive husband trying to drive his wife insane, has become a byword of our national life.”

We owe the term to the great 1944 novelist James B. Meigs, co-host of the How Do We Fix It? podcast. He has served in senior editorial positions at Popular Mechanics, National Geographic Adventure, and Entertainment Weekly. This is his first appearance in Commentary.

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George Cukor film in which Ingrid Bergman portrays Bella Manningham, a fragile woman being nudged toward madness by her manipulative husband. Cukor's version shows how a vulnerable person can be induced to doubt her own judgment by a campaign of small, insidious deceptions. "You're not going out of your mind," a detective tells Bella. "You're being slowly and systematically driven out of your mind." Gaslight is set in Edwardian London, where the unhappy couple lives in a stately home lit by gas jets that go mysteriously dim on occasion.

Since the dimming of the lights is one of the few clues Bella uses to cling to reality, it's a little odd that "gaslighting" became shorthand for the act of trying to drive someone crazy. Nonetheless, in the late 20th century, a few psychologists began using the term to describe how narcissists and abusers undermine and intimidate their partners. Over the years, there have been several books and various magazine articles written on the topic. (And one very creepy song: Steely Dan's "Gaslighting Abbie," in which a philandering husband plans to eliminate his inconvenient wife.) In the past decade, the word began showing up on feminist and pop-culture websites. Jezebel called it "the increasingly popular term for the various ways in which men convince women that they're 'crazy,' 'over-reacting,' or 'hysterical.'"

And then came Trump. Days after the 2016 election, EverydayFeminism.com identified "5 Gaslighting Phrases Donald Trump Used That Remind Me a Lot of My Abusive Ex." A few weeks later, Lauren Duca wrote a column on TeenVogue.com entitled "Donald Trump Is Gaslighting America." And with that, "gaslighting" boldly jumped tracks into the realm of politics. Google searches for the word went through the roof. "Gaslighting" began proliferating in political commentary and on social media. Today, both sides deploy it with relish: "Fox News Is Gaslighting Their Viewers into Authoritarianism," reads one headline. "Media Gaslighting Can't Hide the Fact Trump Campaign Was Spied On," reads another. "Trump is a f--ing idiot," notes a typical Twitter comment, "but he's conducting a master class on gaslighting." Amanda Carpenter, a one-time Ted Cruz staffer, wrote an anti-Trump book called Gaslighting America.

It’s such a vivid word, you can understand why pundits love it. CNN's Anderson Cooper has a recurring segment called “We'll Leave the Gaslight On for You.” MSNBC host Chris Hayes wrote that “it’s hard to come up with a better word” to describe Justice Brett Kavanaugh’s testimony during his Supreme Court confirmation hearings. According to the Washington Post’s Megan McArdle, even animals can do it. “My dog is trying to gaslight me into believing I didn’t just feed him 45 minutes ago,” she recently tweeted.

“Gaslighting” feels like one of those trendy words that becomes au courant for a couple of years and then devolves into a punch line. (“How many men’s rights activists does it take to change a lightbulb?” one online meme asks. “None, they still use gaslighting.”) But the term's growing popularity hints at a deeper change in political language, not just in the words we use, but in how we use them, in the goals we are trying to accomplish when we speak.

Disagreements over political issues used to hinge mostly on factual questions. (At least that was the ideal to which both sides claimed to aspire.) Does a higher minimum wage help or hurt the poor? Will tax cuts boost inequality or lift all boats? Good-faith advocates for either side would marshal their evidence and make their cases. To be sure, some debates got nasty. But, underneath the vitriol, people generally accepted that winning the argument required having a more persuasive set of facts.

There is another style of argument, one that doesn’t trouble itself with pesky facts at all. British writer C.S. Lewis dubbed this style “Bulverism,” after a fictional character he called Ezekiel Bulver. He imagined Bulver as a child overhearing his mother dismiss a point made by his father with the words, “Oh you say that because you are a man.” At that point, Bulver later recalls, “there flashed across my opening mind the great truth that refutation is no necessary part of your argument. Assume that your opponent is wrong, and then explain his error, and the world will be at your feet.”

Lewis conceived Bulver as a stand-in for the Freudians and Marxists of his day who dismissed their opponents’ positions by attributing them to deep-seated—even uncon-
Those engaged in gaslighting aren’t just wrong, or even simply lying, the word suggests; they’re conducting an insidious campaign to undermine the judgment and mental stability of their interlocutors.

But “gaslighting” also says something interesting—and troubling—about those on the receiving end. Even as the term ascribes extraordinary powers to the gaslighters, it portrays their listeners as virtually powerless. They’re often described in the terms used to characterize abused spouses or hostages suffering from Stockholm syndrome—traumatized, vulnerable, easily misled. Teen Vogue’s Duca described gaslighting as “a terrifying strategy currently being used to weaken and blind the American electorate.” In this view, not only is it pointless to debate a gaslighter, it’s actually dangerous. The idea that ordinary people can hear controversial ideas, assess their validity, and then accept or reject them on the merits has become outdated. Instead, we now imagine political discourse as taking place between malicious mind-benders on one side and fragile Bella Manningshams on the other.

How did we get to the point where large portions of the American public see themselves as emotionally wounded and intellectually defenseless? In their book The Coddling of the American Mind, Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff write that, over the past decade, political speech on college campuses started becoming “medicalized.” They explain: “Students claimed that certain kinds of speech—and even the content of some books and courses—interfered with their ability to function.”

The authors attribute the shift to what they call the “concept creep” involving our notions of trauma. Originally, “trauma” referred solely to extreme physical injury. But over time it came also to define the kind of extraordinary psychological stress—like combat or torture—that might lead to post-traumatic stress disorder. Along with the new definition came recognition that such patients could be “triggered” or “re-traumatized” by exposure to certain stimuli. Soon, that new concept of trauma started creeping as well. Today, anything an individual might subjectively perceive as upsetting can be defined as trauma, and college students are increasingly likely to see themselves as victims in need of protection.

Haidt and Lukianoff believe that today’s students are being taught to reject rationalism in favor of “emotional reasoning,” a concept they borrow from cognitive behavioral therapy. If we aspire to a rational mind set, we try to align our opinions with the facts we encounter in the external world. But emotional reasoning demands we do just the opposite: We believe that our subjective state—fear, anxiety, anger—should define external reality. For example, young people schooled to be alert for “microaggressions” are being encouraged “to start with their feelings and then justify those feelings by drawing the conclusion that someone has committed an act...
of aggression against them.” If we feel that someone’s opinions have traumatized us, then, by definition, that person has done us harm.

In this worldview, words are not separate from actions. Instead, hurtful words are seen as concrete threats to one’s well-being. This is why, when college groups protest against a controversial speaker, they often say the speaker intends to “enact violence” on some members of the school community. They don’t mean this as a metaphor; they actually believe words can be as injurious as fists. In this context, to say someone is gaslighting is to accuse that person of quasi-criminal behavior. No wonder so many students feel they are protecting their community when they try to deny controversial speakers a “platform” from which to speak.

The overheated atmosphere of elite campuses eventually infiltrates other parts of society. Not long after the New York Times hired the mildly conservative writer Bari Weiss, offended employees took to an in-house message board to complain about how the paper had become a “hostile work environment.” (Critics piled on with the obligatory accusations of, naturally, gaslighting.) Google famously fired engineer James Damore after he wrote a memo arguing that the paucity of women in the company’s engineering departments might have more to do with voluntary career choices than with discrimination. It was an unpopular position, but one for which he provided an array of scientific evidence. Damore’s critics didn’t much engage with the substance of his arguments. Rather they focused on his intentions and character. “You’re a misogynist and a terrible person” was one of the more succinct formulations of that rebuttal.

What we’re seeing here is the creeping Bulverization of our culture. Facts are becoming secondary to feelings. And, with our own feelings as our guide, we increasingly believe we’re entitled to attribute malicious motives and biases to others.

In Gaslight, the evil husband drips honeyed lies into Bella’s ear, and she believes him. It all sounds so plausible! Fortunately, a dash-}

ing detective arrives to help her see through the deception. In its modern, political form, gaslighting is similarly portrayed as a deviously subtle technique. A politician or pundit might sound perfectly reasonable, but don’t be fooled! Those seemingly innocuous words just prove what a brilliant gaslighter he or she is. We need to protect our delicate Bella Manninghams from these insidiously sensible arguments. We mustn’t “platform” these dangerous thinkers; people might get taken in.

In such an environment, accusations of gaslighting ensure rhetorical supremacy. The person making the allegation gets to claim the status of victim—or that of protector of victims—and that confers bullet-proof moral authority. (If I feel that your words are meant to cause me psychic injury, who are you to question my “lived experience”?) The accuser also gets to play the role, not just of vulnerable Bella but of the brilliant detective who uncovers the plot. Like the Freudian sniffing out “denial,” or the Marxist denouncing “false consciousness,” the “gaslight” accuser holds the linguistic high ground, uniquely qualified to determine the true meaning of everyone else’s words.

Those who want to police campus speech often equate words with actions. Well, “gaslighting” turns out to be quite a hardworking utterance in its own right. It elevates the accuser to a position of unchallengeable authority, while exposing the accused as a particularly nasty sort of person, the kind whose words must never be trusted. Without having to deploy a single fact, you can invalidate any opposing argument—and banish the arguer from the realms of legitimate discourse. That’s a lot for one little word to accomplish. No wonder the people who use it sound so smug.

Facts are becoming secondary to feelings. With our own feelings as our guide, we increasingly believe we’re entitled to attribute malicious motives and biases to others.
World Economic Forum in January, he had attacked Facebook and Google, describing them as a monopolist ‘menace’ with ‘neither the will nor the inclination to protect society against the consequences of their actions.’” Doesn’t sound friendly.

And what did Facebook’s paid defender do in response? “Definers pressed reporters to explore the financial connections between Mr. Soros’s family or philanthropies and groups that were members of Freedom from Facebook, such as Color of Change, an online racial-justice organization, as well as a progressive group founded by Mr. Soros’s son. (An official at Mr. Soros’s Open Society Foundations said the philanthropy had supported both member groups, but not Freedom from Facebook, and had made no grants to support campaigns against Facebook.)”

Read that again, and note: Definers never said Soros had given money directly to Freedom from Facebook, which calls on the Federal Trade Commission to break up the tech company. It asked reporters to look at the financial connections between Soros and the Freedom from Facebook coalition—connections the Open Society Foundations freely admit!

Members of that coalition also include Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) and Linda Sarsour’s MPower Change. Both JVP and Sarsour support the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions, or BDS, movement that is waging economic warfare on the Jewish state of Israel. Is it really surprising to the Times that, when Freedom from Facebook activists swarmed a House Judiciary Committee hearing last July carrying images of Zuckerberg’s and Sandberg’s heads atop octopus tentacles encircling the globe, “a company official flagged” the pictures “as anti-Semitic”? Or that the Anti-Defamation League denounced the act? Or that “the criticism was soon echoed in conservative outlets including the Washington Free Beacon, which has sought to tie Freedom from Facebook to what the publication calls ‘extreme anti-Israel groups’”?

Speaking as editor of the Free Beacon, let me say for the record that my publication hasn’t “sought to tie” Freedom from Facebook to what are by definition extreme anti-Israel groups. We’ve sought to report the truth. And the truth is that any group whose coalition includes Jewish Voice for Peace and Linda Sarsour, and whose members go around with images of two Jews with tentacles controlling the world, needs to take a time-out in the corner.

To its credit, the initial Times story also included a passage detailing how Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer, a longtime recipient of donations from Silicon Valley, warned Senator Mark Warner of Virginia to temper his efforts to regulate Facebook. It also noted that one of Schumer’s daughters is a Facebook employee in New York City. This high-level politicking by one of the most powerful men in America, however, is consigned to a few paragraphs at the end of the piece. The real story, for the Times, is Facebook’s hiring of a Republican firm.

On November 15, the Times published “A Look Inside the Tactics of Definers, Facebook’s Attack Dog,” by Jack Nicas and Matthew Rosenberg. Schumer was not mentioned at all. Nor were the partners of Freedom from Facebook to whom the Open Society Foundations had made grants. Instead, the reporters covered Freedom from Facebook like it was the March of Dimes: Definers’ mission, they wrote, “was to persuade reporters that the coalition was not a sincere movement of like-minded groups but rather an orchestrated campaign by a rich, partisan opponent.” Who wants to bet that the Times won’t be as understanding in its next piece on conservatives?

On November 21, in “How Facebook’s P.R. Firm Brought Political Trickery to Tech,” Nicas revised history further. “Definers,” he wrote, “encouraged reporters to write about the financial connections between anti-Facebook activists and the liberal financier George Soros, drawing accusations that it was relying on anti-Semitic tropes.” Hold it right there, cowboy. It’s the people holding pictures of Jews with tentacles who are the anti-Semites, not the public-relations schlubs asking friends to look at a research document.

In the space of two weeks, Definers went from doing what everybody in Washington does every single day to losing its contract with Facebook and being portrayed in the world’s most important newspaper as “relying on anti-Semitic tropes.” It’s another example of the anathematization of partisan and policy differences, from same-sex marriage to climate change to Second Amendment rights to American Jews who voted for President Trump. No matter the issue, the message is the same: Republicans and conservatives have no place in polite society. And must be shunned.
FOR ABOUT 50 YEARS NOW, as the federal government has increased in size and scope beyond comprehension, businesses have employed lobbyists and consultants to advance their interests in the nation’s capital. Because we live in a period of divided government, when control of the White House and Congress switches frequently, the flow of money into Washington ends up in the pockets of both Democrats and Republicans. These agents of industry schedule meetings, keep tabs on the press, and promote stories favorable to clients and disadvantageous to their clients’ enemies. One can hold differing opinions on the seemliness of this influence peddling—a lot depends on the character of the peddler—while recognizing that it is utterly commonplace. Banal even.

Unless, it seems, the company is Facebook and the consultants are Republicans. If that’s the case, well, we are dealing with a national emergency. Why? Because Facebook’s scale and power have made it an object of justifiable and often hostile interest among government and media elites, many of whom blame the company at least in part for Donald Trump’s election to the presidency in 2016. As for the Republicans—well, no explanation is necessary for faithful readers of the New York Times. They already know Republicans are the worst.

On November 14, 2018, the Times published “Delay, Deny, and Deflect: How Facebook’s Leaders Fought Through Crisis,” by Sheera Frenkel, Nicholas Confessore, Cecilia Kang, Matthew Rosenberg, and Jack Nicas. This expansive, well-reported article, “based on interviews with more than 50 people,” detailed how Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and COO Sheryl Sandberg have responded to attacks. The Times zeroed in on the following business decision: “Facebook employed a Republican opposition-research firm to discredit activist protesters, in part by linking them to the liberal financier George Soros. It also tapped its business relationships, lobbying a Jewish civil-rights group to cast some criticism of the company as anti-Semitic.”

Why is Facebook’s relationship with the firm, Definers Public Affairs, newsworthy? Because applying “political campaign tactics to corporate public relations,” while “long employed in Washington by big telecommunications firms and activist hedge fund managers,” is “less common in tech.” Really? Maybe the paper should check to see whether the Obama alumni who populate the executive suites of Amazon, Apple, and Zuckerberg’s Chan Zuckerberg Initiative are strangers to “political campaign tactics.”

I don’t mean to spill the beans here, but the sources who provide material for news stories, including exposés of Facebook, always have an agenda. Always. It’s the reporter’s job to check the facts, allow the subject of the story fair comment, and write up the back-and-forth as dispassionately as possible.

At least that’s how things are supposed to work. For its part, the Times seemed more incensed that Definers asked journalists to examine George Soros’s role in the anti-Facebook campaign than in, you know, any of the actual details of that campaign: “Facebook also used Definers to take on bigger opponents, such as Mr. Soros, a longtime boogeyman to mainstream conservatives and the target of intense anti-Semitic smears on the far right,” the Times team wrote. “A research document circulated by Definers to reporters this summer, just a month after the House hearing, cast Mr. Soros as the unacknowledged force behind what appeared to be a broad anti-Facebook movement.”

Criticism of Soros ought to be tempered and fact-based, especially after the atrocity at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh last October. But the fact that Soros is a target of anti-Semites does not exempt his ideas or his political giving from scrutiny, investigation, and dissent. Was Soros tied to anti-Facebook activism or not?

The hedge-fund billionaire and progressive mega-donor, the Times said, was “a natural target.” They write: “In a speech at the

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Palestinian Mythology

Palestinian Arabs claim full ownership of the Holy Land, denying any Jewish connection or rights—all based on deceptive lies, all easily proven false.

In this era of “fake news,” it’s often hard to tell truth from fiction. Indeed, Palestinian Arab leaders have constructed an elaborate false mythology to justify their war against Israel and the Jewish people. It’s time to lift the curtain on these myths—to separate truth from fabrication.

What are the facts?

Every ethnic group has the right to create its own narrative—but such a narrative should be based on truth, especially when it denies the rights of others. We may disagree on interpretation, but at least we should agree on the facts. So, let us consider five cornerstones of the Palestinian narrative and judge their moral strength by adherence to the truth. We soon find that modern Palestinian myths are unfair attempts to disenfranchise the Jewish people from Israel—their ancestral homeland.

1. Palestinians are indigenous to the Holy Land: False. President Mahmoud Abbas often claims Palestinians are related to the Canaanites, a group that vanished 2,300 years ago. This claim has no basis in archeological or genetic research. Nearly all Palestinians trace their lineage to Arab lands. What’s more, unlike the Jews, Palestinians have no unique language, culture or religion—essential markers of indigenous peoples. Indeed, historians, archeologists, biblical records, and the Koran itself affirm conclusively that Jews founded a kingdom in the Holy Land some 3,000 years ago—before arrival of the Arabs—and have lived in the lands of present day Israel, Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) ever since.

2. Israel occupies Palestinian land: False. Mr. Abbas and even mainstream media frequently refer to “Palestinian land.” In truth, the Palestinians have never had a state, nor have they had sovereignty over any land in the Middle East. Aside from individual private holdings, there is no defined public Palestinian land in the disputed territories. Nonetheless, Israel has many times offered to turn over most of land it won after its defensive war against Jordan in 1967 in exchange for peace, but the Palestinians have refused all those offers.

3. Jerusalem is the capital of the Palestinian people. False. Palestinian leaders commonly herald Jerusalem as a Muslim and Christian capital—unfairly excluding 3,000 years of Jewish history and Jerusalem’s centrality to Judaism. Indeed, history shows King David founded Jerusalem as the capital of the Jewish kingdom around 1000 BCE, before the advent of Islam. Jerusalem is cited 669 times in the Hebrew bible and not a single time in the Koran. Moreover, Jerusalem has never been an Arab capital, and for most of the city’s history, Jews have been the majority population.

4. Palestinians have a right of return to Israel: False. Among approximately 700,000 Arabs who left Israel in 1948, when five Arab armies attacked, only about 30,000 are still alive today. Some live in the disputed territories of Judea and Samaria, and many over the 70 years have made homes in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Nonetheless, the Palestinians claim that 5.5 million descendants of these refugees—children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren—are also refugees. No other descendants in history have ever been considered refugees. Indeed, no displaced refugees, let alone descendants, have inherent legal rights to return to their original homes after a war. Any such returns have always been negotiated among the parties—and so they will be in a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

Peace between Israel and the Palestinians must be based on good faith and the truth.

5. Israel is guilty of apartheid against the Palestinians: False. Palestinian leaders frequently accuse Israeli citizens of committing genocide, ethnic cleansing and apartheid. In fact, Israel’s two million Arab citizens enjoy full civil rights and benefits—greater than those in Arab nations. Palestinians in the West Bank, on the other hand, are largely self-governing, have increased dramatically in number over the decades, and enjoy a higher standard of living than any of their Arab neighbors. Limitations on Palestinian movement within the West Bank exist only when necessary to prevent Arab terrorism against Israelis, which continues to this day. In short, accusations of discriminatory subjugation of Palestinians by Israel are false and malign.

The Nazis continuously repeated “the Big Lie” to convince the people to wage an imperialistic, genocidal war. Today, Palestinians repeat falsehoods to convince the world that Jews are evil, colonial usurpers. Until the Palestinians agree to negotiate peace with Israel—in good faith and based on truth—they are sadly condemned to bitterness and thwarted aspirations for independence.

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