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

art

Joan Miró's Wild Decade

How he assassinated painting again and again.

By Christopher Benfey

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 4:53 PM ET

Click [here](#) to read a slide-show essay on Joan Miró.

books

Slouching Towards Santa Teresa

Roberto Bolaño's utterly strange masterpiece.

By Adam Kirsch

Monday, November 3, 2008, at 6:15 AM ET

According to Proust, one proof that we are reading a major new writer is that his writing immediately strikes us as ugly. Only minor writers write beautifully, since they simply reflect back to us our preconceived notion of what beauty is; we have no problem understanding what they are up to, since we have seen it many times before. When a writer is truly original, his failure to be conventionally beautiful makes us see him, initially, as shapeless, awkward, or perverse. Only once we have learned how to read him do we realize that this ugliness is really a new, totally unexpected kind of beauty and that what seemed wrong in his writing is exactly what makes him great.

By this standard, there is no doubt that Roberto Bolaño is a great writer. *2666*, the enormous novel he had almost completed when he died at 50 in 2003, has the confident strangeness of a masterpiece: In almost every particular, it fails, or refuses, to conform to our expectations of what a novel should be. For one thing, though it is being published as a single work (in a Bible-sized single-volume edition and as a three-paperback set), *2666* is made up of five sections that are so independent Bolaño originally planned to release them as separate books. These parts relate to one another, not as installments or sequels but, rather, as five planets orbiting the same sun. With their very different stories and settings, they seem to describe a single plummeting arc—the trajectory of a universe on the verge of apocalypse.

It is a shame for a reviewer to have to reveal even the outlines of these stories: The best way to experience *2666* is without warning, as in a dream in which you find yourself on a road that could lead absolutely anywhere. Like many such dreams, or nightmares, the first section of the novel, "The Part About the Critics," starts quite undramatically, as Bolaño introduces us to four literary scholars from different European countries who are all interested in the work of an obscure German novelist named Benno von Archimboldi. Bolaño follows the evolving romantic intrigues among the scholars—three men and a woman—and gives hints about the strange career of Archimboldi, who has lived through the 20th century as an almost complete recluse. Suddenly, improbably, the critics learn that Archimboldi has been spotted in northern Mexico, and three of them go to the border city of Santa Teresa to look for him.

From then on, Santa Teresa becomes the novel's center of gravity. When the first part of *2666* ends, the critics vanish from its pages, never to return. Instead, Bolaño devotes the second section, "The Part About Amalfitano," to a virtuosic character study of a Mexican professor who is slowly going mad. Amalfitano had appeared briefly in the previous section as one of the European critics' guides to Santa Teresa, but nothing about the character suggested that Bolaño would devote so much attention to him. Likewise, in the third section, Amalfitano

leaves the stage for good, and we are introduced instead to Oscar Fate, a black American journalist who comes to Santa Teresa to cover a boxing match and happens to meet the mad professor's daughter.

Finally, with the fourth section, "The Part About the Crimes," Bolaño starts to make clear why all of his disparate plots have converged on this ugly, ramshackle, provincial city. The rumors about 2666 that have filtered through to the English-speaking world, in the years since it was published in Spanish to wild acclaim, often described it as being "about" the real-life epidemic of murders of women in Ciudad Juárez. While this is a great oversimplification, it is true that the fourth section of 2666 is an almost journalistic account of that long-running crime wave. Bolaño rebaptizes Juárez as Santa Teresa and moves the city from the El Paso, Texas, border to the Tucson, Ariz., border, but the underlying facts are the same. Since 1993, hundreds of women have disappeared, sometimes to resurface as horribly violated corpses, sometimes without a trace, and the police seem unable or unwilling to do anything about it.

What makes Bolaño's narration of these crimes so characteristic, and transforms it from pulpy true-crime writing to something like fiction, is, paradoxically, his total refusal to imagine his way into the murders. He does not take advantage of the novelist's privilege of going anywhere—into the mind of the victim as she suffers or of the killer as he kills. On the contrary, the eeriness of Bolaño's account lies in its complete exteriority, the deadened affect of its relentless cataloging of deaths:

In the middle of November the body of another dead woman was discovered in the Podesta ravine. She had multiple fractures of the skull, with loss of brain matter. Some marks on the body indicated that she had put up a struggle. She was found with her pants down around her knees, by which it was assumed that she'd been raped, although after a vaginal swab was taken this hypothesis was discarded. Five days later the dead woman was identified. She was Luisa Cardona Pardo, thirty-four, from the state of Sinaloa, where she had worked as a prostitute from the age of seventeen. She had been living in Santa Teresa for four years and she was employed at the EMSA maquiladora.

Imagine reading case reports like these, one after another, for almost 300 pages, and you will get a sense of the bludgeoning effect of "The Part About the Crimes." The violence becomes simultaneously banal and unbearable in its sheer reiteration; at times, it requires a real effort to keep turning the pages. Yet in this way, Bolaño succeeds in restoring to physical violence something of its genuine evil, in a time when readers in the First

World are used to experiencing it only as *CSI*-style entertainment.

At the same time, Bolaño manages to suggest that the violence in Santa Teresa is something much more than a local crime wave. One of the characters who looms into individuality, out of the anonymous crowd of the dead, is Klaus Haas, a German-born American citizen who is imprisoned by the Mexican police as a scapegoat for the murders. He may or may not have killed a woman—Bolaño never lets us know for sure—but he is certainly not "the Santa Teresa killer," if only because the murders continue after he is arrested. Yet when Sergio Gonzales, a journalist reporting on his case, calls Haas in jail, Bolaño writes that over the phone line he "heard the sound of the desert and something like the tread of an animal." It is an understated but clear allusion to Yeats' "The Second Coming," where the poet sees "somewhere in sands of the desert/ A shape with lion body and the head of a man," and asks, "what rough beast, its hour come round at last,/ Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?"

In this indirect fashion, Bolaño hints that Haas is, if not an anti-Christ, at least a sign of the times: a beast whose advent signals some cosmic realignment. It is just one of countless moments in 2666 that suggest the metaphysical dimension of Bolaño's vision. The attentive reader will be reminded of a remark by a minor character in the novel's third section, some 200 pages earlier: "No one pays attention to these killings, but the secret of the world is hidden in them." And then she might remember a strange dream that Espinoza, one of the critics, had in Part 1, in which "he could see the still, bright desert, such a solar yellow it hurt his eyes, and the figures on horseback, whose movements—the movements of horses and riders—were barely perceptible, as if they were living in a world different from ours, where speed was different, a kind of speed that looked to Espinoza like slowness, although he knew it was only the slowness that kept whoever watched from losing his mind."

Time and again, Bolaño hints, without ever quite saying, that what is happening in Santa Teresa is a symptom of a universal derangement in which hidden dimensions of reality are coming horribly to light. That is why so much of the activity of 2666 takes place not along the ordinary novelistic axes of plot and character but on the poetic, even mystical planes of symbol and metaphor. It is in Bolaño's allusions and unexplained coincidences, in his character's frequent, vividly disturbing dreams, in the mad recitations of criminals and preachers and witches—above all, in the dark insights of Benno von Archimboldi, who finally takes center stage in the book's fifth section—that the real story of 2666 gets told. That is one reason why the book is so hard to summarize—and why Natasha Wimmer's lucid, versatile translation is so triumphant. 2666 is an epic of whispers and details, full of buried structures and intuitions that seem too evanescent, or too terrible, to put into words. It demands from the reader a kind of abject submission—to its willful strangeness, its insistent grimness, even its

occasional tedium—that only the greatest books dare to ask for or deserve.

chatterbox

The Uncabinet

A guide to key appointments Obama should resist.

By Timothy Noah

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 6:49 PM ET

With Barack Obama's presidential victory [in the bag](#), speculation has begun about who he'll appoint to his Cabinet. Actually, it began some time ago. Russell Baker of the *New York Times* many years ago invented a spectral figure called the Great Mentioner to describe how the Washington cognoscenti come to view this or that public figure as a candidate for political advancement. Sometimes the Great Mentioner passes along names under consideration by the deciding person or body. Sometimes the GM passes along names that the cognoscenti merely feel *warrant* consideration. Because the deliberations are secret, it's hard to know the difference (and also a lot less fun).

It used to be that you needed a lunchtime reservation at Washington's dog wagon of the moment either to learn who's on the list or to add some names yourself. Today the GM's picks, like all other human knowledge, have migrated to the Internet, where they've been democratized to a fare-thee-well. A [college kid](#) elevated Sarah Palin to the GOP's [potential veep choice](#) merely by creating a [Web site](#). You [don't even have to be American!](#) The world is flat, and *nous sommes tous* Washington insiders. No harm in that. Indeed, this digitization saves Washington journalists like me a lot of time. But like the names I'd likely hear whispered over chardonnay at [Acadiana](#), the Googled mentionees—mostly those very same names—are a hodgepodge of good prospects and bad. Somebody's got to winnow.

Back in October 1987, Paul Glasris published a deeply researched magazine piece in the *Washington Monthly* under the headline "[The Powers That Shouldn't Be](#)." Glasris now regrets what he says was at least one bad call: He wrote that the next Democratic president should not elevate William J. Perry to secretary of defense. Perry subsequently performed that job with admirable skill during the Clinton administration. The impact of Glasris' misjudgment was blunted by the Democrats' failure to recapture the White House in 1988—a luxury I do not enjoy as I compile my own do-not-hire list. Hoping to avoid Glasris' error, I have researched this piece perfunctorily. But *caveat emptor*: I cannot eliminate entirely the possibility that one or two of the judgments rendered below flunks the test of time.

State Department. Do not appoint Bill Richardson, who [by some accounts](#) is the front-runner. Obama may feel he owes Richardson because the New Mexico governor endorsed him after dropping out of the presidential race and ended up being called a "[Judas](#)" by James Carville. But Richardson took his sweet time before embracing Obama; he [dropped out](#) in mid-January and didn't [cough up](#) the endorsement until late March. Richardson's résumé includes Clinton administration stints as energy secretary and as U.N. ambassador. He didn't perform either job particularly well. As energy secretary, Richardson [rashly accused](#) Los Alamos official Wen Ho Lee of espionage—a charge later proved false. As U.N. ambassador, Richardson didn't do anything anyone can remember except offer Monica Lewinsky [a job](#) three months before the story of her affair with President Clinton hit the Internet. "He has no great beliefs," [observed](#) *Slate*'s David Plotz in June 2000, "which may be why he didn't mind flattering despots." Richardson has twice [broken the world's record](#) for most handshakes in an eight-hour period. He's very proud of this. Don't you find that alarming?

Also, do not appoint [John Kerry](#). The 2004 election demonstrated that nobody likes him. That isn't disqualifying for a senator, but it is for a diplomat.

Also, do not appoint [Anthony Lake](#). He made himself unconfirmable for Central Intelligence Agency director back in 1996 in part by [saying on TV](#) that he wasn't sure Alger Hiss was guilty. Heads up: [Alger Hiss was guilty](#). If you think Hiss wasn't guilty and you want to get confirmed by the Senate, be my guest. But don't shoot your mouth off about it, because if you do, you'll be easy prey for the GOP. Also, I have to say that anyone who performs the [mental calisthenics](#) necessary to believe Alger Hiss may have been innocent runs a substantial risk that he won't have enough additional mental energy left to run the State Department.

Supreme Court. Do not appoint [Hillary Clinton](#). The Supreme Court needs jurists, not politicians. Plus, Bill would drive the other justices crazy.

Treasury Department. Do not appoint former Clinton Treasury Secretary [Robert Rubin](#). I explained why last week. (See "[Robert Rubin's Free Ride](#).") Rubin has said he doesn't want the job anyway. [Lawrence Summers](#), who succeeded Rubin, is said to be interested, but he's too closely linked to Rubin and to former Fed Chairman (and current Public Enemy No. 1) [Alan Greenspan](#) to be a wise choice. Plus, the hash Summers made out of [Harvard's presidency](#) suggested that even after holding one of the highest positions in government, Summers still was pretty clueless about getting along with other people—a crucial skill for whoever ends up managing the worst financial panic since the Great Depression.

Energy Department. Do not appoint [Arnold Schwarzenegger](#). The supposed reason would be that Schwarzenegger is the rare

Republican governor who's doing something serious about [global warming](#). But if there's a shortage of Republican governors addressing climate change, can we really afford to remove one from state government? There's no shortage of *Democrats* who are at least as committed as Schwarzenegger to reducing greenhouse gases. Pick one of them.

Environmental Protection Agency or Interior Department. Do not hire [Robert Kennedy Jr.](#) He's [too partisan](#) and kind of a nut when it comes to policy. Check out this [dangerously alarmist](#) 2005 *Rolling Stone* piece about the purported link between autism and childhood vaccines. (To learn why Kennedy's piece was alarmist, see "[Sticking Up for Thimerosal](#)" by Arthur Allen in *Slate*, August 2005.) Throw in Kennedy's [1983 heroin bust](#), and you've got yourself an unconfirmable nominee.

Defense Department. Do not reappoint [Robert Gates](#). Joe Klein [floated](#) this idea in a June *Time* magazine column inspired by Doris Goodwin's *Team of Rivals*, which shows how Abraham Lincoln co-opted his political enemies by appointing them to his Cabinet. The trouble with Klein's thinking is that it's all about politics and only vaguely about Gates himself, who gets good press mainly because he had the fantastic luck to succeed a disastrously bad defense secretary, Donald Rumsfeld. Nancy Soderberg, a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations under Clinton, and Brian Katulis of the Center for American Progress, a liberal nonprofit, made a [more substantive case](#) last month in the *Washington Post*, arguing for Gates because he's not an ideologue and because he favors shoring up failing states before they become havens for terrorists. But it still adds up to "he's not as bad as those other blowhard Bushies." I think that's setting the bar way too low. Plus, I was never really satisfied that Gates [came clean](#) about his role in the Iran-Contra scandal.

Attorney General. Do not appoint [Jamie Gorelick](#). It pains me to write this partly because I know and like Gorelick and mostly because by all accounts she performed brilliantly as deputy attorney general in the Clinton administration. But her subsequent hiring as vice chair at Fannie Mae, despite her lack of any background in finance, and most especially the \$26.4 million she received in total compensation over a period of six years disqualify her for public office. As Jack Shafer has noted in *Slate*, Fannie Mae was a [bipartisan trough](#) for the politically connected, but the patronage and executive pay were particularly lavish under James Johnson, a Democrat who ran Walter Mondale's 1984 presidential campaign. (See "[A Medici With Your Money](#)" by Matthew Cooper, February 1997.) Gorelick needs a few more years of good works (the [9/11 commission](#) was a good start) to rehabilitate herself.

It goes without saying—but I'll say it anyway—that Obama should avoid hiring Johnson for *any* position. Obama probably learned that lesson during the campaign when he made the mistake of briefly putting Johnson [in charge of](#) his vice-

presidential search. He should avoid Franklin Raines, Johnson's successor, for the same reason.

Vice President. Not Joe Biden.

What?

Oh.

Then just make sure he keeps a low profile.

chatterbox

Why Don't War Heroes Win?

Excepting George H.W. Bush, it's been 48 years since a war hero won the presidency.

By Timothy Noah

Monday, November 3, 2008, at 6:47 PM ET

John McCain entered the 2008 presidential campaign with a strong advantage shared by John Kerry in 2004, Bob Dole in 1996, and George H.W. Bush in 1992. All four were war heroes whose opponents bore no record of military service. (Dubya's [spotty attendance](#) in the Air National Guard doesn't count.) Yet Kerry, Dole, and Bush *père* lost, and McCain will almost certainly lose, too. If you broaden the McCain category from "war hero" to "wartime veteran," then add Al Gore (2000) to the roster of vets defeated by nonvets in presidential elections.

Presidents Richard Nixon, Lyndon Johnson, and Ronald Reagan were all World War II veterans, but their service records were unexceptional. Yet they beat out [George McGovern](#), a bomber pilot who flew 35 combat missions; Barry Goldwater, who [flew missions](#) to war zones in Asia and Africa and, as a reservist, later rose to the rank of major general; and Jimmy Carter, [a pioneering submariner](#) in the nuclear Navy. Carter's seven years in the Navy trumps Ronald Reagan's three years in the Army [making wartime propaganda films](#) in Culver City, Calif. But Gerald Ford's [near-drowning and heroic rescue work](#) in a typhoon during his wartime Navy service in the South Pacific trumps Carter's peacetime service. Yet Carter beat Ford in 1976.

With the sole exception of George H.W. Bush in 1988—who won by waging the [dirtiest presidential campaign](#) of the modern era and then served only one term—no war hero has won the presidency since John F. Kennedy beat Nixon in 1960. Before Kennedy, there was Dwight Eisenhower, former Supreme Allied Commander in Europe. Before Eisenhower came a century and a half of American history during which war heroes and battlefield commanders routinely won the presidency, starting with George Washington and continuing through Andrew Jackson, William

Henry Harrison, Zachary Taylor, Ulysses S. Grant, Rutherford B. Hayes, James Garfield, Benjamin Harrison, William McKinley, Teddy Roosevelt, and Harry S. Truman. Between T.R. and Truman came a dry spell of 36 years during which no sitting president had served in the military. But that anomaly can be explained partly by the fact that for nearly half that time the president was a single person—Franklin D. Roosevelt. Moreover, both Roosevelt and his predecessor, Herbert Hoover, had performed enormously significant *civilian* duties in World War I, Roosevelt as assistant secretary of the Navy and Hoover as a highly enterprising organizer of famine relief, first as a private citizen and later as an appointee of President Woodrow Wilson. The Oval Office's current drought of military leaders, then, would seem historically unique.

What brought it about?

I posed that question to Alan Brinkley, professor of American history at Columbia. "I don't have an answer," he replied. "My guess is that military service no longer *helps* the way it once did, but that it does not *hurt*. I don't think wars have had the romance they did in the aftermath of World War II. Vietnam, Korea, the Gulf War, the Iraq war—no romance there."

Vietnam, of course, marks the starkest dividing line between an era when the American public expressed little or no dissent about war and an era when such dissent was common. One sad consequence of McCain's anticipated defeat is that it becomes possible to imagine, given the passage of 35 years since the U.S. withdrew its combat troops from Southeast Asia, that no Vietnam vet will ever serve in the White House. It could still happen, but the lengthening years now make it likelier that it won't.

David Greenberg, who writes *Slate's* "History Lesson" column and is an associate professor of American history at Rutgers, agrees with Brinkley that being a veteran, while hardly a negative, is no longer a positive in the way it used to be. For Greenberg, it's about the growing separation between military and civilian culture:

We still nominally admire vets, and when their heroism is put before us we are genuinely moved. Think, for example, about when McCain spoke of his wartime experience during his convention speech. But since the 1960s the military as an institution has not been integrated into American life the way it was when there was a draft. For many (possibly most) Americans, serving in war is an abstraction. It's not about our uncle or cousin who came home with a purple heart.

In Greenberg's view, military values like duty and sacrifice, which McCain tried to make centerpieces of his campaign,

have a tinny ring today. We admire these values from afar, or in the abstract. The left has won the culture wars in this sense. There remains a powerful backlash to the liberalization of American values, and in times of foreign crisis—after 9/11, during the early stages of the Iraq war—politicians like Bush benefit from the backlash. But when those crises don't loom as large, the military values don't seem terribly relevant or pertinent to being an effective politician.

I would add that the public has learned to separate the question of whether a candidate has demonstrated high moral character (most typically through wartime heroism or leadership) from the question of whether that candidate ought to be president. This struck me with particular force in 1992, when I was a reporter in the Washington bureau of the *Wall Street Journal*. The presidential election was just a few weeks away, and I was assigned to write a story about the paper's latest poll. It found that a majority of Americans thought President George H.W. Bush possessed greater moral character than former Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton. History has demonstrated that finding to be correct (assuming you forget about the 1988 election). But the poll also found that a majority of Americans thought Clinton would make a better president than Bush. History has demonstrated that finding to be correct also, though not by as much as many hoped. I came away from this experience with the conviction that Americans vote not for the best man but for the best potential president.

Obama's moral character, unlike Bill Clinton's circa 1992, appears to be in good working order. But Obama belongs to a generation (me, too) that was never compelled to risk life and limb for our country. Few potential candidates for president in 2012 and beyond possess military experience of any kind, and fewer still have been tested in combat. It could be a decade or more before a war-hero candidate next runs for president. That may or may not be a loss for the presidency. (Most of the tested-by-military-fire presidents listed above, like most presidents generally, leave behind a poor-to-middling legacy.) But it's a departure from the past, one that merits watching.

corrections

Corrections

Friday, November 7, 2008, at 7:04 AM ET

In a Nov. 5 "[Politics](#)," John Dickerson erroneously claimed that North Carolina had gone for Obama. As of midday ET on Nov. 6, the race was still too close to call. Dickerson also incorrectly stated that Barack Obama's victory was the first majority for a Democrat since Lyndon Johnson in 1964. Jimmy Carter won a majority of the popular vote in 1976.

In a Nov. 3 "[Politics](#)," Darren Garnick originally misspelled Charles M. Schulz's last name. He also incorrectly stated that Richie and Fonzie both supported Adlai Stevenson in an election-themed episode of *Happy Days*. Fonzie backed Dwight Eisenhower.

In the Nov. 3 "[Press Box](#)," Jack Shafer misspelled Tony Rezko's last name.

In the Oct. 31 "[Hot Document](#)," Bonnie Goldstein reported erroneously that Sen. Ted Stevens of Alaska has been a member of Congress for 50 years. Alaska has been a state for only 49 years. Stevens has been a senator for 40 years. Prior to that, he was speaker of Alaska's House of Representatives.

In the Oct. 30 "[Moneybox](#)," Daniel Gross incorrectly defined the price-to-earnings ratio. It is not the profits earned per outstanding share but, rather, the ratio of the share price to the profits earned per share.

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

culture gabfest

The Culture Gabfest, Wow Edition

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

By Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and Julia Turner
Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 12:14 PM ET

Listen to Culture Gabfest No. 20 with Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and Julia Turner by clicking the arrow on the audio player below:

You can also download the program [here](#), or you can subscribe to the weekly Culture Gabfest podcast feed in iTunes by clicking [here](#).

In this week's Culture Gabfest, our critics discuss Obama, Obama, and Obama. What happened with the election, how the media covered it, and what lies ahead for culture under future President Barack Obama.

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

President-elect Barack Obama's [election-night speech](#) in Chicago.
Kevin Phillips on the "Southern strategy" in his book, *[The Emerging Republican Majority](#)*.
How CNN's [holograms](#) work.
CNN's [bio](#) for John King.
Troy Patterson's *Slate* piece on [the television coverage of election night](#).
The New York Times' [interactive election results](#).
The FiveThirtyEight [Web site](#).
Walt Whitman's [preface](#) to *Leaves of Grass*.
David Simon's HBO [series](#) *The Wire*.
The Bernie Mac [film](#) *Soul Men*.

The Culture Gabfest weekly endorsements:

Dana's pick: The Giorgio Morandi [survey](#) at the Met. If you don't live in New York, check out *Slate's* [slide-show essay](#) on the exhibition.

Julia's pick: Timothy Crouse's book, *[The Boys on the Bus](#)*.
Stephen's picks: The Donovan song "[Catch the Wind](#)" and Paul Berman's book *[A Tale of Two Utopias](#)*.

You can reach the Culture Gabfest at culturefest@slate.com.

Posted by Amanda Aronczyk on Nov. 6, 2008 at 12:14 p.m.

Listen to Culture Gabfest No. 19 with Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and Julia Turner by clicking the arrow on the audio player below:

You can also download the program [blog](#), or you can subscribe to the weekly Culture Gabfest podcast feed in iTunes by clicking [here](#).

In this week's Culture Gabfest, our critics discuss the unexpected catharsis they felt watching Oliver Stone's *W. Then*, in a special lightning round, they revisit past Gabfest topics, including the ongoing Fey/Palin tragicomedy, Rachel Maddow, and the future of the current environmental movement.

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

The official [Web site](#) for Oliver Stone's film *W.*
Dana's [Slate review](#) of *W.*
[Slate's conversation](#) about *W.* with Oliver Stone, Ron Suskind, and Jacob Weisberg, and Bob Woodward.
Curtis Sittenfeld's [American Wife: A Novel](#) about Laura Bush.
[Slate's Audio Book Club](#) on *American Wife*.
Jacob Weisberg's book [The Bush Tragedy](#).
Sarah Palin's latest appearance on [Saturday Night Live](#).
[Slate's "XX Factor" blog's discussion](#) of Palin's SNL stint.
Michael Pollan's recent [article](#) in the *New York Times Magazine*.
Cormac McCarthy's novel [The Road](#).
Stephen Metcalf's tomato.

The Culture Gabfest weekly endorsements:

Dana's pick: James Wolcott's *Vanity Fair* [blog](#).
Julia's pick: [oatmeal](#), brought to you by Starbucks.
Stephen's pick: Claudia Roth Pierpont's collection of essays, [Passionate Minds: Women Rewriting the World](#).

You can reach the Culture Gabfest at culturefest@slate.com.

Posted by Amanda Aronczyk on Oct. 22, 2008 at 11:08 a.m.

Oct. 8, 2008

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

Nobel Foundation Secretary Horace Engdahl's [comments](#) about American literature.

[Slate's article](#) on Engdahl's comments.

"The Nobel Prize in Literature From an Alternative Universe" [Web site](#).

JFK impersonator Vaughn Meader's [Web site](#).

Tina Fey as Gov. Palin debating Sen. Joe Biden on [Saturday Night Live](#).

Summary of O.J. Simpson's trial on the *Los Angeles Times'* [Web site](#).

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Julia's pick: *New York* magazine's [survey](#) of the recent New York City architecture boom.

Stephen's pick: Joseph Dorman's documentary film [Arguing the World](#).

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Posted by Amanda Aronczyk on Oct. 8, 2008 at 12:00 p.m.

Sept. 24, 2008

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

Michael Douglas as [Gordon Gekko](#) in the Oliver Stone film *Wall Street*.

[Jim Cramer's](#) take on the financial crisis in *New York* magazine.

Michael Lewis' book [Liar's Poker: Rising Through the Wreckage on Wall Street](#).

Bob Rafelson's 1970 film, [Five Easy Pieces](#).

[Slate's "Obit"](#) for David Foster Wallace.

A David Foster Wallace essay from *Harper's*, "[Democracy, English, and the Wars over Usage](#)."

The second [Microsoft ad](#) featuring Jerry Seinfeld and Bill Gates.

The newer Microsoft "[I'm a PC](#)" ad campaign.

[Slate's](#) ad critic's assessment of [Crispin Porter & Bogusky](#), the advertising firm behind the Seinfeld/Gates ads.

The Culture Gabfest weekly endorsements:

Dana's pick: David Foster Wallace's essay "[A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again](#)."

Julia's pick: the Emmy-Award winning show [30 Rock](#).
Stephen's pick: Edmund Wilson's book, [To the Finland Station](#).

You can reach the Culture Gabfest at culturefest@slate.com.

Posted by Amanda Aronczyk on Sept. 24, 2008 at 12:00 p.m.

day to day Great Expectations

Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 3:40 PM ET

Nov. 6, 2008

Politics: What To Expect From Obama Now

America has decided. Barack Obama will be inaugurated as the 44th president of the United States on Jan. 20, 2009. Madeleine Brand and Alex Chadwick talk to chief political correspondent John Dickerson about the election results and what Americans can expect from their new president.

Having covered Obama for more than 20 months, Dickerson says it was striking how different the atmosphere at Obama's victory rally was: "There was no humor. It was a very serious speech about the challenges we face as a country." [Listen](#) to the segment.

Nov. 4, 2008

Politics: Editor Says Voters Are Smart, So We'll Call It Early

Some media organizations are planning to name a winner before all the polls close—even though it came back to bite them in 2004. Editor David Plotz tells Madeleine Brand why he thinks it's a good move to make an early call. [Listen](#) to the segment.

What's Up, Doc?: TV Shows Linked to Teen Sex

A new study links provocative TV with unwanted teen pregnancies. So should you limit your kids' TV time to *Sesame Street*, or is there more here than meets the eye? Dr. Sydney Spiesel looks at the factors at play. [Listen](#) to the segment.

dear prudence Sex Is a Sore Subject

My new boyfriend has herpes, and I don't. Should I take the plunge and sleep

with him?

Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 6:43 AM ET

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

Dear Prudence,

I have just met the most unbelievable man and have fallen completely in love. On our second date, he told me that he caught genital herpes in college. (He married the woman who gave it to him, and they have divorced.) At first, I was shocked and considered writing him off, but the more I thought about it, the more I didn't know what to do. I kept in contact with him, and every time we spoke or saw each other, I knew this was someone I wanted in my life. We have decided to hold off on being "completely intimate" with each other until the time is right. My concern is that the time may never be right. I truly love him and would never want to hurt him. Please help.

—Helpless

Dear Helpless,

It says a lot for your beau's character that he was so forthright about this. (For herpes carriers struggling with the issue of when to tell potential partners, you don't have to blurt this out before it's clear that the relationship is progressing to the point where it will become germane. But you do have to give your partner fair warning, which means you don't drop this bomb as you're dropping your drawers.) He is respectful of your concerns and is not pressuring you to become sexually intimate. He sounds like a catch! But you understandably are concerned about catching what he's caught. You need to educate yourself so that you feel confident about whatever decision you make. The book [Sexually Transmitted Diseases: A Physician Tells You What You Need To Know](#) is a good place to start. The author writes that "millions of people with herpes form loving, lasting relationships with partners, and over time herpes often becomes more of a manageable, periodic nuisance." She advises that avoiding sex during outbreaks and otherwise using condoms can drastically reduce the chance of transmission, and suppressive therapy can reduce it even further. Be warned: Whenever you read a full medical account of herpes, it might make you want a boyfriend with a more appealing chronic condition—say, leprosy. When the doctor writes "millions of people," she's not kidding. It's estimated that 20 percent of adults in this country have genital herpes. So if you leave this man to search for someone without his viral baggage, you might just find yourself facing the same dilemma with someone you don't love as much.

—Prudie

[Dear Prudence Video: Cat Lady Mother-in-Law](#)

Dear Prudence,

Approximately 20 years ago, I saw my oldest sister, D, for the last time. I was a teenager, and she was 29. After years of rocky relationships, with our mother in particular, she cut off all contact with our family. Our father recently died. Because we weren't able to locate D, he passed away without seeing her one last time, as he had wished. Mom has resigned herself to the same fate. Recently, I accidentally found D while surfing a popular social Internet site. She's moved across the country and changed her name, but seeing her picture, it is undeniably her. She seems fulfilled and looks like she has a tremendous support system and a happy relationship. I very much want to contact her. I would offer not to tell our family about our correspondence unless she wanted me to. At the same time, if she went through the trouble of changing her name and moving across the country because of us, would my contact just be an intrusion on her happy, family-free life? At a minimum, we will have to notify her when Mom passes away so she gets her inheritance. Should I try to contact D while Mom's still alive, in case there's any hope of reconciliation?

—The Baby

Dear The Baby,

You need to consider the possibility that a 49-year-old woman who looks like the sister you haven't seen in 20 years and has "changed her name" is just a woman with a resemblance to your sister but isn't actually her. That said, go ahead and get in touch, but don't spill your whole family saga in the first e-mail. Make a tentative approach by explaining that you saw her Web page and thought there was a possibility you two are related. If she says you're right, she's your sister, then see where it all leads—keeping in mind that going to the lengths she did to escape the family could mean that your sister is somewhat psychologically disturbed or that disturbing things were done to her that you know nothing about. But if this woman says you're mistaken, accept that either you are or that you're just going to have to live with the ambiguity that maybe your missing sister is telling you to get lost.

—Prudie

Dear Prudence,

I work at a small, private company run by two Jewish men. There are only about 20 employees, and half are Jewish. When I interviewed for the job, my boss told me everyone got to go home early on Fridays in the winter. I later learned that this meant only Jewish employees could go home early; non-Jewish employees were told to stay a full day. This disparate rule even applied to Jewish employees who didn't observe the Sabbath. I asked my bosses why everyone couldn't leave early, as it seemed like discrimination not to give everyone the same hours. They told me bluntly: because you're not Jewish. I then asked them, what if I told you I just converted to a new religion that required me to be home early on Fridays as well? Would you not respect

my religion? They did not get my point. What can I do, short of finding a new job in this wretched economy?

—Oy Vey

Dear Oy,

I agree the way your bosses have handled this is bound to stir up both resentment and extreme slacking off on Friday afternoons if half the office—including the bosses—disappears before sunset. But you have brought this to their attention, and they were completely unmoved by the potential of your founding your own sect based upon the doctrine of TGIF. Since you don't complain about what your work life is like the other four and three-fifths days of the week, there doesn't seem to any point in becoming obsessed with the fact that for part of the year, your Jewish colleagues leave early one day a week for religious observance. If you want to quit your job over this, given the economic conditions you rightly describe as "wretched," you will probably end up with more free time than you know what to do with.

—Prudie

Dear Prudie,

Oh my God, he wants to marry me. We've known each other a long time, we love each other dearly, we share values and interests, he makes me feel cherished, the sex is great. But as a single woman in my 50s, I've lived on my own for more than 30 years. It was once hard to accept that I wouldn't have a husband and children of my own, but I have come to be generally happy with my independent life. I'm orderly and territorial; I love my apartment, my routines and rituals, my privacy. And he ... leaves his socks around if he stays over; uses half a roll of paper towels at a time; hates most of the foods I love; is loud; puts things back where I can't find them, if he puts them back at all; snores; has the TV on all the time. All minor things, I know. I feel rigid and petty for letting them irritate me, but they do. I have spoken up about some things, and he tries to be responsive, but I don't press other issues precisely because I know I don't have to deal with them all the time. And now I'm terrified that if we did get married, I would either turn into a raving nag or a resentful brooder. He is very easygoing about my own quirks and accepts my need for independence and privacy; he's even promised we could have separate rooms or spaces of some kind, though in the wildly expensive city we live in, that's a hard promise to keep. There's a big part of me that wants to embrace this sweet and adventurous prospect and enjoy having something I never thought I would. But part of me wants to run screaming from the room. How do I decide?

—Bride or No Bride

Dear Bride or No Bride,

You know, he could write his own letter about you: She stores her soup in alphabetical order, scrubs grout for relaxation, never takes her nose out of a book. Yet he accepts your quirks as part

of your charm. Of course, in these situations, it's always harder for the tightly wound neatnik than the voluble slob (viz., *The Odd Couple*). Your struggle is over whether these daily annoyances will kill your desire to go through life with a beloved partner. I'm of the school that it's good to embrace that chance for sweet adventure you thought would never be yours. But to help you decide, try imagining yourself 10 years from now. In one future, you are puttering around alone in your lovely, quiet space. In another, before falling asleep together after fabulous sex, you have to get up to toss his socks in the hamper and turn off the TV in the den. Only you know which makes you happier. And you haven't said whether there is a third possibility: He accepts that you can't live with him or without him, and you two just keep things the way they are.

—Prudie

dialogues

The Conservative Crackup

What should the Republican Party do now?

By Tucker Carlson, Ross Douthat, Douglas W. Kmiec, Jim Manzi, Kathleen Parker, and Christine Todd Whitman
Friday, November 7, 2008, at 7:06 AM ET

From: Jim Manzi

To: Tucker Carlson, Ross Douthat, Douglas Kmiec, Kathleen Parker, Christine Todd Whitman

Subject: A Return to Reaganism Won't Be Enough

Posted Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 9:04 AM ET

Tucker, Ross, Douglas, Kathleen, and Christine,

What should the GOP, and the conservative movement more generally, be concentrating on for the next few years? Developing, demonstrating, and communicating solutions to the current problems of the middle class.

Most conservatives who propose a return to "Reagan conservatism" don't understand either the motivations or structure of the Reagan economic revolution. The 1970s were a period of economic crisis for America as it emerged from global supremacy to a new world of real economic competition. The Reagan economic strategy for meeting this challenge was sound money plus deregulation, broadly defined. It succeeded, but it exacerbated a number of pre-existing trends that began or accelerated in the '70s that tended to increase inequality.

International competition is now vastly more severe than it was 30 years ago. The economic rise of the Asian heartland is the

fundamental geostrategic fact of the current era. In aggregate, America is rich and economically successful but increasingly unequal, with a stagnating middle class. If we give up the market-based reforms that allow us to prosper, we will lose by eventually allowing international competitors to defeat us. But if we let inequality grow unchecked, we will lose by eventually hollowing out the middle class and threatening social cohesion. This rock-and-a-hard-place problem, not some happy talk about the end of history, is what "globalization" means for the United States.

Seen in this light, the challenge in front of conservatives is clear: How do we continue to increase the market orientation of the American economy while helping more Americans to participate in it more equally?

Here are two ideas among many.

First, improve K-12 schools. U.S. public schools are in desperate need of improvement and have been for decades. We do not prepare the average American child to succeed versus international competition. Schools can do only so much to fix this—in a nation where 37 percent of births are out-of-wedlock, many children will be left behind—but it would be a great start if the average school didn't go out of its way to make kids lazy and stupid.

No amount of money or number of "programs" will create anything more than marginal improvements, because public schools are organized to serve teachers and administrators rather than students and families. We need, at least initially, competition for students among public schools in which funding moves with students and in which schools are far freer to change how they operate. As we have seen in the private economy, only markets will force the unpleasant restructuring necessary to unleash potential. Conservatives have long had this goal but are unprepared to win the fight. Achieving it would be at least a decade-long project.

The role of the federal government could be limited but crucial. Suppose it established a comprehensive national exam by grade level to be administered by all schools and universities that receive any federal money and required each school to publish all results, along with other detailed data about school budgets, performance, and so forth each year. Secondary, profit-driven information providers, analogous to credit-rating agencies and equity analysts, would arise to inform decision-making. The federal role would be very much like that of the Securities and Exchange Commission for equity markets: to ensure that each school published accurate, timely, and detailed data. This would not only improve schools in the aggregate but also serve to provide a more realistic path of economic advancement to anybody with a reasonably responsible family and help to acculturate more Americans to a market economy. This would

also become a model for other reform of entitlement programs, from retirement accounts to medical care.

Second, reconsider immigration policy. What if, once we had control of our southern border, we came to view the goal of immigration policy as recruiting instead of law enforcement? Once we established a target number of immigrants per year, we could set up recruiting offices looking for the best possible talent everywhere from Beijing to Helsinki. It would be great for America as a whole to have, say, 500,000 very smart, motivated people move here each year with the intention of becoming citizens. It would also do wonders for equality if they were not almost all desperately poor, unskilled, and competing with already low-wage workers.

Other examples of policies that can raise competitiveness and lower inequality, ranging from reduced small-business regulation to allowing individuals tax deductibility for private health care purchases to automatic (with an opt-out) enrollment for 401(k) plans, become obvious once you start to look for them. What they tend to have in common is a focus on building human capital and effective market institutions. That is, they build the key resources of the new economy.

The conservative movement has become excessively dogmatic and detached from realities on the ground. It needs to become more empirical and practical—which strike me as traditionally conservative attitudes.

From: Douglas W. Kmiec
To: Tucker Carlson, Ross Douthat, Jim Manzi, Kathleen Parker, and Christine Todd Whitman
Subject: The Not-So-Grand, Really-Old-Idea Party
Posted Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 10:22 AM ET

Tucker, Ross, Jim, Kathleen, and Christine,

Ronald Reagan attracted me to his side in 1980 with five words: "family, work, neighborhood, peace, and freedom." It was Barack Obama who spoke in those timeless terms in this election, and he received his just reward Tuesday evening. What's more, he spoke about them by using well-considered, new ideas—for example, universal health insurance, as well as a national commitment (and not just an anemic executive order) for faith-based and often neighborhood social-service delivery.

How might Republicans catch up? With respect to family, it has been a good many years since the Supreme Court approved vouchers, yet Republicans have yet to pursue the opportunity. A nationwide voucher effort for math and science, or a voucher for

full tuition, for low-achieving children would have plenty of social-science research and support behind it. It would also put families back in charge of the upbringing of their children.

The right to life remains a highly important and sensitive topic. Republicans have been trying to sell themselves for so long on the basis of judicial appointments and the supposed "fifth vote" to overturn *Roe*, sometimes you wonder if they realize how selecting judges on that basis disservices the rule of law. It also keeps Republicans perennially looking like the gang that can't shoot straight—given the number of "fifth votes" they've already appointed to the court, from Sandra Day O'Connor to Anthony Kennedy to David Souter.

The Democrats had a brilliant strategy on abortion this year: Don't play the futile court speculation game. Instead, Obama's team promoted life in ways that don't depend upon a Supreme Court vacancy and cooperating nominee. Specifically, Obama had the Dems commit to promote life with enhanced social and economic assistance. This idea had traction—the Catholic vote literally switched from Republican to Democrat, going (in preliminary numbers) 55-45 for Obama nationwide, which is amazing given the amount of outright lies and falsehoods the GOP was purveying about the president-elect on this issue. (Not to mention the co-conspiring clergy the Republicans captured, who were literally preaching that voters would go to hell for voting for Barack.) The Republicans became the party of fear and damnation rather than solution or respect for life. As a consequence, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, and Virginia are in the Democratic, not the Republican, column.

It's admittedly hard to untie the abortion knot, but here's a thought: Republicans could have moved a constitutional amendment that would presume life to begin at conception, while further providing that no government, federal or state, is competent to legislate on the question absent a supermajority. The effect? Taking the Supreme Court's "activist" thumb off the scale against life while at the same time avoiding the criminalization of a woman's freedom. This is not the ideal Catholic position, but it's closer, and the Catholic Church has less standing to complain about a grant of freedom that could then be fairly influenced by the moral instruction associated with a woman's religious choice.

Of course, respecting the dignity of work requires Republicans to think past the pretense of the unregulated market, which as an ideal has never truly existed. One might expect that Republicans, as the proponents of the benefits of vibrant competition, would not promote antitrust principles that reduce competition by making mergers and consolidation too available. Incentives promoting both employment security and better work/family balance are also worth exploring.

As for peace, it is well past time that the neoconservatives be given a good swift boot out of the Pentagon, if not the town.

Then Republicans could give up trying to sell us the stale bill of goods that Iraq is the central front of anything or that the surge is working. Trade, too, remains an opportunity for expanded freedom. Our principles of international trade should match the stronger EU market integration that minimizes impediments to commerce, rather than permit even the most heavy-handed regulation so long as it is facially nondiscriminatory between in-state and out-of-state commerce.

Finally, beyond these somewhat wonkish ideas for policy innovation, Republicans ought to remember occasionally that they are—or at least were—the party of Lincoln, and ought to promote civil and human rights. That is better than dragging one's feet on reasonable ways to break up the systematic racism or gender stereotypes that still inhabit much of our culture.

The GOP also needs to recruit some new blood. Ron Paul was young at heart and amusingly nonconformist, and Sarah Palin was well-dressed, if somewhat goofy in demeanor. Mitt Romney looked, thought, and acted like a president, which is probably why a party that indulges far too much gratuitous intramural sniping over whether Hayek or von Mises is the better thinker eliminated him with embarrassing sniping about his faith.

Given the historic opportunities embodied by the talented and inspiring Barack Obama, it is not clear to me that any GOP candidate could have prevailed. But one thing is obvious even to the man on the street: A campaign without a fresh face or new ideas was more of the same—and if nothing succeeds like success, nothing new succeeds at even less.

Welcome to the wilderness. It is time to think, rather than grouse or govern.

From: Ross Douthat
To: Tucker Carlson, Douglas W. Kmiec, Jim Manzi, Kathleen Parker, and Christine Todd Whitman
Subject: No One To Blame but Ourselves
Posted Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 11:30 AM ET

Tucker, Doug, Jim, Kathleen, and Christine,

Two years ago, while the Republicans were busy losing the House and the Senate, a young conservative writer named Michael Brendan Dougherty inclined his ear to the sound of right-wing recriminations [and observed](#) that "at the end of the day, the arguments all seem to boil down to something similar: *If it were more like me, the Republican Party would be better off. It's failing because it's like you.*"

In the wake of Barack Obama's victory, this will be the pattern of conservative commentary for months and perhaps years to come. Foreign-policy realists will insist neoconservatism doomed the Bush administration to failure. Anti-immigration activists will claim that the Republican Party would have beaten Obama if only it had nominated somebody who *actually* opposed illegal immigration, instead of just pretending. Small-government conservatives will claim that if the Bush administration had only held the line on domestic spending, everything would have turned out differently. The dwindling band of Rockefeller Republicans will blame the whole thing on social conservatives for being too strident about abortion and gay marriage and turning off moderates; social conservatives, for their part, will argue that John McCain didn't talk *enough* about abortion and gay marriage. And so on.

I have [my own dog](#) in a number of these fights, but it's important to point out that nearly every faction will be able to score some points and lay some blame: A pair of defeats as resounding as '06 and '08 have a thousand fathers, no matter how much every right-winger would like to assign paternity to someone else. Which means that the best thing, by far, for the American right would be for every sect within the conservative temple to spend some time in self-examination before it turns to flinging blame.

Social conservatives, a group in which I count myself, might profitably meditate on how to disentangle our primary political goal—the protection of the unborn—from secondary issues like, say, abstinence-only education and the debate over evolution and intelligent design, which dovetail too easily with caricatures of religious fundamentalism (as Mike Huckabee and Sarah Palin both discovered in the media coverage of their campaigns). Meanwhile, those Republicans who wish that the GOP spend more time talking about, say, capital-gains tax rates and less time talking about abortion should recognize that in this election, the McCain ticket did exactly that, sidestepping the social issues and instead emphasizing a business-friendly tax agenda and (late in the game) Joe the Plumber's case against progressive taxation. This strategy did not exactly reap impressive returns.

Or, again, anti-immigration hawks should ponder the fact that in the long run, the GOP cannot win without Hispanic votes, and recognize that the party's increasingly poor showing in the Southwest has a lot to do with the bile that some conservatives direct at illegal immigrants. But advocates of comprehensive immigration reform should recognize that they lack credibility with many voters who are motivated by concerns for law and order rather than by bigotry; that by nominating John McCain, the most pro-immigration figure among the primary contenders, the GOP gained exactly nothing with Hispanic voters; and that the party will need other ways to win Latinos than simply pandering to their ethnic loyalties.

Likewise, in foreign policy, neoconservatives would do well to draw chastening lessons—about the utility of pre-emptive war,

America's capacity for nation-building, and so on—from the debacles of the last four years. But neoconservatism did not give us Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney, and it's not as though there was a groundswell of opposition to the invasion of Iraq among non-neocon right-wingers. And the realist community, in particular, might profitably ponder how so many of its members found themselves supporting the invasion of Iraq and then opposing the only strategy—the surge—that's offered any hope of a decent outcome in that country.

There's a great deal of talk about a conservative crackup at the moment, as there always is after a big defeat. And some cracking-up will no doubt take place: Some factions and demographics will leave the right-wing tent, never to return, and others will (I hope!) join up in their place. But I suspect that the conservative coalition won't change all *that* much, once the dust has settled: There will still be free-marketeers and religious conservatives, idealists and realists, libertarians and law-and-order types. And as long as we're all going to be living together, each faction would do well to give the beams in their own eyes at least as much attention as they give the motes in the eyes of their neighbors.

From: Christine Todd Whitman
To: Tucker Carlson, Ross Douthat, Douglas W. Kmiec, Jim Manzi, and Kathleen Parker
Subject: It Was Obama's Victory, Not Liberalism's
Posted Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 2:19 PM ET

Tucker, Ross, Doug, Jim, and Kathleen,

As conservatives, we have some questions to ask ourselves today. Has the country really embraced the idea of "redistributing the wealth"? Are Americans convinced that Washington is going to have the answers to all our needs? I don't think so. One pollster I heard zeroed in on people's obsession with Barack Obama the person, not necessarily Obama the ideology, and I have to agree. When the dust settles, I don't think we'll find a liberally recalibrated nation on our hands. Obama's victory showed that the majority of the American people aren't narrow-minded and don't object to bipartisan policy solutions.

I see this election as being more about hope than just change. It was about the hope that we can and should expect more out of our government—an area where Republicans have disappointed, but economic conservatism has not. This election was a clear repudiation of the last eight years. I can't tell you how many longtime Republicans have been in touch with me to say that they really wanted to vote for John McCain but couldn't accept the rightward tilt of the campaign, which they had seen too much

of during the Bush administration. Thomas Friedman [said it well](#) in today's *New York Times*:

Bush & Co. did not believe that government could be an instrument of the common good. They neutered their cabinet secretaries and appointed hacks to big jobs. For them, pursuit of the common good was all about pursuit of individual self-interest. Voters rebelled against that. But there was also a rebellion against a traditional Democratic version of the common good—that it is simply the sum of all interest groups clamoring for their share.

What this means for Republicans and what this means for conservatives are two different things. For economic conservatives, we have to examine where we fit in American politics today—sadly, the party that used to represent us has strayed from the fundamentals. I hope that our home will lie with the GOP in the future, but that is not a given in light of the last eight years.

For the GOP, I hope that we are investing time in figuring out how to hold a coalition of economic conservatives, social moderates and conservatives, and foreign-policy conservatives under one umbrella. As Ross implied, we must resist the temptation to form a circular firing squad that casts blame on one or the other faction within the party. I, for one, am content to have the GOP wander in the Obama wilderness for four years if it forces my party to have a serious self-examination.

From: Tucker Carlson
To: Ross Douthat, Douglas W. Kmiec, Jim Manzi, Kathleen Parker, Christine Todd Whitman
Subject: Let's Find Someone Who Speaks English
Posted Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 12:08 PM ET

Ross, Douglas, Kathleen, Jim, and Christine,

These entries are so smart that I don't have much to add, apart from the obvious: The various Republican constituencies need some reason to hang together. It's not obvious what socially conservative, big-government types like Mike Huckabee have in common with economically conservative libertines like Rudy Giuliani. So why are they in the same party? It used to be because they both hated communism. Then it was Bill Clinton. Most recently, it was a shared fear of Islamic extremism. What now? Time to think of something—quick. There's no natural reason these two groups should be connected. In fact, they sort of despise each other, as you'll notice immediately if you ever eat with them.

Once the party figures out what it's for—or more precisely, against—it ought to stick to its story. People respect principle, even if they disagree with it. That was Ron Paul's secret. (The gold standard? Who's for that? Didn't matter. Paul seemed like he sincerely was.) Let's say you spent decades extolling the genius of the free market, then, the moment an economic crisis struck, your first instinct was to swoop in and nationalize entire industries.

People might begin to suspect you weren't really sincere in the first place. They might also wonder if you ever really understood your own policies. You could lose an entire election over something like that.

Finally, after the party has settled on what it believes, it ought to go shopping for a leader. I recommend someone who speaks fluent English. This matters, it turns out, and not just for aesthetic reasons. In a democracy, eloquence is a basic condition of leadership. A president has a moral as well as a political obligation to explain his program. His constitutional powers are limited to just a few (war, the veto). His real authority comes from persuasion.

It helps if you can talk.

From: Ross Douthat
To: Tucker Carlson, Douglas M. Kmiec, Jim Manzi, Kathleen Parker, and Christine Todd Whitman
Subject: Kmiec's Abortion Folly
Posted Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 1:40 PM ET

Tucker, Douglas, Jim, Kathleen, and Christine,

I tend to think that the GOP's position on abortion is pretty low on the list of topics that conservatives should be fretting about at the moment: My impression is that the life issue (or the choice issue, if you prefer) had very little impact on either party's fortunes in this cycle. But since Douglas Kmiec [suggests](#) that conservatives could profit from Barack Obama's example on the issue, let me offer a few words in response.

The trouble with seeking common ground on abortion is that the legal regime enacted by *Roe* and reaffirmed in *Casey* permits only the most minimal regulation of the practice, which means that any plausible "compromise" that leaves *Roe* in place will offer almost nothing to pro-lifers. Even the [modest restrictions](#) that prevail in many European countries (and that, not coincidentally, coincide with lower abortion rates) are out of the question under the current legal dispensation. This, in turn, explains why the national debate inevitably revolves around the

composition of the Supreme Court and the either/or question of whether a president will appoint justices likely to chip away the *Roe-Casey* regime or justices likely to uphold it.

This state of affairs creates enormous frustration for pro-choice Republicans, a group in which I know some of the participants in this discussion count themselves, since it makes it next to impossible for pro-life primary voters to consider supporting a pro-choice candidate for the presidency or vice presidency. I think this frustration is somewhat misplaced, since to my mind any pro-choice American who sincerely seeks a national consensus on the subject of abortion should support overturning *Roe* and returning the issue to the democratic process—a position that I would have liked to see the pro-choice Rudy Giuliani experiment with, for instance, in his quest to become the GOP nominee. But I certainly understand why pro-choicers don't see things quite that way.

What I don't understand at all is Kmiec's position, which seems to be that the contemporary Democratic Party, and particularly the candidacy of Barack Obama, offered nearly as much to *pro-lifers* as the Republican Party does. I am sure that Kmiec is weary of being called a fool by opponents of abortion for his tireless pro-Obama advocacy during this election cycle, but if so, then the thing for him to do is to cease acting like the sort of person for whom the term "useful idiot" was coined, rather than persisting in his folly.

Those seeking a primer on the case against Kmiec's putatively pro-life position on Obama and abortion can begin [here](#) or [here](#) or [here](#). Suffice to say that what he calls "outright lies and falsehoods" about Obama's views were, in fact, more or less the truth: The Democratic nominee ran on a record that can only be described as "[very, very pro-choice](#)," and his stated [positions on abortion](#) would involve rolling back nearly all the modest—but also [modestly effective](#)—restrictions that pro-lifers have placed upon the practice and/or appointing judges who would do the same. There may have been reasons for anti-abortion Americans to vote for Barack Obama *in spite* of his position that abortion should be essentially unregulated and funded by taxpayer dollars. But Kmiec's suggestion that Obama took the Democrats in anything like a pro-life direction on the issue doesn't pass the laugh test. (And nor, I might add, does his bizarre argument that because the goal of placing a fifth anti-*Roe* justice on the court is somehow unrealistic, the pro-life movement should pursue a far more implausible constitutional amendment instead.)

I suppose I could find a thing or three to agree with in Kmiec's longer list of ideas for how the party he abandoned could win back his vote. But frankly, I don't see the point. I understand that the pro-life position on abortion does not command majority support in the United States and that people of good will can disagree on the subject. And I have no doubt that the Republican Party can profit from greater dialogue between its pro-life and pro-choice constituents—and do a better job, as well, of

addressing itself to both pro-lifers and pro-choicers who aren't already inside its tent. But I can't begin to fathom why the GOP should consider taking any advice whatsoever from a "pro-lifer" who has spent the past year serving as an increasingly embarrassing shill for the opposition party's objectively pro-abortion nominee.

From: Douglas W. Kmiec
To: Tucker Carlson, Ross Douthat, Jim Manzi, Kathleen Parker, and Christine Todd Whitman
Subject: Working Together Without Claiming Credit
Posted Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 3:59 PM ET

Tucker, Ross, Jim, Kathleen, and Christine,

Christine's thoughtful post with the reference to the "common good" is right on target, and I believe it answers her initial question about redistribution. No, phrased that way, America will see it as "theft"; indeed, it is commonplace for some Republicans to view all taxation as theft. But America is genuinely tired of the notion that "government is the problem." That was Reagan's line, and it worked because the need for collective action during most of the '80s was small, except for the military buildup (or, if you will, redistribution to military contractors). The buildup spent the Soviet Union under the table and facilitated the opening of freedom to the Eastern bloc. It was, in short, money well spent. Domestically, however, there was tremendous waste in HUD, HHS, and the like, and the Gipper scored by pointing it out and trimming a bit and experimenting with melding public and private with a greater reliance upon user fees and the like.

To what extent are Republicans prepared to collaborate with their Democratic counterparts to refine, as opposed to obstruct, reform and regulation of the financial markets, for example? While as a party, it will be important to keep a tally of our intellectual contribution, right now, the GOP can earn back some good will simply by improving Democratic health care and other initiatives with our cost-benefit know-how. As we recruit and regenerate, we should also contemplate that new minority leadership is warranted in the new Congress. New faces ought to come to the GOP microphone at day's end in D.C., not to find fault but to manifest cooperation. In short, without a big show of claiming credit, it should be our aim to improve needed regulatory initiatives undertaken by the Obama administration, rather than just obstructing them.

There is no better way to express this spirit of cooperation than by giving great deference to the new president's nominees for the executive. The financial disclosure paperwork should be streamlined, and if the file is ready, the GOP should guarantee a

hearing, committee vote, and floor action in no more than a two-week process.

From: Jim Manzi
To: Tucker Carlson, Ross Douthat, Douglas M. Kmiec, Kathleen Parker, and Christine Todd Whitman
Subject: We Needn't Surrender Just Yet
Posted Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 4:54 PM ET

Doug and I appear to have read [Christine's first post](#) somewhat differently.

Doug [begins his reaction](#) by saying:

Christine's thoughtful post with the reference to the "common good" is right on target, and I believe it answers her initial question about redistribution. No, phrased that way, America will see it as "theft"; indeed, it is commonplace for some Republicans to view all taxation as theft.

I'm sure the last phrase is technically correct, in that at least two Republicans in this vast country "view all taxation as theft." But I don't think that this opinion characterizes more than a tiny minority of Republicans (or conservatives).

Economic conservatives believe in limited government and low taxes, accepting that "limited" and "low" vary by circumstance and are subject to lots of prudential debate. Further, economic conservatives (and presumably most rational people) believe that whatever tasks we properly delegate to the government should be executed efficiently and effectively. This view—a government with limited tasks that it performs very well—seems to be Christine's vision. It's certainly mine.

Any real-world government requires taxes. The people who have a lot of money will end up paying a share of these taxes disproportionate to their numbers under any nontyrannical regime. Further, any just real-world government will have at least some poor relief, by whatever name, for those unable to care for themselves. Therefore, at least some mild redistribution will be an incidental byproduct of a just and well-functioning government. Accepting these practical realities is very different from actual advocacy of redistribution as good in and of itself.

I think that one of Christine's points is that this week's election does not provide good evidence that the American electorate supports redistribution of wealth as a government policy. I think she's right about that.

Doug goes on to say:

But America is genuinely tired of the notion that "government is the problem." That was Reagan's line, and it worked because the need for collective action during most of the '80s was small, except for the military buildup (or, if you will, redistribution to military contractors).

Well, I remember the 1980s, and I don't seem to recall many on the left arguing that the "need for collective action was small" in domestic policy at the time. It seems like a pretty breathtaking thing to assert flatly and in passing; perhaps Doug can provide some evidence for what made the 1980s different from prior and subsequent decades in this respect.

Describing the Reagan military buildup as "redistribution for military contractors" strikes me as snide and uninformative, unless one believes that the actual intention and result of spending on the military buildup was not to contribute to the defeat of global totalitarianism, which is a point of view that Doug seems to directly contradict when he goes on to call this "money well spent."

Doug then says:

To what extent are Republicans prepared to collaborate with their Democratic counterparts to refine, as opposed to obstruct, reform and regulation of the financial markets, for example? ... [T]he GOP can earn back some good will simply by improving Democratic health care and other initiatives with our cost-benefit know-how. ... In short, without a big show of claiming credit, it should be our aim to improve needed regulatory initiatives undertaken by the Obama administration, rather than just obstructing them.

There is no better way to express this spirit of cooperation than by giving great deference to the new president's nominees for the executive. ... [T]he GOP should guarantee a hearing, committee vote, and floor action in no more than a two-week process.

Without going into the details here, proper regulation of financial markets is not necessarily the same thing as "pretty much whatever Chuck Schumer and Barney Frank want, with some tinkering around the edges."

Maybe I'm misunderstanding it, but Doug's overall post reads to me as saying more or less this: "Look, conservatives just need to

accept that the American people have rendered the judgment that conservatives are wrong on the important issues of the day, and surrender to the popular will embodied by President-elect Obama and the Democratic Congress." If so, I respectfully disagree.

From: Kathleen Parker
To: Tucker Carlson, Ross Douthat, Douglas W. Kmiec, Jim Manzi, and Christine Todd Whitman
Subject: The Palin Factor

Posted Friday, November 7, 2008, at 7:06 AM ET

Tucker, Ross, Doug, Jim, and Christine,

There's little to debate about where Republicans have gone wrong. As you've all pointed out, they've strayed from conservatism's organizing principles on nearly every front.

Returning to those principles will help the party get back on track—and some of you have made some strong, interesting suggestions. One can quibble over the details of whatever blueprint emerges from the meetings about to begin, but no amount of tweaking market theories or foreign-policy models will save the Grand Old Party unless its members do some painful soul-searching about what kind of people they are.

I agree with you, Christine, that Barack Obama's victory was more about hope than about change. The U.S. majority is still more centrist than left or right. In a recent Zogby poll, 59 percent of respondents described themselves as "fiscally conservative and socially liberal."

The election was also a referendum on the Bush years. John McCain performed remarkably well considering the overwhelming dissatisfaction with all things Republican. And, finally, the economy broke at precisely the wrong time for anyone with an (R) by his name.

But something else also caused many to jump ship even though, philosophically, a leap toward Obama carried significant risk. Despite conflicts of self-interest, many conservatives shifted away for what we might call the "P Factor": Sarah Palin. It wasn't only her selection as McCain's running mate, which becomes more unbelievable each day as previously off-the-record tidbits are surfacing. More important is what the "P Factor" revealed about the party itself.

It has become angry and ordinary.

And, oh, by the way, proud of it.

We saw that starkly as Palin whipped up crowds, winking her way through attacks against Obama that telegraphed, "He's not one of us." We saw the cackling white man toting an Obama monkey to a rally and listened slack-jawed as country singer Gretchen Wilson belted out "Redneck Woman" while Palin clapped and lip-synched her favorite song.

Palin was the embodiment of ordinariness, despite her comely packaging, and managed while invoking the Christian God to repel our better angels.

I am not a snob and don't much like those who are. I live among so-called "ordinary Americans," a term I despise, and have devoted countless words through the years trying to explain the concerns of everyday people. I believe that most who flocked to Palin meant no one ill will, period. But they fervently want a country they recognize. They saw in Palin a kindred spirit who was fearless in defending bedrock values of family, country, and, yes, belief in a higher authority. What they failed to acknowledge was that Obama and family—churchgoing, well-educated exemplars of community service—were the embodiment of those same values, a Rockwellian portrait rendered with the brushstrokes of our professed core beliefs that all men are created equal—and that through hard work, anyone can become anything in the United States of America.

Palin wasn't speaking only to her fellow Republicans' hearts, however. She was speaking to their anxieties and the fear that goes unspoken: The Republican base is fast becoming a racial and cultural minority. Recognition of this statistical fact has caused unease for which Sarah Palin provided a promising balm. Her supporters were willingly blind to her weaknesses because validation and victory required it.

What a great many others saw was someone out of her depth, whose lack of knowledge—and apparent lack of intellectual curiosity—was a bonding agent with the Republican base. To concern oneself with trivial details such as what countries are part of NAFTA was to be derided as elitist. And everybody knows Republicans hate elitists.

Well, nobody likes elitists, really. But we certainly do aspire to become elites in our various fields of endeavor. Joe the Plumber undoubtedly considers himself an elite among those who keep the water flowing. Would a self-respecting Republican fail to acknowledge the desirability of military elites such as the Force Recon Marines, Navy SEALs, Army Special Forces, Army Rangers, or Air Force Commandos?

Might we not also want the country to be led by equally elite folks, well-versed in history, geography, foreign policy, and economics? It isn't necessary that a vice president be able to pass the Foreign Service exam, but she ought to be able to demonstrate that she has read a newspaper in the past year or so. Among new information surfacing from inside the McCain

campaign is that Palin didn't know that Africa is a continent rather than a country unto itself. Is it mean and cowardly for anonymous campaign aides to whisper these anecdotes to the media, as Palin defenders insist? Or shouldn't we, without snickering, admit that such things matter?

Palin covered her inadequacies with folksy charm and by drumming up a class war, turning her audiences not just against elites but against the party's own educated members. The movement created by that superelite, but never elitist, William F. Buckley Jr. was handed over to Joe Six-Pack. Know-nothingness was no longer a stigma, but a badge of honor.

The Republican Party's Baghdad Bobism with regard to Palin, a denial so pernicious that party operatives were willing to let her sit a heartbeat away from the presidency in a time of war and financial collapse, revealed what really ails the party. The "P Factor" isn't a single person but a sickness that will have to be acknowledged and cured—Republicans will be reciting their newly tailored principles only to themselves.

First, raise the bar.

dispatches

There's No Place Like Home

The mood in Hyde Park—and what it says about Obama.

By Meghan O'Rourke

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 6:08 PM ET

HYDE PARK, CHICAGO—To understand Barack Obama, you have to understand Hyde Park, the small neighborhood on Chicago's South Side where he lives. To understand Hyde Park, you have to understand the University of Chicago. Today, the major controversy at the University of Chicago concerns the construction of a new research institute named after [Milton Friedman](#), the famed [Chicago School of Economics](#) thinker who espoused free-market capitalism and opposed government regulation. When the university announced it was creating an institute named after one of its most famous professors—a relatively common practice—the response was not what you might expect; more than 100 professors signed a letter protesting the center. At the core of the controversy, of course, is a debate over the efficacy of the free market and over Friedman's conservative approach to economics.

This may seem like a hothouse ivory tower debate. But it speaks to the very issue being debated in this election. McCain was ahead of Obama in polls before this fall's economic crisis hit. One of the things that will help Obama get elected—if the voting goes as predicted—is a sudden dip in faith in free-market capitalism.

But this debate isn't the only reason Hyde Park is a key to understanding Obama. The neighborhood's broader intellectual heritage is at the heart of Obama's measured pragmatism. The University of Chicago may have a reputation as a bastion of conservative thought—home to the free-market gurus of the Chicago School of Economics, like the late George Stigler and Friedman, and to the high-culture mandarins of the Committee on Social Thought, like Leo Strauss and Allan Bloom. Yet Hyde Park was also where Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, and Roderick McKenzie founded the Chicago School of Sociology with their pioneering studies of urban life. The Hyde Park community is built on the idea that people can work together despite their disagreements. That willingness to take seriously the views of others is at the heart of Obama's measured pragmatism and his ability to reframe traditional divisive issues in new ways.

As has been much observed, Obama's politics don't always seem to hew neatly to a traditional line—he appears ready to compromise, to work with others, to "reach across the aisle." At worst, this might look like wishy-washy indecision or a betrayal of liberal ideology; this past June, for example, Obama angered many on the left when he supported FISA legislation that legalized many forms of surveillance. But at best, Obama promotes a politics of [Pragmatism](#)—a strain of the empirically based philosophy developed by William James, Charles Sanders Peirce, and John Dewey, an educational reformer and philosopher who joined the University of Chicago faculty shortly after John D. Rockefeller founded the university in 1891. Pragmatism stresses solutions more than first principles, as does the senator himself. Defending his FISA decision, he told reporters, "Given the legitimate threats we face, providing effective intelligence collection tools with appropriate safeguards is too important to delay. So I support the compromise, but do so with a firm pledge that as president, I will carefully monitor the program."

Of course, Barack isn't from Hyde Park. But the places we make our homes as adults say as much about who we are as the places we come from. The University of Chicago has a reputation for being conservative—mainly because of a handful of its most famous faculty, including Friedman, Strauss, and Bloom. But its real emphasis, viewed more objectively, falls less on political ideology and more on a concern with how ideas can be transmitted into realities. The purism of the free-market Chicago School may arguably seem very different from the empirically based concerns of Pragmatism, and the conservatism of Milton Friedman may seem diametrically opposed to that of a Chicago reformer like Jane Addams. But what unifies them all is an adherence to the notion that ideas can be and *should* be acted on to change reality. Dewey didn't just develop pedagogical theories. He founded the [University of Chicago Laboratory Schools](#) and then used his experiences in those schools as material for his books on education.

At the same time, Hyde Park's racially and (to some degree) economically integrated community only underscores the need for putting ideas into practice. It may be instructive to compare Hyde Park and the University of Chicago to Cambridge and Harvard (where the more abstract philosophy of Transcendentalism developed). In Hyde Park, students and teachers live in an ivory tower, sure. (The other day I saw a young couple flirting over copies of Simone de Beauvoir's *Being and Nothingness* and Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*.) But they do so in the most racially integrated neighborhood of a famously segregated city, often meeting up for lunch at Valois, a famous restaurant that also served as the subject for the sociologist Mitchell Duneier's [Slim's Table](#), a study of black masculinity and values. (Hyde Park, of course, has also been the home of Harold Washington, Chicago's first African-American mayor, as well as Louis Farrakhan, Jesse Jackson, and Jesse Jackson Jr.) Given this cauldron of interconnectivity, it makes sense that many of the traditions here are more sociological than, say, literary, and that an emphasis falls on transforming not only the way people think but the way they act. "Surely one of the reasons he found himself at home in the neighborhood and the university was its seriousness," Andrew Patner, a journalist and longtime resident of Hyde Park, told me. "It's a place for vigorous discourse, and it's a place where people say, 'Show me.' You've got to back up your points." It's easy to find echoes of this in the way Obama has sought not only to convince voters he's the right candidate for them but also to nudge them into taking *active* part in the democratic process.

Today, of course, there's a feeling that action is kicking into gear. At 7:30 this morning, Hyde Park had a hushed and formal feeling and the calm quiet of barely contained excitement. Couples with baby strollers walked together from the poll stations down leaf-strewn streets; the air was unseasonably warm, almost mildewy. Outside Barack Obama's house—an imposing mansion, in the grand Hyde Park tradition, at Hyde Park Boulevard and Greenwood—stood eight or so cops (most wearing bulletproof vests) guiding pedestrians away from the house and down another street.

Barack and Michelle were voting with their daughters at the Beulah Shoemith Elementary School a few blocks away. I wandered over. Landscaping trucks lined the streets, and workers were busy clearing away ivy and leaves, as if to make way for new growth. The Obamas had just left the school when I arrived. But the line to vote still stretched out the door, and cameramen were interviewing voters. Off to the right, a group of kids were laughing and playing. One asked a teacher, "Do we have to go to school today?"

Over at Medici, a local coffee shop and bakery Obama used to frequent, I bought a coffee and a chocolate croissant; the cashiers were bustling around, and one said crossly to another: "I can't do that today; I'm going to vote." On the back of the

cashiers' shirts it said: "OBAMA EATS HERE." I asked one when she'd last seen him.

"Not since February," she said. "But Michelle and the kids eat brunch here every Sunday—and it's Secret Service *everywhere*." She rolled her eyes. I asked if she'd had time to vote yet, and she said: "I'm voting when I get off at 2. I've never been so frantic to vote. If I have to wait in line until tomorrow morning, I will."

Outside, the windows in both the stately homes and the apartment buildings here are cluttered with Obama-Biden signs and the word "HOPE." Along one of the boulevards, not far from where a man sells incense out of the back of his car, you can find all sorts of bootlegged Obama swag, and in the storefronts are badly screened T-shirts of Obama looking ghostlike and pockmarked. There are no T-shirts with Milton Friedman's face on them, though one store here sells a University of Chicago shirt that reads, "Where Fun Comes to Die." Tonight, if Obama wins, surely fun will be alive in the streets for at least one night.

dispatches

The Undecided Amish

To vote or not to vote.

By Noreen Malone

Monday, November 3, 2008, at 4:35 PM ET

LANCASTER, Pa.—The 2008 election is a decidedly modern one, what with all the tabloid scandals, Internet smears, teen-pregnancy side plots, and non-white-male candidates. Which got me to thinking: What, exactly, would an earlier America have made of this year's historic race? How would, say, a simple farmer whisked from 100 years ago make sense of all that's going on?

So, I drove to Lancaster County, Pa., this fall in search of a niche vote *ne plus ultra*. In 2004, the Bush campaign devoted a disproportionate amount of resources to wooing the Amish, whose relatively small but [fast-growing](#) population is concentrated in important swing states—approximately in 48,000 in Pennsylvania alone and 227,000 nationally. The [Amish](#) are an Anabaptist sect whose way of life boils down to institutionalized anachronism: They steer clear of electricity whenever possible, interact very little with the broader modern world, and are permitted various exemptions from the U.S. government (from draft registration, schooling past the eighth grade, and the Social Security system, if they so choose).

Unsurprisingly enough, their über-traditional values and anti-government stances make them overwhelmingly Republican, among those Amish who choose to vote. But because they try to

remain as separate as possible from modernity, few Amish actually make it to the polling place—in Lancaster in '04, just about 13 percent of the eligible adult population voted. That was after a major get-out-the-vote effort from the Republicans, spearheaded by a former Amishman-turned-local-GOP-operative, that resulted in a 169 percent spike in new registrations among the Amish that year.

Despite the low turnout compared with national averages, it was a bumper crop of [plain people](#) at the polls—and depending on the margins in Pennsylvania, the McCain campaign could sure use the 1,300 or so Amish Lancaster votes Bush got in '04. With [early news reports](#) in '08 of Amish at Hillary Clinton rallies and Iraq weighing more heavily on the pacifist Amish than it was a few years ago, I thought those votes might be a little more up for grabs this year.

But looking for Amish voters is a little like trying to buy drugs. It's extremely awkward to walk up to someone and ask where to find them. Once you meet someone with a connection, however, they're everywhere you look. When I first arrived in Bird-in-Hand and Intercourse, the main Amish villages in Lancaster, I drove from farm to farm, stopping at those recognizable as Amish by the old-fashioned clothing hanging outside to dry. In an effort to casually strike up conversation about the election, I bought huge hunks of nonpasteurized cheese and ogled various wooden gezabos.

It didn't work. No one was at all weirded out by the stranger inviting herself into their backyards and asking prying questions—the Amish are gently tolerant of the booming tourist industry that's exoticized their simplicity—but my questions about whether they'd vote made already laconic people doubly so.

Egg-selling Verna Miller, for instance, wretched by five blond High German-speaking children like a bonneted Lady Madonna, explained to me that although her parents received a daily newspaper, since marrying her husband she'd stopped reading one. She didn't have the time, and from what she could see, little in the outside world affected her. Even if the election came down to just a few votes in Pennsylvania, she, like others, assured me that "God will make sure it's the right candidate." This frustrating explanation that a prayer is equal to a vote was offered up over and over. ([P. Diddy](#) never made it out to Bird-in-Hand, I guess.)

Most Amish, when pressed, told me it just wasn't their way to vote and that it never really had been. Or they said they didn't think they were informed enough to vote. They deflected my follow-ups with politely repeated uses of the phrase "I don't rightly know" and apologetic, disarming grins that could put the most expert flacks to shame. Their attitude would be described as apathetic in nearly every other circumstance; here, it seemed more like conscientious objection. Lots of people seemed aware

of the election only in the vaguest sense, a reality that boggled my [FiveThirtyEight](#)-obsessed mind. What they had heard about the election was spotty—they'd heard Obama was a foreign-born Muslim, for instance, or that he was definitely going to make gay marriage legal.

In fact, the pacifist Amish were far more participatory in American government until the Civil War made them rethink the philosophical implications of active engagement. Even a generation ago, it was common practice for local Republicans to herd carpools of nondriving Amish to the polls, but no one could quite say why that stopped—maybe the Republicans needed the Amish vote less for local elections; maybe the Amish had grown disenchanted with the corruption of politics.

In that sense, the GOP's '04 wooing of the Amish was a throwback. Despite several [speeches](#) in the county, neither campaign has pursued the Amish specifically the way Bush, who made a special trip to meet with Amish leaders, did. (Obama's campaign, in a particularly tone-deaf attempt to woo the noncomputer-using Amish, actually created an "[Amish for Obama](#)" community blog. Its handful of sporadic posters don't exactly appear to represent the throbbing heart of the Amish community—one appears to have simply joined the first 10 community blogs as listed alphabetically; another is a religious Jew from Nevada.) But at least the Obama campaign sent canvassers into Bird-in-Hand and Intercourse; the Amish I spoke to in early October hadn't seen anyone going door-to-door for McCain. (Neither of the campaigns responded to my queries about Amish outreach.)

Convinced the Amish voter was the Loch Ness monster of the Eastern seaboard, I headed back to try to find the Bird-in-the-Hand Bake Shop, whose Amish owner I'd been told was spotted chanting for Sarah Palin at a McCain rally. Lost along buggy-populated Route 340, I pulled off and asked a woman for directions. She turned out to be the wife of one of the biggest Amish political junkies in Lancaster. I was in.

Dan and Fannie Fisher live on Enterprise Road in the most bustling area of Bird-in-Hand. It turns out that most of the Amish voters live near the center of town, where they're more tied into the mainstream economy, have more contact with non-Amish, and are likely to read a newspaper. Because of that, they're considered "liberal" by their more traditional brethren farther out in farm country—it's an urban-rural divide writ very small.

Like the other Amish voters I met, "liberal" Dan was staunchly Republican, though he wasn't pleased with this year's choices. (So much for my up-for-grabs theory.) McCain lacks the religiosity and traditional values Bush pushed, though several people told me they thought Sarah Palin was bringing the ticket in the right direction. ("She's for country people.") Women are expected to be subservient to men in the Amish community and

devote their lives to homemaking, but I was told that since Palin wasn't on the top of the ticket, it was probably OK for her to run. I didn't meet a single woman who told me she was going to vote, even Fannie, who clearly had been following the race along with her husband.

"The country" isn't ready for a woman or a black president, I heard repeatedly. Obama was too "inexperienced," which turned out several times to be a soft buildup to blunt racism. There's a huge fear of the unknown in the Amish community. Immigration and national security were of massive concern, as was the problem of too many people asking for "handouts" from the government. The Amish have their own health care system, in which members of the community make sure everyone is covered no matter what, but reject anything like it on a national scale. They don't think it can work when everyone doesn't have the same values. Dan's son Paul, a supreme fiscal conservative, referenced the Founding Fathers over and over to me in defending his ideas.

In many ways, these were some of the most high-minded, philosophical conversations I've had about the election. No one kvetched about McCain's verbal tics or speculated on Levi's ring tattoo. The national soap opera of the election, an embarrassingly large part of the media I consume, isn't playing here. Lipstick on a pig gives me something to talk about on Gchat with my friend on another coast; the Fishers' gossip and circle is local.

The Amish who vote won't pass judgment on those who don't—it's a free choice they've made, and for all their passion about politics, they would never pressure one of their neighbors into voting. It's an oddly tolerant attitude to see right after you've been asked how in good conscience you can vote for a black man. But following the news and thinking about the ideas behind it is an escape for some from a community that gives a very difficult set of rules to live by.

election scorecard

Presidential Race

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 12:06 PM ET

The polls in Ohio are all over the place, with six surveys returning margins from a [six-point lead](#) for Obama to a [two-point lead](#) for McCain. As a result, [Pollster.com](#) has changed its trend in the state from "lean Obama" to "tossup." In Colorado, a [FOX/Rasmussen poll](#) shows Obama with a four-point lead while a [YouGov/Polimetrix poll](#) shows him with a 14-point lead. This prompted Pollster.com to change its trend in the state from "lean Obama" to "safe Obama."—*Abby Callard*

absentee ballot applications, be either destroyed with a "criss-cross shredder" or sent to a "qualified, certified and bonded document disposal business."

Most of the time, this process of storing and then destroying the ballots is pretty mundane. But in a couple of recent cases, critics have questioned whether 22 months is long enough. After the Florida recount, lawyers and historians [made the case](#) that the ballots should be kept for posterity's sake; today, members of the public can stop by and view them at the Florida State Archives. (See this [Explainer](#) from the days immediately following the recount for details of the original plans for storing the ballots.) In Ohio, a judge presiding over [a lawsuit](#) brought by groups alleging voter suppression and fraud during the 2004 election ordered that the county boards keep ballots past September 2006, when their 22-month period expired. But documents obtained by the plaintiffs show that in many Ohio counties, the ballots weren't all kept as mandated—an error officials blamed on miscommunications following the judge's order.

Bonus Explainer: Nationally, [98 percent of precincts](#) had reported their election results as of early Thursday afternoon, according to CNN. But Oregon and Washington are both listed as having at least 20 percent of votes outstanding. How come the Northwest states are so slow to count their votes?

Because most voters there vote by mail. That makes counting the votes a much longer process, as election officials must verify more information and handle more paper. Moreover, while election results typically refer to the percent of precincts reporting, that number doesn't really apply in Washington or Oregon. In Oregon, where the ballots must arrive by Election Day, the "percent reported" number refers to the percentage of ballots counted compared with the number of registered voters in the state. So unless every voter casts a ballot, that number will never reach 100 percent. (Officials expect turnout will be closer to 85 percent this year.) In Washington, things are even more complicated; voters there [only need to postmark their ballots](#) by Election Day, so counties may have to wait a few days to receive every vote.

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

Explainer thanks Sarah Cherry of Ohio State University's Moritz College of Law, Tim Humphries of the Office of the Arkansas Secretary of State, Don Hamilton of the Office of the Oregon Secretary of State, and David Ammons of the Office of the Washington Secretary of State.

explainer

The Presidential Transition FAQ

election scorecard

Pennsylvania Shifts

Polls in Pennsylvania show Obama's lead narrowing.
Monday, November 3, 2008, at 11:37 AM ET

explainer

What Happens to All the Ballots From Election Day?

They'll likely be shredded by Christmas of 2010.
By Jacob Leibenluft
Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 5:51 PM ET

With [all but a few House and Senate races](#) decided, election officials around the country are finishing up the process of counting the vote. When all is said and done, those officials will have processed [more than 120 million ballots](#). What happens to them after they've been tallied up?

They'll be stored until at least September 2010. According to [U.S. code](#), ballots and other records related to any federal election—that means for president, U.S. Senate, or U.S. House of Representatives—must be kept for at least 22 months. Beyond that, it's up to the state to decide what to do with them. In most cases, the details of ballot storage during that interval are left up to local election boards.

In [Arkansas](#), for example, board of election commissioners in each county keep the ballots for 20 days, after which point they can place them in a secured area in the county courthouse or a government warehouse. After two years, the ballots may be destroyed. State laws don't typically say how to destroy an old ballot. (In Maine, for example, the rule simply dictates that they be "destroyed using [a method that makes the contents unreadable](#)." [PDF]) Conversations with election officials at a half-dozen locations across the country revealed that shredding appears to be the method of choice. (Sending ballots straight to a recycling center is another option.) The Ohio secretary of state issued a more specific [directive last year](#) (PDF) requiring that voter registration materials, including personal information like

Does the president-elect get to ride around in Air Force One-elect? And other questions ...

By Juliet Lapidos

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 6:59 PM ET

Speaking from the White House Rose Garden this morning, President Bush [promised a smooth changing of the guard](#) between his outgoing administration and Barack Obama's incoming one: "During this time of transition," he said, "I will keep the president-elect fully informed of important decisions." The 77-day lame-duck interlude between today and Jan. 20 raised a slew of questions for Explainer readers:

Who pays for the transition team?

Taxpayers. Before the passage of the [Presidential Transition Act of 1963](#), the president- and vice-president-elect and their party raised private money to support the changeover. As Rep. Dante Fascell of Florida put it during House floor debates, "It just does not seem proper and necessary to have [the president- and vice-president-elect] going around begging for money to pay for the cost of what ought to be the legitimate costs of Government." The [General Services Administration](#), the agency tasked with doling out funds, had \$7.1 million at its disposal for the 2000-01 transition, including \$1.83 million for the outgoing Clinton administration, \$4.27 million for the incoming Bush team, and a \$1 million cushion for any additional expenses incurred. This year, the budget provides \$8.52 million.

Private donors contribute, too. This year, for example, the Obama campaign created a nonprofit entity called the "[Obama Transition Project](#)," which accepts donations up to \$5,000 for transition-related expenses.

Where does the transition team work?

The GSA has already prepared a 120,000 square-foot space in downtown Washington, D.C., for Obama's [committee](#). Since the 500 or so people who will work on the transition aren't yet federal employees, they don't have access to secure government computer networks. But the GSA has set up a separate network with access to e-mail and shared servers. Some transition team members work out of the president-elect's home-state election headquarters—in this case, Illinois.

Does the president-elect get to fly around in a special plane, like an Air Force One-elect?

Not really. Bush gets to keep his exclusive seat aboard [Air Force One](#) until inauguration day. The Obama team may use Transition Act funds to charter a plane or hire cars.

When does the president-elect start getting intelligence briefings?

Right away. Key CIA officials met on Wednesday to discuss the transition, and on Thursday National Intelligence Director Michael McConnell will give Obama his first briefing. After an initial lay-of-the-land chat, the CIA will provide Obama with

critical overnight intelligence and clue him in to any ongoing covert operations.

As Obama puts together his administration, the Joint Staff transition team—which includes representatives from the Army, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Navy—will prepare briefings on developments in Iraq and Afghanistan, the mechanics of managing the military, and disaster management.

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

Explainer thanks Martha Kumar of Towson University.

explainer

Is Free Coffee Against the Law?

Yes, if it's in exchange for your vote.

By Abby Callard and Noreen Malone

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 6:25 PM ET

Starbucks announced Saturday that stores would be offering a [free "tall" coffee](#) to anyone who voted today; Krispy Kreme promised a [doughnut with red, white, and blue sprinkles](#). *USA Today* compiled a cheat sheet [keeping track](#) of other swag offers on Election Day, including chicken, beer, and sex toys. Wait a second, [isn't this voter bribery illegal?](#)

Yes, though it probably wouldn't be prosecuted. Federal law [states](#) it's a crime to offer, solicit, or accept any "expenditure to any person, either to vote or withhold his vote." Those who violate the rule are subject to imprisonment for up to one year, a fine, or both. (At least three of the companies offering Election Day giveaways—Starbucks, Krispy Kreme, and Ben & Jerry's—have since changed their offers. Now they're offering [free stuff to everyone](#), not just people who claim to have voted.)

Although rewarding people for turnout has been against federal law since 1948, voter-bribery cases have been pursued much more seriously since the [Voting Rights Act of 1965](#). That bill, intended to eliminate discriminatory practices that were occurring on a state level, resulted in more federal voting oversight and signaled that any sort of election tampering would be taken seriously. By the late 1970s, authorities had begun to crack down on the practice of giving out "[walking-around money](#)" to prospective voters on Election Day. (Today, political parties are generally permitted to distribute cash and other goodies but only to their campaign volunteers—not directly to the voters.)

But the government can't possibly prosecute every single minor "inducement" for voters. Likewise, the corporate giveaways

announced in recent days are extremely unlikely to draw serious investigation. Although the chains offering freebies are clearly in violation of the law, the civil rights division of the Department of Justice isn't likely to devote the time and money required to bring a suit against major corporations for a fairly benign infraction. The feds might be more inclined to pursue a case if the companies were targeting their offers to specific areas—say, free Starbucks for people who voted in heavily Democratic San Francisco. In that case, the promotion might be seen as a direct attempt to lure more Democrats to the polls. But since it appears certain that the companies were looking to grab publicity and possibly a tax write-off with the patriotic giveaways, they're getting off with a warning. A spokesman for the Washington secretary of state, whose office first informed Starbucks' corporate counsel that it was breaking the law, said the "friendly" warning was intended to highlight the state's vigilance in preventing all kinds of voting irregularities this year.

The federal ban against voting *quid pro quo* only applies to national ballots. Many states have similar rules on the books, but some are a bit more lenient. In California, for example, it's perfectly legal to reward voters for showing up to the polls in a local election—but it's against the rules to buy a vote for a specific candidate. (In theory, Starbucks could hand out cups of coffee—or, indeed, wads of cash—to induce turnout among California voters as long as no federal candidates were on the ballot.) In 1999, California State Assembly candidate Elihu Harris and the state Democratic Party sent mailers to predominantly African-American neighborhoods [offering a free chicken dinner](#) for anyone who could prove that they voted. Even in this case, no charges were filed—on the grounds that the election was strictly local and that Harris wasn't demanding a vote for himself.

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

Explainer thanks Sarah Cherry of Ohio State University, Rick Hasen of Loyola Law School in California, Nathaniel Persily of Columbia Law School, and David Stebenne of Ohio State University.

explainer

Voting From the Hospital

I got hit by a car over the weekend. Can I still cast a ballot on Election Day?

By Nina Shen Rastogi

Monday, November 3, 2008, at 6:41 PM ET

Over the three days leading up to Election Day, [close to a million Americans](#) are likely to have been admitted to hospital emergency rooms. Many of those will end up confined to a bed

throughout the course of the presidential election polling on Tuesday. Since the deadline for applying for mail-in absentee ballots was last week in most states, are these sick and injured people disenfranchised, too?

No, but they'll need to get an "emergency absentee ballot." Like everything election-related, the process for obtaining one varies from state to state and sometimes from county to county. In [New York](#), for example, you need to send a representative (like your spouse or your mom) to the Board of Elections with a regular absentee-ballot application—[available online](#)—along with a letter, signed by you, explaining your situation. Your proxy can then bring you an emergency ballot, which must be returned to the board office by 9 p.m. on Election Day.

The process is more onerous in [Virginia](#). There, you have to request an application first, then return a signed version and have it verified by local election officials before you can get your bandaged hands on a ballot. A designated representative must watch you complete your ballot and fill out a witness statement to that effect before ferrying the whole package over to the registrar's office by close of polls. (You'll also need a doctor's note.) [Pennsylvania](#) makes you or your representative go to court if your accident occurred after 5 p.m. on the Friday before elections.

In [West Virginia](#) and [Nevada](#), on the other hand, the mountain comes to Mohammed: In those states, you can request to have election commissioners dispatched to the hospital to collect your ballot. [Kentucky](#)'s laws allow for a hospitalized voter's spouse to get an emergency ballot, too. A few states—Alabama, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Texas—and the District of Columbia have jumped into the digital age and offer [downloadable emergency-ballot applications](#). However, these documents must still be printed out and submitted by mail or in person.

If you can manage to get yourself into an ambulance or family member's car, you may be able to vote curbside at your registered polling place. To find out what the rules are in your county, check with your [secretary of state](#) or your [local election office](#).

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

Explainer thanks Karen Lynn-Dyson and Matt Weil of the Election Assistance Commission, the Staten Island Board of Elections Office, and Dan Tokaji of Ohio State.

faith-based

Does Religion Make You Nice?

Does atheism make you mean?

By Paul Bloom

Friday, November 7, 2008, at 7:05 AM ET

Many Americans doubt the morality of atheists. According to a [2007 Gallup poll](#), a majority of Americans say that they would not vote for an otherwise qualified atheist as president, meaning a nonbeliever would have a harder time getting elected than a Muslim, a homosexual, or a Jew. Many would go further and agree with conservative commentator Laura Schlessinger that morality requires a belief in God—otherwise, all we have is our selfish desires. In [The Ten Commandments](#), she approvingly quotes Dostoyevsky: "Where there is no God, all is permitted." The opposing view, held by a small minority of secularists, such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens, is that belief in God makes us worse. As [Hitchens puts it](#), "Religion poisons everything."

Arguments about the merits of religions are often battled out with reference to history, by comparing the sins of theists and atheists. (I see your Crusades and raise you Stalin!) But a more promising approach is to look at empirical research that directly addresses the effects of religion on how people behave.

In a review published in [Science](#) last month, psychologists Ara Norenzayan and Azim Shariff discuss several experiments that lean pro-Schlessinger. In one of their own studies, they primed half the participants with a spirituality-themed word jumble (including the words *divine* and *God*) and gave the other half the same task with nonspiritual words. Then, they gave all the participants \$10 each and told them that they could either keep it or share their cash reward with another (anonymous) subject. Ultimately, the spiritual-jumble group parted with more than twice as much money as the control. Norenzayan and Shariff suggest that this lopsided outcome is the result of an evolutionary imperative to care about one's reputation. If you think about God, you believe someone is watching. This argument is bolstered by other research that they review showing that people are more generous and less likely to cheat when others are around. More surprisingly, people also behave better when exposed to posters with eyes on them.

Maybe, then, religious people are nicer because they believe that they are never alone. If so, you would expect to find the positive influence of religion outside the laboratory. And, indeed, there is evidence within the United States for a correlation between religion and what might broadly be called "niceness." In [Gross National Happiness](#), Arthur Brooks notes that atheists are less charitable than their God-fearing counterparts: They donate less blood, for example, and are less likely to offer change to homeless people on the street. Since giving to charity makes one happy, Brooks speculates that this could be one reason why atheists are so miserable. In a 2004 study, twice as many religious people say that they are very happy with their lives,

while the secular are twice as likely to say that they feel like failures.

Since the United States is more religious than other Western countries, this research suggests that Fox talk-show host Sean Hannity was on to something when he asserted that the United States is "the greatest, best country God has ever given man on the face of the Earth." In general, you might expect people in less God-fearing countries to be a lot less kind to one another than Americans are.

It is at this point that the "We need God to be good" case falls apart. Countries worthy of consideration aren't those like North Korea and China, where religion is savagely repressed, but those in which people freely choose atheism. In his new book, [Society Without God](#), Phil Zuckerman looks at the Danes and the Swedes—probably the most godless people on Earth. They don't go to church or pray in the privacy of their own homes; they don't believe in God or heaven or hell. But, by any reasonable standard, they're nice to one another. They have a famously expansive welfare and health care service. They have a strong commitment to social equality. And—even without belief in a God looming over them—they murder and rape one another significantly less frequently than Americans do.

Denmark and Sweden aren't exceptions. A [2005 study by Gregory Paul](#) looking at 18 democracies found that the more atheist societies tended to have relatively low murder and suicide rates and relatively low incidence of abortion and teen pregnancy.

So, this is a puzzle. If you look within the United States, religion seems to make you a better person. Yet atheist societies do very well—better, in many ways, than devout ones.

The first step to solving this conundrum is to unpack the different components of religion. In [my own work](#), I have argued that all humans, even young children, tacitly hold some supernatural beliefs, most notably the dualistic view that bodies and minds are distinct. (Most Americans who describe themselves as atheists, for instance, nonetheless believe that their souls will survive the death of their bodies.) Other aspects of religion vary across cultures and across individuals within cultures. There are factual beliefs, such as the idea that there exists a single god that performs miracles, and moral beliefs, like the conviction that abortion is murder. There are religious practices, such as the sacrament or the lighting of Sabbath candles. And there is the community that a religion brings with it—the people who are part of your church, synagogue, or mosque.

The positive effect of religion in the real world, to my mind, is tied to this last, community component—rather than a belief in constant surveillance by a higher power. Humans are social beings, and we are happier, and better, when connected to

others. This is the moral of sociologist Robert Putnam's work on American life. In *Bowling Alone*, he argues that voluntary association with other people is integral to a fulfilled and productive existence—it makes us "smarter, healthier, safer, richer, and better able to govern a just and stable democracy."

The Danes and the Swedes, despite being godless, have strong communities. In fact, Zuckerman points out that most Danes and Swedes identify themselves as Christian. They get married in church, have their babies baptized, give some of their income to the church, and feel attached to their religious community—they just don't believe in God. Zuckerman suggests that Scandinavian Christians are a lot like American Jews, who are also highly secularized in belief and practice, have strong communal feelings, and tend to be well-behaved.

American atheists, by contrast, are often left out of community life. The studies that Brooks cites in *Gross National Happiness*, which find that the religious are happier and more generous than the secular, do not define *religious* and *secular* in terms of belief. They define it in terms of religious attendance. It is not hard to see how being left out of one of the dominant modes of American togetherness can have a corrosive effect on morality. As P.Z. Myers, the biologist and prominent atheist, puts it, "[S]cattered individuals who are excluded from communities do not receive the benefits of community, nor do they feel willing to contribute to the communities that exclude them."

The sorry state of American atheists, then, may have nothing to do with their lack of religious belief. It may instead be the result of their outsider status within a highly religious country where many of their fellow citizens, including very vocal ones like Schlessinger, find them immoral and unpatriotic. Religion may not poison everything, but it deserves part of the blame for this one.

family

Embarrassing Obama Kids

What do you do when your child's partisanship is too extreme?

By Emily Bazelon

Monday, November 3, 2008, at 5:24 PM ET

In our soccer carpool of 8-year-olds on Saturday morning, the trash talk was about Tuesday's election, welded onto the trick-or-treating of the night before. It went like this:

Dylan: You went over to the McCain side of the porch?

Siddhartha: I just wanted to see what it was like!

Eli: Traitor!

Siddhartha: But they were giving out more candy over there!

Dylan: Traitor!

Witness the harsh and sometimes hostile partisanship of the sweet liberal children I know. In our town of many academics (New Haven, Conn.), Yale economist Dean Karlan used Halloween to conduct an [experiment](#) about the voting preferences of 551 kids who showed up on his front porch as Paul Revere and Albert Einstein and pirates and bandits and armadillos and Chinese dancers and ladybugs. Karlan set up a big McCain sign and a life-size cutout of the candidate on one side of his porch, and a big Obama sign and the corresponding cutout on the other. A squad of graduate students sat behind two tables, recording the kids' ages, genders, and responses. We live in a blue neighborhood in a blue city in a blue state, so it's not surprising that when given a straight-up choice, about 78 percent of the kids chose Obama. About the same proportion of New Haven voters cast their ballots for John Kerry in 2004.

To make things more interesting, Karlan and his minions asked a second group of kids (randomly selected, naturally) a different question: "You can get two pieces of candy from the Obama table or four pieces of candy from the McCain table. Which do you prefer?"

The McCain side of the porch picked up some kids like Siddhartha—the self-maximizers or chocolate-lovers or free-thinkers of the group. But Obama's support dropped only about 10 percentage points, to 68 percent. Most of the kids, like Eli and Dylan, stuck to their partisan guns. Karlan calls these results "strikingly inelastic," meaning that doubling the McCain incentive seemed to move few kids. This is a liberal version of Thomas Frank's [What's the Matter With Kansas thesis](#)—the kids voted against their own economic (or at least acquisitional) self-interest because of a perceived cultural benefit that offered more psychic reward. Karlan points out that because there was a line at the Obama table, his results probably understate the Obama preference because "the candy acquisition process took longer"—the kids couldn't snatch their candy and greedily run to the next house. One more wrinkle: Kids below the age of 8 weren't moved by the promise of extra candy. Thirty percent of them went to the McCain side of the porch whether they were offered two pieces of candy for McCain or four. The 8-and-up kids, however, chose the Obama table 92 percent of the time when the candy offered was equal and 73 percent of the time when McCain meant more chocolate.

Maybe Siddhartha and the other defectors understood that their McCain "vote" wasn't really a vote at all, whereas the younger kids didn't. And maybe Dylan and Eli are just stalwart: They claimed they would have stuck with their choice when I asked them whether they would have gone for the four pieces of candy if Karlan's house had been the only one giving out chocolate that night instead of just one stop along the Halloween Milky Way.

I suppose I should applaud the strength of their convictions. But the dark side to their partisanship is the traitor-bashing. Our kids are raised on a steady diet of tolerance, but, given the chance, they signal allegiance by turning on whomever they can pin as a bad guy. They don't get many chances at that, really. There just aren't a lot of enemies in their lives. Railing against McCain supporters functions as a safe outlet for hostility and even hatred. For my sons Eli and Simon and most of their friends, die-hard Republicans are an abstract concept. They know people who differ from them by race and ethnicity and religion, and they get that it's not OK to judge by those categories. On their soccer team are kids who are working-class rather than well-off, and I think they also understand that class isn't a flag to rally around either. They may have met a libertarian or two, but they've never talked politics with a serious conservative.

And so I fear the election is teaching them not only about the joy of supporting an appealing candidate but also about the more vicious pleasures of despising the other side—with a zeal that's usually off-limits to them. Also during the soccer carpool, the kids discussed a pumpkin with Obama carvings that had gotten smashed, and one of them said, "It must have been those McCain-loving teenagers." Which led to a gleeful discussion about fighting back with bombs and guns. I winced. As did one of my colleagues over drawings her 3-year-old son did at synagogue this weekend. At first, he drew a stick figure with its arms raised. "That's Obama," he said to nobody. Then the stick figure reappeared, lying prone. "Dead McCain," he muttered.

This makes us feel like terrible mothers because of the mirror our kids are holding up. Thinkers who debunk the influence of parents over their children's personalities, such as [Judith Rich Harris](#), author of *The Nurture Assumption*, note that political preference is one domain in which parents' views do matter to kids. The opinions they hear parents express may have only a temporary influence, but the communities they grow up in, which parents choose, have a more lasting effect. For those reasons, as well as some contribution from the genes they inherit, kids with liberal parents are more likely to be liberals themselves, and the same goes for conservative lineage. This is fine with me. But I'd like to see my kids expressing a purer, nobler version of my political preferences, not a baser one. As is often the case, the shimmering ideal of childhood innocence doesn't last long in the face of real kids. Instead of presenting me with a thoughtful, gentle version of the values my husband and I

like to think we transmit, my kids are at the moment showering us with rancor.

In an effort to pull them back from the partisan abyss, I showed my kids the utterly winning video of the kids from the Ron Clark Academy of Atlanta who are singing, in a nonpartisan friendly fashion, about how "[You can vote however you like](#)." After watching this [interview](#) with them, Eli triumphantly pointed out that they are almost all Obama supporters. "Now can we watch [that video](#) where they say that John McCain talks like a dump truck?" he asked. Oh well. At least it will all be over by the time they finish eating their Halloween Obama candy.

fighting words

McCain's Shameful Slur

The Republicans' appalling attack on Rashid Khalidi.

By Christopher Hitchens

Monday, November 3, 2008, at 12:09 PM ET

On the clouded synapses of Sen. John McCain, it became clear as his campaign limped and lurched to its close, the termites had been dining long and dining well. However much one might have admired the low comedy of his closing routine on [Saturday Night Live](#), it had to be admitted that even in that context, he looked a trifle glassy and elderly, not to say lost. No doubt there was some safe refuge to be taken, by himself and his absurd choice of running mate, in self-deprecation. The true ghastliness, however, was revealed in the crudeness of the McCain-Palin attempt to deprecate others.

A few feeble cracks on a comedy show are not enough to erase the memory of a vulgar and vicious attack, mounted on a rival candidate McCain has publicly called "honorable," only a few days earlier. It had been said that Sen. Barack Obama had once attended a dinner for professor Rashid Khalidi, a distinguished Palestinian academic. It was further said that the *Los Angeles Times*, which had first reported the five-years-ago dinner in Chicago, was deliberately [withholding a videotape](#) of the evening that would show Obama in the audience while tough criticism of Israel was being voiced. Here is how the Republican nominee for the presidency of the United States described the situation in a radio interview in Miami:

I'm not in the business of talking about media bias, but what if there was a tape with John McCain with a neo-Nazi outfit being held by some media outlet? I think the treatment of the issue would be slightly different.

I presume that in this fantastic piece of semicoherent Florida pandering McCain meant to imply the wearing of a neo-Nazi outfit rather than the membership of one, but it was hardly necessary for him to be so arch as to disclaim an interest in "talking about media bias." After all, his campaign maintains and accouters a running mate who will do all that for him and will furthermore read anything that is put in front of her (or, if it is a [hoax call](#), will believe anything that is told to her) and who opined, on the same subject:

What we don't know is how Barack Obama responded to these slurs on a country that he professes to support, and the reason we don't know is the newspaper that has this tape, the *Los Angeles Times*, refuses to release it. It must be nice for a candidate to have major news organizations looking out for their best interests like that.

And it must be easy for a woman who couldn't, when first asked, name a single newspaper or magazine that she had ever read, to become such an instant expert on the press. It was last April when the paper disclosed the original event. Now it's being accused of covering up the event!

My main point, though, is not to call attention to the bullying and demagoguery of McCain's attack. It is to observe how completely it undermines any claim on his part to foreign-policy experience. Khalidi has been known to me for some time and can easily be read and consulted by anyone with the remotest curiosity about the Israeli-Arab dispute. He is highly renowned, well beyond the borders of his own discipline, for his measure and care and scruple in weighing the issue. If he is seriously to be compared to a "neo-Nazi," then the Republican nominee has put the United States in the unbelievable position of slandering the most courageously "moderate" of the Palestinian Arabs as a brownshirt and a fascist. What then has been the point of every negotiation on a two-state solution since President George H.W. Bush convened the [peace conference](#) in Madrid in 1991? Nazis, after all, are to be crushed, not accommodated. One would have to think hard before coming up with a more crazy and irresponsible statement on any subject. Once again, it seems that McCain utterly lost his bearings.

I put the word *moderate* in quotation marks above because I dislike employing it in its usual form. Rashid Khalidi's family is a famous one in Jerusalem, long respected by Arab and Christian and Jew and Druze and Armenian, and holding a celebrated house and position in the city since approximately the time of the Crusades. I have had the honor of being invited to this very house. If Rashid chooses to state that he doesn't care to be evicted from his ancestral home in order to make way for some settler from Brooklyn who claims to have God on his side, I think he has a perfect right to say so. I would go further and say that if Barack Obama was looking for a Palestinian friend, he

could not have chosen any better. But perhaps John McCain has decided that he doesn't need any Palestinian friends and neither do we. Perhaps he thinks it's all right to refer to refugees and victims of occupation, who have been promised self-determination and statehood at the podium of the United Nations and the U.S. Congress by George Bush and Condoleezza Rice, as if they were Hitlerites. How shameful. How disgusting. How ignorant.

One could go a step further and say that many Israelis have used the words *apartheid* and *terrorist* to describe at least some of their government's policies. In just the same way, one could note that Khalidi has clearly denounced violence when used by his "own" side, and also—this I remember very well from meeting him in Beirut in the 1970s and '80s—when employed by regimes like the Syrian. But somehow this evidence and this reflection has become beside the point. McCain saw a chance to deal a cheap and low blow, and he had the ideally ignorant deputy to reinforce him. The slander, after all, might get them through another news cycle and perhaps adhere some defamatory mud to their opponent. Who cares that it made the United States of America look thuggish and ignorant and petty in the eyes of any thinking person in the Middle East? Anyone who does care should be getting ready to vote against this humiliating ticket, a team that so farcically and horribly unites the senescent and the puerile.

foreigners

The Obama Advantage

How race was his ace in the hole.

By Anne Applebaum

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 3:34 PM ET

Way back in January, soon after Barack Obama won an improbable victory in the Iowa caucuses, I wrote an [article](#) arguing that—despite the conventional wisdom and the snide "white Americans will never vote for a black man" comments from my European friends—it was not a disadvantage to be a black presidential candidate. On the contrary, it was an enormous advantage.

I was right—but for the wrong reasons. At the time, when his main opponent was Hillary Clinton, I thought Obama's skin color helped distinguish him from the Bushes, the Clintons, and the other dynastic families that then appeared to have an inexorable grip on American politics. His face alone told voters that he was the true anti-oligarchical, anti-status-quo outsider in the race. If nothing else, it identified him as a candidate who was definitely not related, or married, to a former president. But while not being Mrs. Clinton helped him win the primaries, not

being white helped him even more in the national election—and not only among black voters or guilty white liberals.

Why? Because all Americans, white and black, liberal and conservative, are brought up to believe that their country is different, special, the "greatest nation on earth," a "city on a hill." We are all taught that our system is just, our laws are fair, our Constitution is something to be proud of. Lately, though, this self-image has taken a battering. We are fighting two wars, neither with remarkable success. We have just experienced a cataclysmic financial crisis. We are about to enter a recession. We are unloved around the world, and we know it. Electing our first black president won't by itself solve any of these problems, but—to use the pop-psychological language for which Americans are justly famous—it sure makes us feel good about ourselves. That hysteria you saw on television in Chicago was, yes, partly about the return of the Democrats and partly about the passing of George Bush. As the rain-on-the-parade [dispensers of sour grapes](#) are already writing, it was absolutely about ideology, too. But it was also about relief: We really are a land of opportunity!

I think Obama knew this. It certainly explains why he started his [acceptance speech](#) by declaring, "If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible ... tonight is your answer." Strange though it sounds, I think McCain knew it, too: It explains why he went out of his way to [praise Obama](#) for "inspiring the hopes of so many millions of Americans who had once wrongly believed that they had little at stake or little influence in the election of an American president."

A century ago, he reminded his somber, occasionally booing audience, an earlier American president, Theodore Roosevelt, was widely condemned for inviting black educator [Booker T. Washington](#) to dinner at the White House: "America today is a world away from the cruel and frightful bigotry of that time. There is no better evidence of this than the election of an African-American to the presidency of the United States." He didn't have to say that—but he wanted a little of that "America is great again" feeling. He, too, was attracted, touched by the idea of a black president.

Maybe it's superficial, and surely it won't last. But I am convinced that it explains a lot, both about the election result and about this weirdly euphoric aftermath. That desire to feel, once again, like "the greatest nation on earth" explains why my friend J. the Republican cried when she watched Obama's acceptance speech, even though she didn't vote for him; why people stood in those long lines to vote, all across the country; why I woke my children on Wednesday morning by singing "God Bless America."

In, the end, it comes down to this: All Americans are told, as children, that "anyone can grow up to be president of the United

States." Because we have a black president we can now, however briefly, once again feel certain that it's true.

foreigners

The Surprising Absence of an October Surprise

How did we get through the election without an al-Qaida attack?

By Daniel Byman

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 7:00 AM ET

Terrorism watchers repeatedly warned that al-Qaida might strike in the days leading up to the election, but—thankfully—Nov. 4 has come and gone without incident. [Al-Qaida's logic for striking at election time](#) seems straightforward: An attack would dominate media coverage at a time when the entire world is focused on the United States. In a tight race, a terrorist attack might even tip the balance, enabling Osama Bin Laden to claim that American politics dances to his tune.

Democratic strategists in particular feared that an al-Qaida attack might play to Sen. John McCain's perceived national-security advantage and that Bin Laden would want to bolster McCain in the belief that he was more likely to entangle the United States militarily in the Muslim world. Spain's March 2004 general election was the precedent Democrats feared. The [bloody attacks on commuter trains](#) (and the Spanish government's bungled response) led to a surprise opposition victory, which in turn led to a Socialist government that withdrew troops from Iraq, as al-Qaida had sought.

But with the clarity of hindsight, we know that al-Qaida did not strike the U.S. homeland, nor did we hear of a serious attempt to do so during the months before the vote. (Before we relax too much, I should note that several experts warned that the post-election transition period is also a time of higher risk.) This is not because Osama Bin Laden lacks interest in an attack. As he knows, attacks on U.S. soil would be popular among his key constituents and would help him recruit and raise money. In addition, he genuinely believes that the United States is evil and deserves punishment.

So why didn't he strike? Here are several plausible explanations:

Bin Laden has other fish to fry. Although Americans understandably focus on the threat al-Qaida poses to the United States, from Bin Laden's point of view, we are only one concern among many—even if we are still a favorite target of his rhetoric. Al-Qaida's primary day-to-day focus is currently on events in Pakistan, where the organization is based, and Afghanistan, where it is helping to support the massive

insurgency that is battling the U.S.-backed government of President Hamid Karzai. As if this were not enough, al-Qaida has ambitions in Iraq, the Levant, the Maghreb, and Central Asia, as well as against Israel. These theaters are important to al-Qaida leaders, and many in the organization would prioritize them over attacks in the United States. Even if the United States remains the primary focus of al-Qaida's core leaders, expanding operations in several of these theaters provides the organization with opportunities to strike at America outside the U.S. homeland. The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan allow it to showcase one of its preferred methods: support for insurgents.

Al-Qaida's operational capacity is limited. Al-Qaida has re-established a base in the tribal areas of Pakistan, and its operational capacity is growing when compared with the organization's dark days in 2002. Al-Qaida can still plot attacks from Pakistan, and its propaganda is prodigious. But in many respects, Pakistan is a tougher haven than the Taliban's Afghanistan. Unlike Afghanistan in the pre-9/11 era, al-Qaida leaders in Pakistan spend much of their time battling and intimidating government forces, hiding from U.S. Predator strikes, or otherwise focusing on their daily survival.

U.S. government efforts at home are paying off. The Department of Homeland Security is much-maligned, but at least it is trying to stop jihadists from entering the United States. And trying counts. The FBI has made numerous arrests on terrorism charges (often, we find out later, on quite thin grounds), suggesting that it is aggressive in going after potential jihadist threats at home.

Aggressive intelligence efforts abroad keep us safer at home. More important than strictly domestic efforts, U.S. intelligence is working with its counterparts around the world to disrupt al-Qaida, making it harder for the organization to plan and mount sustained operations. Remember, preparations for the 9/11 attack occurred not only in the United States and Afghanistan but also in Germany, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and other countries. Such a global plot would be far more difficult to orchestrate today. Senior leaders would be more likely to be killed, and junior operatives would be more likely to be arrested.

Al-Qaida wants to outdo 9/11. Bin Laden does not think small, and he consistently seeks terrorism "spectaculars" against the United States (for example, the [plot to bomb multiple trans-Atlantic flights from the United Kingdom](#), which was foiled in August 2006). A spectacular attack might inflict mass casualties like 9/11, or it might involve fewer casualties but more publicity, such as an operation involving chemical weapons. This ambition may have dissuaded Bin Laden from making a low-level strike before the election. He may care more about a successful spectacular than he does about striking on or by a particular date.

There is no "al-Qaida of the United States." Even if the U.S. government were not more aggressive at home and abroad, al-Qaida's ability to operate in the United States is limited. In

contrast to Britain, Egypt, France, Saudi Arabia, Spain, and many other countries, the United States does not have a significant jihadist network within its borders. Many of those arrested in the United States on terrorism charges were incompetent dreamers who had little or no ties to the al-Qaida core, in contrast to their counterparts in Europe and the Arab world. Infiltrators that Bin Laden sends to the United States would find it hard to obtain local assistance as they prepare for an attack. The few radicalized American Muslims might still attack in al-Qaida's name, but the likelihood is far lower than in many other countries, and the skill level of the attackers would probably be limited, making a 9/11-scale operation particularly unlikely.

Although these explanations suggest we can relax a little in the lead-up to future elections, New Year's Day, the Super Bowl, and other events that attract concentrated media attention, it also means that much of our success depends on aggressive U.S. efforts at home and abroad. Most troubling, one explanation—operational capacity—is turning in al-Qaida's favor as the organization develops a haven in Pakistan, and another—Bin Laden's preference for spectaculars—suggests the next attack may be even bloodier or scarier. So, as we congratulate ourselves on making it past another milestone, we should also recognize the need for continued vigilance.

foreigners

Learning From Experience

Afghanistan stabilized after 9/11. Let's get back to what was working.

By Clare Lockhart

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 6:59 AM ET

Both candidates for the U.S. presidency pledged to make Afghanistan a top priority. The war there now tops the news on a daily basis with tales of the devastating hardships of the Afghan people and the deaths of Afghans and NATO soldiers. The untold story is that Afghanistan was well on its way to stability in 2004. It is essential that President Obama understands why the nation slipped into chaos. The challenge now is to win the peace.

After 9/11, stability was created through a partnership between the Afghan people and the international community. In December 2001, the [Bonn Agreement](#) laid out a political framework to allow increasing numbers of Afghans to become participants and stakeholders in their country's future, with a sequence of events set out in a clear timetable using mechanisms like the [loya jirga](#)—a national convention of Afghan representatives—that would be culturally familiar to Afghan citizens.

A group of Afghan leaders and managers was empowered to implement an economic reform agenda to complement the political process. It started with simple mechanisms such as putting in place a national currency. In 2001, there were at least three different currencies in circulation and millions of Afghans were required to buy a simple meal. The *hawala* dealers—the Afghan money changers—agreed with the government on a plan to change the currency, and before long a new currency was in use across the country. Afghanistan's new Cabinet designed its first post-Taliban budget, working out how many policemen, doctors, teachers, and soldiers would be required to keep the peace and restore essential services, and it set out a vision for the future of the country in the "National Development Framework." These leaders designed a transparent process to create a cell phone system where companies bid for licenses in return for a fair price to citizens and revenue to the government. The U.S. government made a risk guarantee available to investors. As a result, rather than the small numbers of satellite telephones that existed in 2001, there are now more than 5 million cell phones in the country, which have sent more than \$1 billion in revenue to the government. They also designed a national health system that set standards for health care and contracted out basic services in partnership with nongovernmental organizations.

A system of good governance called the National Solidarity Program saw a block grant of roughly \$20,000 allocated to thousands of villages across the country. Villagers could access the money if they followed three simple rules: elect a village council, have a quorum of the village meet to decide on projects, and then post accounts in a public place. The government hired NGOs to facilitate the process, but villagers decided how to use the money. This program is now operational in more than 22,000 villages across Afghanistan. Villagers participating in the program would often say that for the first time they felt like citizens, since someone was trusting them to make a decision. The leadership team also designed a ring road around the country to generate national unity and minimize geographical divisions. It set up a national public works program to create jobs. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it set up a reliable funding mechanism to finance their budget—and hired international firms to provide treasury management, accounting, auditing, and procurement assistance.

This process was not perfect, and—since there were no guidebooks on how to do state-building—it required a fair degree of improvisation. Some national programs—most notably an energy program, an irrigation program, and an agriculture program—were designed but not implemented because of insufficient funding. But the main trajectory was forward, with centripetal forces bringing Afghans and their near and far neighbors around the same table to discuss the issues and forge consensus. By the end of 2004, the Bonn Agreement was completed, and Afghanistan seemed firmly on track, significantly improving its rating on Transparency International's

[Corruption Perception Index](#). Suicide bombs were unheard of, and Afghans remained patient and hopeful.

I had the privilege to live and work in Afghanistan throughout this period. Two myths that many outsiders claim about Afghanistan have confounded me. One was that Afghans are naturally warlords, always have been, always will be. In fact, nearly all the Afghans I met craved law, order, justice, and fairness. From an old woman I met in Mazar-e-Sharif in January 2002 who demanded an accountable civil service, to the cheers in the *loya jirga* when it was announced that customs revenues would be properly administered, to my driver who would rather spend a night in jail than pay a 10-cent bribe to a policeman, the demand for accountability was overwhelming. I found a people of extraordinary intelligence and fair-mindedness, even after unimaginable sufferings, and, above all, a people yearning to be responsible participants in the global system. The second myth is that Afghanistan is naturally a poor country. Rather, and as the recent "[Operation Rampant Lion](#)" that mapped Afghanistan's geology shows, Afghanistan is blessed with significant natural resources, including copper, iron, emeralds, and marble. The country once had a flourishing agricultural sector famous throughout the world for its fruit and nuts. It is situated at the crossroads of Asia and the Gulf. The potential for the country to be not only self-sufficient but prosperous is very real.

What went wrong? This is not the time for a detailed account, but some elementary mistakes are worth highlighting. First, not enough money was allocated to the government at its nascent and most critical stage. In 2001, Afghanistan had 240,000 civil servants who had served through decades of war. The donors, in their infinite wisdom, allotted more than \$2 billion to their own agencies—the NGOs and U.N. agencies that then used the money to set up parallel organizations to the Afghan government—but provided a mere \$20 million to fund the government's entire budget for the first year. This sum barely covered fuel costs for a month, and as a result, the country's leaders spent much of this period scrambling to pay doctors, teachers, and policemen their meager \$50 per month salaries. Wages went unpaid, and, eventually, competent civil servants left their jobs in droves to take higher-paying positions in donor organizations, working as drivers, assistants, and translators. The government could not collect tax or customs duties since it did not have the means to control the borders and roads, which were held by militias that served as the proxy ground forces for military operations. The state coffers remained empty, and state functionality began to erode.

Second was a failure of the donors to realize that there are some functions of the state that Afghanistan, like any nation, needs to perform for itself. Initially, donors refused to fund programs to address good governance at the local level, such as to rebuild court houses, police stations, and administrative offices in the provinces and districts and to provide training and support to the Afghan officials staffing them. Donors rejected this plan,

claiming that a government-buildings program to restore basic infrastructure that had been destroyed in the years of war was not "poverty-reducing"; that a district good-governance program might be "dangerous," since the donors might not be able to reach all areas of the country to monitor; and that support for policing was outside their organizational mandates. The United States, Canada, and Great Britain did eventually step in to finance a district- and provincial-governance program, but only after two years had passed. The donors did eventually back the government's plan in 2004, and they made significant pledges for the future, but by that point the open window was closing and the reform team had been dismantled. The donors then overcompensated by supporting the government unconditionally, failing to ask for accountability in the fair budgeting and allocation of resources.

Third, there was a near total failure to invest in building the Afghan skills base. Donors insisted that the Afghan government should put no money in secondary or tertiary education for their own citizens, citing the Millennium Development Goals and the importance of primary education. While the MDG are worthy targets, it is not very wise to neglect investment in the next generation of leaders, managers, and professionals—or even bricklayers, plumbers, and electricians—in a country like Afghanistan. As a result, Afghanistan's youth remained forgotten and marginalized, yearning to contribute to their country's future but without the skills to do so.

Fourth was the extreme dysfunctionality of the aid complex in Afghanistan. Thousands of small, disparate projects were planned and implemented. This haphazardness confused villagers who might see three wells in one village but none in the next. Donor dollars were "salami-sliced" by the aid system, often through as many as four or five contractual layers. Consider the costs of security, travel, housing, and translation, and it is no surprise that a small proportion of any grant ever reaches the ground. The aid agencies wrote proposals for their projects with great enthusiasm but paid scant attention to supply-chain management, the functioning of the civil service, or the realities of implementation. There has yet to be a public audit of the first \$2.7 billion of donor projects in Afghanistan that the U.N. agencies raised money for after 9/11. These agencies failed to appreciate the most fundamental lesson of post-conflict reconstruction: As one of Europe's top diplomats put it, generally it is not about what *we* do; it is about what *they* do.

Reaching an impasse, my colleagues and I went to look at other parts of the world in search of patterns of success and failure in state-building. *Fixing Failed States*—a book I co-authored with Ashraf Ghani, the architect of much of the 2001-05 transition—sets out that learning.

What does this mean for Afghanistan now? Since 2005, Afghanistan has plunged from 117 to 176 on Transparency International's corruption ranking, one of the fastest declines in

the index's history. At the same time, the trust of Afghan citizens in their government has plummeted. If we take a step back and look to how countries transform themselves from poverty and conflict to stability, a basic principle rings loud and clear. A country is not stable until it has a functioning state that performs key functions for its citizens. And behind every successful transition are four factors: a leadership and management team with a long-term vision and commitment to building good governance based on the rule of law; a relentless focus by those leaders on what we call "national accountability systems"—putting in place the building blocks of transparent revenue raising, budgeting, procurement, accounting, and auditing; nurturing civil society, in particular by investing in skills and training of citizens within the country in question, who must be empowered to take the lead; and nurturing small- and medium-sized firms that will give people a stake in the system. With these basic ingredients, Afghanistan could be put on the path to stability.

Putting Afghanistan back on such a path will certainly require funding and expertise from outside, but in a different type of partnership based on joint commitment to rule of law and building an accountable state. The countries that transformed successfully all partnered with the aid system but with a clear vision for how best to use the money, with rights and responsibilities on both sides and clear recognition that domestic leadership was the critical factor. In the short term, resources and military commitments will be required for Afghanistan, but if good governance were restored, Afghanistan could be steadily raising its own revenue and meeting its own bills. A series of reinvigorated national programs managed and staffed by Afghans in partnership with development banks and experts would be far cheaper than the thousands of foreign-run projects. By supporting national programs in partnership with civil society, donors could shift their emphasis to creating a good governance system from the bottom up.

There is a whole range of organizations in the United States and across the world—from volunteer associations to land-grant colleges—that could partner with the effort at reasonable cost. New technologies, such as soil analysis of satellite imagery and using long-distance engineering and architecture support, could drastically reduce the costs of travel and security that are necessary when outsiders are on the ground; they could instead partner with Afghan engineers, architects, and agronomists at Afghanistan's universities. Rather than sending in thousands of civilians, the shift in emphasis could be to training Afghans to do the jobs themselves. Afghanistan has just sold its large copper mine to China and can license more of its assets to raise money. And if investors—especially Afghans—had confidence in the future of the country, they would start financing the range of enterprises necessary to create jobs and supply domestic and regional markets with food, building materials, textiles, and minerals, and thereby grow the domestic tax base.

Sadly, it is not just Afghanistan that we need to worry about. There are as many as 60 countries that are facing a "sovereignty gap"—that is, a gap between the legitimate expectations of their citizens and their ability to deliver on those expectations. If we can demonstrate that a new type of partnership works in Afghanistan, we can provide hope around the world.

foreigners

Voter Beware

Election Day myths you must resist.

By Anne Applebaum

Monday, November 3, 2008, at 8:23 PM ET

Tuesday is Election Day, and, as always, Election Day is fraught with peril. Beware the seductiveness of opinion polls, which can badly mislead. Beware the even greater attraction of exit polls, which have so often been wrong in the past. Beware the too-early commentary, the too-swift rush to judgment. And above all, beware that the hopeful, reassuring clichés that will be passed around in the next couple of days will give false succor to winners and losers alike.

The Republican Party will benefit from some time out of office. Not necessarily! Those Republicans who comfort themselves with this argument should remember the example of the British Conservative Party, which was ejected from power by Tony Blair in 1997 and spent the next decade tearing itself to shreds. Spared the time-consuming need to govern the country, the Tories had more time to argue with one another about basic principles and split themselves into warring factions. As a result, they nominated one unelectable leader after another and have been out of power ever since.

The Democratic Party will become more thoughtful and responsible when in power. History tells a different story here, too: After decades in opposition, the Republicans took control of the House in 1994, vowing to reform the institution. For a while, they tried. Then they gave up. If anything, the Republican Congresses subsequently proved to be bigger spenders and more avid consumers of pork than their predecessors. More to the point, the current Democratic Congress is, so far, no better.

A Congress and White House unified under the control of a single party will function more efficiently. This, as Bill Clinton will tell you, is manifestly not always the case. To cite another cliché: Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely. Without the need to do cross-aisle deals, the temptation to make bad decisions is high. Also, if and when the president becomes unpopular, Congress has an incentive to defy him, regardless of his party—and vice versa.

If Obama wins, our standing in the world will improve immediately just because he's "different." There will, I am sure, be a brief moment of shock and surprise when the rest of the world learns that one of its most treasured beliefs—"whatever happens, the Americans are always more racist than we are"—is untrue. There will also be a good deal of rejoicing at the passing of the hated Bush administration. But very quickly, reality will set in as foreigners discover, along with American voters, that the U.S. president isn't as powerful as they think he is and can't change anything very quickly, if at all. President Obama will not be able to end the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, he will not be able to make the stock exchanges rise, and he will not be able to halt the recession right away. And that's only the short-term disappointment. In the long term, foreigners, along with U.S. voters, will also discover that America is not about to give up on global capitalism and start "redistributing" the nation's wealth to others. [Kenians](#) in particular will be disappointed.

After the election, we can finally stop talking about politics. No! This interminable political season will not, I'm afraid, be over so quickly. If Obama wins, every single one of his first moves will touch off debate: Not only will he be the first black president, the first post-boomer president, and the first Democrat in eight years, he will be the first Democrat post-9/11, which makes all his early security decisions crucial. By contrast, if John McCain wins, every polling organization in the country—along with the entire U.S. political commentariat, as *Slate's* John Dickerson has already [observed](#)—will be utterly discredited. A lot of explanations will be required.

But whoever wins, the assessment of who's in and who's out of Congress, who's been appointed to what in the après-Bush White House, and what it all means will take weeks and weeks. And, yes, the new president will very quickly be tested, if not by Iraq then by Iran, if not by North Korea then by Syria. At least on this single point, [Joe Biden is correct](#). Alas, for those who liked the world better when there was nothing on television but Paris Hilton, it's not over until it's over—and even then it's not over, not for a long, long time.

history lesson

McCain Ran the Sleaziest Campaign in History?

Not even close.

By David Greenberg

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 4:49 PM ET

In the weeks before Election Day, we heard regularly that John McCain was running the sleaziest campaign in a generation, if not in American history. That claim might strike some as another case of journalistic weakness for hyperbole. After all, we've also

heard claims that this was the [most important election](#) of our lifetimes (as if the outcome of the 2000 race hadn't altered history), assertions that [the Internet changed everything](#) this year (though Obama surely would have won without it), and effusions about [young people's unprecedented engagement](#) (an echo of 1992, when youth turnout actually spiked—as it did not this year).

But unlike those exaggerations, the line about McCain threatens to stain a man's name for history. And when viewed without partisan blinders or presentist lenses, the charge doesn't hold up. Indeed, it says more about today's political culture, which has grown unusually high-minded, and the emotions that Americans invest in presidential elections, which are unfailingly intense, than it does about McCain himself.

A cursory familiarity with 19th-century history dispels any illusions that today's campaigns, or candidates, are nastier than they used to be. As historian Gil Troy wrote in *See How They Ran*, the first presidential races—those of 1796 and 1800, which pitted John Adams against Thomas Jefferson—generated slanders on both sides worse than we hear today. Jefferson's surrogates painted Adams as a monarchist, warning that he was going to create a dynasty by marrying his son to King George's daughter. Adams's advocates called the author of the Declaration of Independence a traitor and agent of the French Revolution, and accused him of raping his slave mistress. (Jefferson's [liaisons with Sally Hemings](#) have since been accepted by [most historians](#)). Abigail Adams despaired that all the "abuse and scandal" would "ruin and corrupt the minds and morals of the best people in the world."

During the age of democracy in the 1830s, politics got only uglier. Newspapers, making no secret of their partisan allegiances, happily vilified the opposition in personal terms. Rivals branded Andrew Jackson an adulterer, his wife a bigamist, and his mother a prostitute. The most infamous contest of the century might have been the mud fight of 1884, when a well-known minister, sharing a stage with Republican nominee James Blaine, labeled the Democrats the party of "Rum, Romanism and Rebellion"—a slur on immigrants, Catholics, and Southerners that Democrats forced Blaine to repudiate. The Republicans also attacked the Democratic candidate, Grover Cleveland, for fathering an illegitimate child—a charge immortalized in the taunt, "Ma, ma, where's my pa? Gone to the White House, ha, ha, ha!"

The push for Blaine to disavow his supporter's well-publicized slur bespoke a growing concern with cleaning up politics. Late in the 19th century, middle-class reformers tried to purge democracy of its seamy underside, introducing voting reforms like the secret ballot and striving to elevate the tone of campaigns. "To elect their own rulers is, indeed, a great privilege," wrote the *New York Evening Post* in 1872. "But the

principles and methods by which they have come to select them for election are execrable."

The political reformers of the Progressive Era muted the crude personal invective that had once been commonplace, to say nothing of the formerly widespread practice of buying and stealing votes. But politics and human nature being what they are, no one devised a way to eliminate meanness. The 20th century saw plenty of below-the-belt campaigning, including many races much uglier than this year's. A quick rundown of the lowlights would have to include the Republicans' 1928 slurs against Al Smith, the first Catholic major-party nominee, pilloried as an agent of the pope; the Democrats' 1964 campaign against Republican Barry Goldwater, to whom neo-Nazi ties were imputed; Jimmy Carter's 1980 insinuations that Ronald Reagan was a reckless warmonger; George Bush Sr.'s use of the Pledge of Allegiance and prison-furlough issues against Michael Dukakis in 1988; Bush's claims in 1992 that Bill Clinton committed near-traitorous acts by protesting the Vietnam War while in England; and—how soon we forget—the Swift-boating of John Kerry in 2004.

If those examples don't put McCain's in perspective, consider that they were all rhetorical attacks. Even worse were Nixon's dirty tricks-filled efforts of 1968 and 1972 and George W. Bush's resort to [mob violence](#) to stop the 2000 Florida recount. Indeed, McCain's campaign probably wasn't even the dirtiest of 2008—a prize that belongs, arguably, to Obama himself for [ascribing racism](#) to Bill and Hillary Clinton in the days between the New Hampshire and South Carolina primaries.

Compared with the foregoing, McCain's slaps at Obama seemed more pathetic and desperate than vicious. His atavistic broadsides against "socialism" rang hollow. Ads about Obama's loose links to a Palestinian-American scholar and to a domestic terrorist whose name few Americans knew fell flat. Cheeky digs at Obama's celebrity status provoked more mirth than ire. McCain's ugliest tactic was to revive an old slur that Obama backed sex education for kindergarteners, but it met with such ferocious rebuke that it was rapidly withdrawn and forgotten. Against these negative themes, too, must be counterbalanced McCain's admirable stands, as when he fired staffers who stoked racism or anti-Muslim sentiments and rebuked his own hate-spewing supporters at rallies.

The claims about McCain's supposedly unprecedented negativity, then, don't signify any deep truth about his character. Rather, they reveal important aspects of American politics today. The efforts to purify politics at the turn of the last century may not have succeeded in eliminating negativity, but they did erect new norms that stigmatized ungentlemanly campaign tactics—norms that remain powerful. When candidates go negative, they almost always draw scorn from the news media and often hurt their own campaigns more than they help. When McCain went

after his opponent, this powerful disdain for negative campaigning kicked in, bringing out all our censoriousness.

The scorn for going negative, moreover, has been especially acute among reformist high-minded liberals in the tradition that runs from [Adlai Stevenson to Eugene McCarthy to Obama](#)—men whose successes rested on their supporters' wish for a politics free of the compromises and rough-and-tumble inherent in democracy. By introducing his campaign in a Stevensonian vein, Obama fashioned an image as one who would never initiate attacks. Remarkably, and much to his credit, Obama sustained that image throughout the campaign, even during those moments in August when, flagging in the polls, he acceded to his supporters' calls to hit harder [against McCain](#) or, the previous fall, against Hillary Clinton.

The hyperbole about McCain's tone also stems from the human tendency to try to explain away electoral losses. In any election, the defeated are naturally loath to concede that the other side's platform or candidate was more appealing. Instead, we tend to ascribe to the other side an extreme skill in black arts—whether dangerously persuasive rhetoric, [election stealing](#), or the evil genius of a Lee Atwater or a Karl Rove. Although Obama was in little danger of losing the election following the mid-September financial meltdown, his supporters, having seen two presidential victories slip through their grasp, couldn't quite shake the notion that the Democrats were vulnerable, and they grabbed onto these time-honored rationalizations.

Finally, the protectiveness that Obama elicited from others also explains why McCain's fall campaigning was reviewed so harshly. Throughout the year, Obama was often spared the task of defending himself because others with prominent media platforms did it for him. As the campaign progressed, a whole slate of possible criticisms—including legitimate concerns about his record or his foreign-policy chops—were deemed, as if by cultural consensus, beyond the pale. Indeed, it's worth recalling that October's hyperbolic claims about McCain's negativity echo [similar \(and similarly unfounded\) claims about Clinton's campaigning](#) back in the spring. Does Obama somehow invite historically unprecedented negativity? Or are his enthusiasts just unusually quick to perceive it? In any event, Obama benefited more from labeling his rivals as uniquely sleazy than he suffered from whatever sleaziness they displayed.

Obama fully deserved to defeat McCain on Tuesday. But he deserved to win because his party and his program presented the better hope for a better America, and not because he is purer of heart than other politicians—or any less able to throw a punch when his political future demands it. Like all good politicians, Obama appears to understand this important distinction. The rest of us should, too.

hot document

Mormons for Traditional Marriage!

Guess who helped put California's Proposition 8 over the top?

By Bonnie Goldstein

Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 12:55 PM ET

From: Bonnie Goldstein

Posted Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 12:46 PM ET

The narrow margin of victory for California's [Proposition 8](#), an amendment to the state constitution banning gay marriage, may be attributable to millions of dollars in donations from members of the [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints](#). The Mormons' support for the ballot measure is no small irony given the Church's onetime support of polygamy. The Church [disavowed](#) that doctrine in 1890 so that Utah could become a state, but renegade Mormon sects continue to practice polygamy today.

LDS leaders expressed support for Proposition 8 in [letters](#) to congregations, [Web videos](#), and outreach efforts with the [Protect Marriage Coalition](#). Church elders [pressed](#) followers to "support in every way possible the sacred institution of marriage as we know it to be." That translated into at least \$14 million in donations from individual Mormons and Mormon-owned businesses, according to a 25-page [spreadsheet](#) posted on the Web site [Mormonsfor8.com](#) (excerpts below and on the following two pages). Mormon contributors are identified by first name and last initial, while non-Mormons are listed with full names. At least one donor, Alan A. from [Lindon, Utah](#) gave \$1,000,000 to prevent same-sex couples two states away from enjoying legally-wedded bliss (Page 3).

[Not all Church members](#) were persuaded by the rhetoric. The Web site [Mormons for Marriage](#), for example, argued for tolerance and compassion for same-sex unions.

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Posted Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 12:46 PM ET

children abandoned in accordance with the Nebraska law, current as of this writing but sure to lengthen, appears below and on the following page.

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Posted Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 12:46 PM ET

hot document

Where To Dump the Kids

How Nebraska became to child abandonment what Nevada once was to the quickie divorce.

By Bonnie Goldstein

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 5:55 PM ET

From: Bonnie Goldstein

Posted Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 5:55 PM ET

Nebraska recently passed [legislation](#) that [allows](#) parents to abandon unwanted children at a hospital—no questions asked—without threat of prosecution. The measure is intended to prevent mothers (and, occasionally, fathers) from leaving infants in public places where they risk death from exposure to the elements. Nebraska is the last state to pass [a so-called "safe haven" law](#) designating places such as hospitals or police departments where a parent can give up one or more children without risking jail time.

Unlike the laws passed in the other 49 states, where typically the child must be one month old or less, Nebraska's measure imposes [no age limit](#); infant and strapping teenager alike may be forfeited. As a result, Nebraska is turning into a national dumping ground for unwanted kids. Mothers and fathers eager to cull their herds have shown up from distant [Michigan](#), Arizona, [Georgia](#), and [Iowa](#). In one busy 24-hour period in September, 11 children were deposited at local hospitals, including [nine siblings](#) left by a single father. One 16-year-old girl [didn't even know](#) she was being abandoned. Concluding, sensibly, that the Nebraska law as written is [disastrously broad](#), Gov. Dave Heineman has called for [a special legislative session](#) this month to cap at three days the age of lawfully abandoned children.

Since the safe-haven law went into effect on July 18, [27 children](#) have been handed over to the Cornhusker State. A list of

Posted Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 5:55 PM ET

human nature

Call Off Your Drones

Negotiating with Pakistan over remote-controlled killing.

By William Saletan

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 9:18 AM ET

By tonight—[trust me](#)—Barack Obama will be president-elect of the United States. One of the first messes he'll face is the insurgency in Afghanistan. Specifically, he'll have to decide what to do about the [robot proxy war](#) in Pakistan.

If you've been following Human Nature's [coverage](#) of this war, you know the players: On one side, anti-American insurgents from al-Qaida and the Taliban; on the other, unmanned aerial [spying and killing machines](#) operated from the United States. We're less than thrilled about putting American troops on the ground in the treacherous physical and political terrain of northwest Pakistan. We tried it once, and the Pakistani government basically threatened to fight us. So we're hunting our enemies there by remote control, with drones. The death tally from the drones since August is around [100](#).

The last two days bring increasing evidence that the insurgents are trying to punish drone strikes the same way they punish manned military action against them: by killing lots of people with suicide bombs. The principal display was a Sept. 20 hotel bombing in Islamabad. Two days ago, the militants struck again. A truck bomb killed eight Pakistani soldiers, "apparently retaliation for deadly missile strikes," according to the [New York](#)

Times. Our drone operators had just tried to take out a senior Taliban commander, and Pakistani analysts construed the truck bomb as his "warning call" to the Pakistani government to back off. According to the *Times*, a Pakistani newspaper says the militants have "threatened to scrap a peace accord with the government if the United States did not halt air attacks against militant leaders."

That was Sunday. On Monday, Pakistani officials met with the new head of the U.S. Central Command, Gen. David Petraeus, and [urged him to call off](#) the drones. A statement from Pakistan's president said, "Continuing drone attacks on our territory, which result in loss of precious lives and property, are counterproductive and difficult to explain by a democratically elected government." Pakistan's defense ministry said drone strikes "could generate anti-American sentiments" and "create outrage and uproar among the people."

If the drones really are alienating the people, that's a big problem. Petraeus wants to do in Afghanistan and Pakistan what he did in Iraq: co-opt the public and our local enemies in order to isolate our mortal enemies. That means collaborating with the tribes and some Taliban elements against al-Qaida. Obama seems to be on the [same page](#).

The tricky question is whether the drone attacks are directly alienating too many people or whether the Pakistani government is asking to Petraeus to call off the drones for more complicated reasons. One reason would be that the government doesn't want more truck bombs aimed at its own troops. A more ominous reason would be that the government doesn't want more bombs aimed at its hotels. If suicide bombs in hotels can force us to call off the drones, then terrorism is trumping remote-control technology.

The most interesting possibility is that the leverage game is being played both ways. That is, the drones aren't really—or aren't only—a way to hunt our enemies. They're a way to pressure the Pakistani government to take care of the job itself. As Obama has repeatedly put it, if Pakistan knows where the bad guys are and "[won't act, we will](#)."

So now we're acting. Since ground raids aren't safe enough to be a credible threat to the insurgents, we're using drones. By all accounts, the drone attacks have been highly effective at killing high-value targets. If that's a problem for the Pakistani government, and they've got a better way to stamp out the insurgency, and they can show us that they're serious about doing it, then, as Obama might say, we're all ears.

jurisprudence Left at the Altar

What happens now to gay marriage, in California and elsewhere?

By Kenji Yoshino

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 7:09 PM ET

On Tuesday, California voters passed Proposition 8, the amendment to the state constitution that eliminates the right of same-sex couples to marry, scuttling a California Supreme Court ruling in May that granted that right. The amendment's passage represents a serious setback to the right of gays and lesbians to marry.

But how serious? Prop 8's consequence can be best understood by examining its effects on three different groups: gay couples who seek to marry in California in the future, gay couples who entered into legal marriages in California before the amendment passed, and gay couples in other states who are wondering when same-sex marriage will be legalized where they live.

The effects of Prop 8 on gay couples who seek to marry in California in the future are clear. California will have a moratorium on same-sex marriage for the foreseeable future. Although a [state constitutional challenge](#) was filed today, the only plausible legal challenge to Prop 8 is a federal constitutional one. But gay-rights groups will be loath to bring such a challenge, as it could be reviewed by the U.S. Supreme Court, which is not viewed as a friendly audience. A more likely response would be another proposition to reverse this one, offered through California's relatively flexible referendum process. But that political remedy will likely be some years away, given the political and financial capital expended on this last fight.

The effects of Prop 8 on the more than 16,000 gay couples in California who got married after the state high court authorized them to do so is much less clear. California Attorney General Jerry Brown has [opined](#) that he believes those marriages will not get washed out by Prop 8. His position comports with the general intuition that retroactive legislation should not deprive people of vested rights like marriage.

However, that intuition will not necessarily be vindicated. As I have pointed out [elsewhere](#), there is a surprising dearth of federal constitutional authority that would protect existing same-sex marriages from retroactive attempts to undo them. It may well be, as California constitutional-law professor Grace Blumberg of UCLA has argued, that the California Constitution would preclude the retroactive application of Prop 8. But as most experts agree, the outcome here is uncertain.

This is in part because a court might find that Prop 8 does not even constitute retroactive legislation. The amendment states that "only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or

recognized in California." A court could find that the pre-election marriages remain in existence but that California cannot recognize their validity going forward. Under that interpretation, a California same-sex marriage that was valid before today could be recognized by another state but not in the Golden State itself. Indeed, a state like New York that recognizes out-of-state same-sex marriages—even though it doesn't yet grant same-sex marriages—might be *required* to recognize a pre-election California marriage because of a state court decision that ordered the recognition of same-sex and cross-sex marriages.

Finally, the effects of Prop 8 on the national movement for same-sex marriage are significant but not devastating. Before Tuesday, court opinions legalizing same-sex marriage in Massachusetts, California, and Connecticut suggested that the right was gaining traction. The passage today of constitutional bans on same-sex marriage not just in California but also in Arizona and Florida provides a counterpoint.

Nonetheless, generational and global trends both ultimately favor full marriage equality in this country. The situation here is similar to the two-steps-forward, one-step-back trajectory that led to the legalization of interracial marriage. To be sure, Prop 8 represents a large step back. But the nation's march toward marriage equality won't stop.

low concept Election Day's Nine Worst Press Releases

La Fresh Travel Towelettes and other products no reporter wants to hear about today.

By David Plotz

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 5:56 PM ET

Slate and other news organizations are barraged with press releases every day, but there is something particularly absurd about a political magazine being pitched La Fresh Travel Towelettes on the most important Election Day in a generation. Here are a few of the most incongruous press releases we received today.

1. "RenewABILITY Energy Inc. launches program to reduce Domestic Water Heating Costs by 40%"

"I am sending you this e-mail to make you aware of the first pilot-project in Quebec to reduce residential water heating by up to 40% per household (The project is also a first for Canada). I am confident you and Slate.com—Washington DC Bureau will find it of interest."

2. "La Fresh Travel Towelettes Now Used in Jet Set Spa Packages"

"I wanted you to be the first to know that La Fresh Travel Towelettes are now being used in Jet Set Spa packages. These packages are geared toward commercial pilots, flight attendants and frequent travelers. They include unique, customized gifts with the finest chocolates, drinking chocolates, cashmere travel blankets, eye masks, and slippers—and now they will include La Fresh Towelettes."

3. "Bi-Curious Bonobos: What our closest relative can teach us about sexuality"

"Sex in the animal kingdom is never dull. Extending beyond stereotypical partnerships, animals have been seen engaging in a wide array of sexual behaviors, such as masturbation, group sex, homosexuality, sexual cannibalism, as well as any and all conceivable forms of penetration. In conjunction with The Sex Lives of Animals exhibition, the Museum of Sex is presenting an event lecture series featuring key lectures from renowned researchers and scholars."

(OK, we did finish reading that one.)

4. "L'Association des policières et policiers du Québec"

"With Canada on the verge of a dramatic increase in the number of people reaching retirement over the next two decades, Government organizations and associations will be faced with an unprecedented amount of personal, health and pension information which will need to be managed to ensure retirees are receiving the benefits they earned. In response, companies are beginning to re-think their internal data management solutions to ensure their systems are working as efficiently as possible today and will be able to meet the spike in demand tomorrow. Once such institute is L'Association des policières et policiers du Québec (APPQ), a Quebec-based organization that supports active and retired members of the Quebec Police Service with legal services and insurance plans."

5. "Glenn Rink, creator of the Smart Sponge is featured as one of 11 extraordinary entrepreneurs in this month's Inc. Magazine for creating radical change in the emerging water economy"

"I would like to propose a meeting with Glenn Rink to discuss the importance and popularity of 'Green Investments' in the current economy for a possible story on the trend of Wall Street Investors investing in Clean and Green Technology. ... A year ago, Rink, founder of **AbTech Industries** and creator of the **Smart Sponge**, *did not* have investors offering him 5 million dollars. But that was before stocks crashed and *the tide* turned to water technology. Now, money is flowing into the Smart Sponge"

6. "Virgin Atlantic's Upper Class Wing at Terminal 3 Celebrates First Birthday"

"Virgin Atlantic Airways, one of the world's leading long-haul airlines, today celebrates the one-year anniversary of its Upper Class Wing at Heathrow—the award winning private check-in

and security channel at Terminal 3, which allows its Upper Class passengers to move from check-in to the Clubhouse within minutes."

7. "Aperto Chosen by Zing for Multi-State 3.65 GHz and 5.8 GHz WiMax Network"

"Aperto® Networks, builder of the world's most versatile carrier-grade and cost-effective WiMAX Forum Certified™ base stations and subscriber units, announced today that Zing, a next generation wireless service provider based in Detroit, MI, has chosen Aperto's award-winning PacketMAX® solution for a multi-state WiMAX network."

8. "New Keyboard Improves Typing Skills"

"The KeyRight Company of Mountain View, California has introduced a colorful computer keyboard designed to teach correct typing. According to Jerome Whitcroft, KeyRight founder and president, "This new product, called the Look & Learn Keyboard™ which was invented and designed in Australia, helps users of all ages learn, practice and master typing, almost without trying, every time they use their computer or laptop.'"

9. "CHUCK NORRIS vs. MR. T: 400 Facts About the Baddest Dudes in the History of Ever is a compilation of the best of Chuck Norris/Mr. T facts, available in one affordable, awe inspiring, death-defying, fully illustrated volume. A must-have paean to the archetypal American male and a bible of all things CHUCK vs. MR. T is easily the most important book of all time. Hopefully by now, you've received your copy of this awesome book. Ian is available for interviews (he encountered the Great Chuck Norris, and has lived to tell the hilarious story!). I hope you'll keep this book in mind for review, interview or feature coverage—I'd love to hear your plans!"

map the candidates

The End

Obama in Indiana and Illinois. Biden in Virginia. McCain in Nevada and Arizona. Palin in Colorado.

By E.J. Kalafarski and Chadwick Matlin

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 11:50 AM ET

medical examiner

High Expectations

Research into medicinal marijuana grows up.

By Amanda Schaffer

Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 6:49 AM ET

This summer, British and Italian researchers [found](#) that in a laboratory plate, molecules in marijuana can slay the superbug methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus, which recently [infected](#) seven babies and four employees in a Yonkers, N.Y., maternity ward, heightening fears of outbreaks in schools and locker rooms, as well as in its more familiar breeding grounds, hospitals and nursing homes. In theory, compounds derived from the cannabis plant could someday serve in topical creams for patients with MRSA or other antibiotic-resistant infections.

This isn't the first time marijuana has tantalized the world as a possible wonder drug. In recent years, compounds in cannabis or related molecules have been shown to [slow the growth of lung tumors in mice](#), [decrease hardening of the arteries in rats](#), and [boost the egg-binding capability of tobacco smokers' sperm](#). Research on the [receptors](#) that THC and other cannabis compounds attach to—and the nitty-gritty mechanisms by which they exert their effects—has been booming. So has work on native molecules, called endocannabinoids, that bind to the same sites. These molecular interactions affect a wide range of functions, from appetite to inflammation to the perception of pain.

The onslaught of basic science has helped to separate cannabis from an association with hippies and recreational pot smokers. It has also spurred hopes that these molecules (or similar ones) might prove therapeutic for [traumatic brain injury](#), [inflammatory bowel disease](#), [allergic contact dermatitis](#), [atherosclerosis](#), [osteoporosis](#), and [Alzheimer's disease](#), among others. For all the razzle-dazzle, though, potential treatments frequently seem stuck in perpetual adolescence. Research on traumatic brain injury seemed promising but got [mixed results](#) in human clinical trials, while most of the others simply haven't gotten very far in the experimental process.

Still, a few prospects show signs of inching toward adulthood. The most enticing are aimed at lessening pain associated with nerve damage and improving some symptoms of multiple sclerosis. Between 2007 and this summer, several randomized clinical trials have found that smoking marijuana can relieve pain in patients with nerve degeneration caused by HIV or other disorders. Compounds in cannabis also seem to reduce nerve pain and possibly decrease spastic movements in people with MS. A drug called Sativex—which delivers two cannabis compounds in a spray under the tongue—is now in late-stage clinical trials in Europe for MS patients. Much as we've heard the hype before, these findings deserve some notice even from the jaded.

Studying the upside of marijuana can be a bureaucratic nightmare. In 1970, Congress deemed it a [Schedule 1 drug](#), meaning that it has a high potential for abuse and "no currently accepted medical use"—making research on possible benefits a tough sell. In the 1980s, the Food and Drug Administration

approved Marinol, an oral formulation of THC, the most psychoactive ingredient in cannabis, to treat nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy. Later, it also approved Marinol to boost the appetites of people with AIDS. But Marinol was never fully accepted by patients, says Donald Abrams, a professor of clinical medicine at the University of California-San Francisco. It took effect more slowly than smoked marijuana and was also more psychoactive. (When THC enters the bloodstream from the digestive tract, it is broken down by the liver into even more psychoactive molecules.) Nor has Marinol been approved in the United States to treat pain. Those who wished to push research further—whether by studying smoked marijuana, developing better formulations, or testing cannabis for other conditions—got no love from the federal government.

Some did get a boost, however, from the state of California, which paid for the recent work on cannabis smoking and pain. In 2000, the state funded the University of California's Center for Medicinal Cannabis Research, which vets research proposals with an NIH-style review process, pays for projects, and helps scientists navigate state and federal regulations. The center helps researchers obtain cannabis cigarettes, for instance, and deal with federal rules for record-keeping and security—like making sure the safe in which the drug is stored is properly bolted to the floor, says director Igor Grant.

The work has moved slowly, but it's finally paying off with a handful of publications. The first clinical-trial-based [paper](#), which appeared in *Neurology* in 2007, was a randomized study of 50 patients with HIV-related nerve damage, which can cause discomfort often described as aching, painful numbness, or burning. Those who smoked cannabis each day reported a 34 percent decrease in chronic pain—an effect that's on par with medications often used for this condition, like anti-convulsants and antidepressants, says Abrams. Two other randomized clinical trials, published in June and August, found similarly clear benefits. The June [study](#) focused on patients with pain related to a range of neurological conditions, including spinal cord injury. The August [paper](#) focused again on HIV-related symptoms. Both found that patients who smoked cannabis reported significantly less pain than those who used dummy cigarettes. These studies were relatively small, but cumulatively they are persuasive.

Other recent [research](#) suggests that cannabis can relieve MS-related pain and may be able to help other symptoms, too. Sativex, which contains THC and cannabidiol, a nonpsychoactive compound, and is absorbed through the mouth, is already approved in Canada for cancer-related pain and nerve pain associated with MS. In 2007, this randomized clinical [trial](#) of 189 MS patients found that those who took Sativex [self-reported](#) a significant decrease in involuntary muscle spasms. (The study was funded by GW Pharmaceuticals, the British company that developed the drug.) Researchers are now conducting a late-stage clinical trial of Sativex in MS patients

across five European countries. The company has also begun a Phase II/III clinical trial in the United States for patients with cancer-related pain. Sativex may offer particular advantages because it is neither smoked nor swallowed: It does not introduce toxins to the lungs, as smoking does. It enters the bloodstream rapidly but does not pass initially to the liver, as oral formulations do, which prevents it from getting broken down as quickly and may make it less psychoactive. (GW Pharmaceuticals says that patients who take Sativex tend not to experience psychoactive side effects at normal dosage levels.)

If these serious investigations and results continue, soon cannabis therapies may not, in fact, be bolted to the floor.

sidebar

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When spasticity is evaluated according to a formal measure called the Ashworth scale, the benefit is less clear, says David Baker, a neuroimmunologist at Barts and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry and author of this helpful [review](#).

moneybox

The Fierce Urgency of Now

Why Obama has to take over economic policymaking—today.

By Daniel Gross

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 5:38 PM ET

The transition from the Bush-Cheney administration to the Obama-Biden administration is well underway. The president-elect has reportedly asked [Rahm Emanuel](#) to serve as his chief of staff. On Thursday, Obama will start to [receive intelligence briefings](#).

That's a good start. Given Obama's methodical, no-drama style, we probably shouldn't expect hasty announcements of Cabinet secretaries. After all, the 11-week transition period offers plenty of time to mull over names and vet candidates. And with incumbent secretaries and other officials eager to hold on to their jobs in this punk market, Obama won't need to have a full slate ready on Jan. 20, 2009. The departments of Transportation and Health and Human Services will continue to chug along, even if Obama waits until February or March to choose new leaders. But in the area of economic and financial policy, the transition

must start in an instant. On CNBC, John Harwood this morning said that Obama might wait until about Thanksgiving to announce a new Treasury secretary. (The smart money says it'll be [Larry Summers](#). The stupid money—i.e., mine—is on [Tim Geithner](#).) That's not soon enough. It may be poor form, but Obama and his team need to get involved in economic policymaking yesterday. Here's why.

In most areas of policy, there's little that the White House can do in the final weeks of a term: just last-minute pardons, executive orders, and efforts to scotch regulations. Washington never uses the last days of a presidency to expand health care or reform the Federal Aviation Administration. So it's usually fine to follow protocol and let departing White House staffers and members of Congress enjoy their final days with a minimum of interruption.

But 11 weeks is a lifetime in the financial markets. In the past 11 weeks, we've experienced a series of vital political decisions related to finance—the nationalizations of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the bailout of AIG, the decision to let Lehman Bros. fail, the passage of a bailout for the financial sector, the expansion of deposit insurance, the Treasury Department amassing a portfolio of preferred banks shares, and efforts by the Federal Reserve to backstop the money-market and commercial paper markets.

It's possible that further dramatic efforts won't be necessary in the next 11 weeks simply because, with all the bailouts, there's nobody left to fail. But plenty of other things could go wrong. We've given the Treasury secretary [unprecedented powers](#) to make life-or-death decisions about large financial institutions and to enter into financial arrangements that will last for several years. Given that Obama's team will be dealing with the decisions Paulson made in August and that they'll have to deal with the decisions Paulson makes in November and December, it's imperative for them to get into the rooms where those decisions are being made—now. Think of it this way: If you're slated to assume control of a mutual fund—say, one that has a concentrated portfolio in large financial companies—in January, and if you're going to be held accountable for its performance, wouldn't you want to sit in on the investment committee meetings right now?

There's also the potential for mischief (albeit less of it) in Congress, which is slated to convene in a lame-duck session. The likelihood that the House and Senate, already controlled by Obama allies (and whose number includes Obama himself), would do anything radical is rather slim. But there are some urgent items that could be on the agenda, including aid for automakers and a second stimulus package. Any legislation passed by Sen. Obama in the next couple of months would appropriate tens of billions of dollars that a President Obama would prefer to dole out himself. Of course, those clamoring for an automotive bailout or a stimulus package will declaim loudly about the fierce urgency of now. All the more reason for an

Obama economic team to get together, organize, and formulate a set of proposals that it can get behind.

Obama will soar into office with expanded Democratic majorities in the House and Senate and a massive popular mandate. But he'll also be weighed down by the huge fiscal handcuffs. His ability to enact his ambitious agenda—expanded health care, new investments in infrastructure, funds for education and clean energy—is already likely to be hamstrung by the government's recent financial commitments. Getting a head start on the economic transition could help avoid further setbacks.

moneybox

Sept. 24, 2008

The day John McCain lost the election.

By Daniel Gross

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 10:05 PM ET

For Bill Clinton in 1992, it was the economy, stupid. For John McCain in 2008, it was the stupid economy. Exit polls showed that 62 percent of the electorate said the economy was the most important issue.

But when, precisely, did John McCain lose the narrative on the economy? Was it last July, when economic adviser Phil Gramm, discussing the "mental recession," noted that "we've sort of become a nation of whiners"? Perhaps it was back in December 2007, when McCain said, "The issue of economics is not something I've understood as well as I should." Or was McCain's economic goose cooked long before the campaigns started? Ray Fair, the Yale professor who plugs macroeconomic data into an election-predicting model, said that "since November 2006, the model has consistently been predicting that the Democratic candidate would get about 52 percent of the two-party vote."

McCain managed to give Obama a run for the money through mid-September. The polls began to turn (decisively, it turns out) against him when the global financial system suffered a run on the money. And with the acuity bestowed by six weeks of hindsight, I think it's possible to pinpoint three dates—Sept. 15, Sept. 24, and Oct. 15—that mark crucial turning points in the campaign.

On Sept. 15, Lehman Bros., having failed to convince the government it was worthy of a bailout, filed for bankruptcy. The same day, McCain proclaimed: "I think, still, the fundamentals of our economy are strong." A twin killer. Lehman's failure triggered a ferocious and unpredictable series of events—the freezing of money-market funds, a global credit seizure—that made it clear that 1) the fundamentals of our economy were

anything but strong and 2) volatility was here to stay. McCain's ill-timed line, a longtime presidential staple, showed he had no intuitive feel for how to talk about the economy at large or about the crisis at hand.

On Sept. 24, as talks about a Washington bailout intensified, McCain announced he would suspend his campaign and fly to Washington. The theory: McCain would put country first, force Obama off the campaign trail, forge a bipartisan compromise, and alter the dynamics of the race. But McCain didn't have a game plan to triangulate effectively between the Republican gentry (the Bush administration, Wall Street, corporate America), who ardently demanded a bailout, and the pitchfork-toting peasants (House Republicans), who opposed it. He ended up leaving town and resuming campaigning without an agreement in place.

While McCain seemed detached, Obama caucused with financial graybeards and kept his campaign plane on the tarmac to get updates from his new speed-dialing buddy, Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson. Self-serving? You betcha. But doggone successful. And the passage of the bailout bill, which McCain grudgingly supported, neutered the increasingly ideological economic warfare McCain waged in the closing weeks. At a time when the Bush administration was nationalizing big portions of the (grateful) financial services sector, charges that Obama was a socialist, the redistributor-in-chief, the second coming of Eugene V. Debs, failed to gain traction.

The third fatal date? Oct. 15, when the third debate took place. Throughout the fall, Obama had rounded up financial icons such as former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker and Warren Buffett to serve as surrogates. They could reassure Wall Street and Main Street that Obama could steer the nation through treacherous financial waters. Rather than enlist a respected businessperson such as Mitt Romney or former eBay CEO Meg Whitman as his chief economic surrogate, McCain turned to an unlicensed plumber from Ohio. McCain mentioned "Joe the Plumber" seven times in the Oct. 15 debate. In the ensuing weeks, McCain routinely trotted out Samuel J. Wurzelbacher's economic folk wisdom as gospel.

Warren the Investor and Paul the Central Banker vs. Joe the Plumber was never going to be much of a fair fight. Given the macroeconomic backdrop of recent years and the microeconomic disasters of recent weeks, neither was the presidential campaign, which is why Obama has won the White House.

movies

Role Models

Paul Rudd + cult sketch director = funny movie.

By Dana Stevens

Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 4:55 PM ET

Role Models (Universal) is funnier than it has any right to be. It's the first mainstream movie from David Wain, a veteran of the comedy troupe the State who previously directed two sketch-based cult films, *Wet Hot American Summer* and *The Ten*. Perhaps in an attempt to avoid making another collection of randomly stitched-together skits, Wain has *Role Models* neatly following the classic arc of the buddy comedy: Two guys, trapped together by fate, execute one stupid decision after another before finally realizing that, hey, maybe they could actually accomplish something if they stopped being such schmucks. Like any formula, it can work if done well, and *Role Models* is strewn with enough serendipities to make it a worthy variation on the dudes-grow-up genre.

For 10 years, Danny (Paul Rudd) has held down the same soul-draining job, visiting schools to hawk an energy drink called Minotaur with his wastrel of a co-worker, Wheeler (Seann William Scott). Danny is burned out, emotionally remote, and virtually incapable of a nonsarcastic utterance. On the day that his live-in girlfriend (Elizabeth Banks) finally breaks up with him, he acts out by damaging some public property with the giant Minotaur-shaped truck he and Wheeler drive to work.

In lieu of a jail term, the miscreants are sentenced to community service as volunteers at a Big Brother-style mentoring program run by recovering addict Gayle Sweeney (the thoroughly nutty Jane Lynch, a regular Christopher Guest player). Danny's assigned to Augie (Christopher Mintz-Plasse), a hopeless teenage dweeb obsessed with medieval role-playing games, while Wheeler gets Ronnie (Bobb'e J. Thompson), a fatherless 10-year-old with a foul mouth and serious anger issues.

The middle section of the movie, in which Danny dispiritedly phones in his big-brothering performance, has most of the best jokes (at least up until the weirdly exhilarating final action sequence, which I'll leave unspoiled except to note that it involves both [LARP](#) and [KISS](#)). Rudd is the rare actor who can make disengagement engaging. His depressed, affectless Danny remains likable even as he rejects all attempts at human connection. ("It's not you," he assures Augie's parents as he turns down their dinner invitation. "I just hate having dinner with people.") Mintz-Plasse, who played the similarly nerdy McLovin in *Superbad*, gets across Augie's neediness without compromising the character's dignity. And though Seann William Scott seems to have only one character in his repertoire—the glazed-eyed, full-throttle party animal—he plays it with a manic energy that's a fine foil for Rudd's anomie. I found the Ronnie character gratefully Gary Coleman-esque, but the rest of the audience seemed to love his R-rated non sequiturs.

Especially after Kevin Smith's emotionally stunted [Zack and Miri Make a Porno](#), it's nice to see a dirty-minded romantic comedy (is there any other kind of romantic comedy these days?) in which the sweetness doesn't seem slapped onto the raunch like bad store-bought icing. *Role Models* may not set its sights very high, but it comes by its emotional payoff honestly. And why isn't Paul Rudd in greater demand as a romantic comedy lead? He's handsome, funny, and smart (he co-wrote this movie with Wain, and many of his best lines sound like on-set improvisation), yet he always seems to be hanging around the corners of other people's movies (the lovelorn co-worker in *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, the stoned surf instructor in *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*). In the last scene of *Role Models*, Rudd turns one of the oldest tricks in the rom-com playbook—the public serenading of one's lady—into a thoroughly satisfying ending. It'd be even more satisfying if this movie got him the plum comic roles he deserves.

movies

Jean-Claude Van Damme Made Me Cry

In *JCVD*, the action star delivers a kick-ass monologue.

By Grady Hendrix

Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 2:00 PM ET

It would be hard to think of a worse venue for a movie than the press and industry screenings at the Toronto International Film Festival. The screenings, held for the press (mostly unwashed bloggers) and unimportant industry people (important industry people are off doing deals), are full of German sales teams who walk in late and leave early, talking loudly the entire time. Cell phones and BlackBerrys light up the darkness as clumps of publicity girls try to figure out where tonight's party is while blogger boys slump in their seats and scowl at the screen, daring it to try to entertain them.

So as the end credits for *JCVD* (Peace Arch Entertainment Group) rolled at a rainy afternoon screening in Toronto this fall, I was surprised to hear thunderous applause break out. Actually, I'm lying. I wasn't surprised at all. There had been earlier volleys of clapping and laughter throughout the film, and I myself had even cried. Twice.

The once-impressive "Muscles from Brussels" is a direct-to-video joke nowadays, churning out ever-cheaper flicks, each less entertaining than the last. But *JCVD* is different from Jean-Claude's recent movies in two major ways. Unlike *In Hell*, *Derailed*, *Wake of Death*, *Until Death*, *The Hard Corps*, or *The Shepherd: Border Patrol*, *JCVD* is actually getting a theatrical release. Also, in *JCVD*, Jean-Claude doesn't play an Iraq war vet named Phillip Sauvage, or a border patrol agent named Jack Robideaux, or even a NATO operative named Jacques Kristoff.

Instead, he plays a washed-up, B-list action-movie star named Jean-Claude Van Damme.

Directed by Mabrouk El Mechri, a real life Jean-Claude fan, this French film stitches together pieces of Van Damme's real life, rumors, slightly fabricated incidents, and complete fiction to paint a pop portrait of a star in decline. Think of it as *Sunset Bloodsport* with Jean-Claude as Norma Desmond. Beginning on the set of yet another Van Damme action snoozer, the real action kicks in when the Muscles heads to court for a custody hearing for his daughter, during which his movies become damning evidence of his inability to parent, and his daughter ultimately chooses to live with her mother. This is based on a painful real-life incident from 1996, when Van Damme lost custody of his son during his fourth divorce.

Desperate for money to file an appeal and back in Belgium to restart his life, fictional Jean-Claude signs up for yet another career-killing, cash-in flick and heads to the post office to receive his wire transfer so that he can pay his lawyer. But this is a Jean-Claude Van Damme movie, and, as in 1995's *Sudden Death*, he walks into the middle of a bank robbery and winds up being held hostage. Mistaking the hostage for the mastermind, the cops lock down the bank and set up snipers with one order: Jean-Claude Van Damme must die. Thinking the national joke has finally lost it, mobs of media-maddened Belgians gather to see him get a bullet in the head.

While the movie is a dizzying meta-maze, *JCVD* also follows the Van Damme formula: An underdog with a ridiculous name must overcome incredible odds to kick people in the face and save the day. And in *JCVD*, the onetime action star with a ridiculous name does save the day (in a manner of speaking), kick people in the face (in a manner of speaking), and overcome incredible odds: the mess he's made of his own life.

In the middle of the film, the action grinds to a halt and Jean-Claude turns to the camera and begins to speak. After a minute or two of his well-known Zen-like head-scratchers ("One plus one equals two, but it could be 11."), he begins to talk about his drug addiction, his failed career, his age, and the fact that he's done nothing with his life. It's a riveting five minutes of cinema because we are seeing Jean-Claude Van Damme transform into Charlie Brown. Facing defeat at every turn, the promise of making good movies held out like Lucy's football and eternally yanked away at the last minute, Van Damme resembles no one more than Charles Schulz's main character, the loveable loser eternally defeated by bad luck and his own insecurities.

All the little annoyances of *JCVD* dissolve into nothing in the face of Jean-Claude Van Damme's performance as himself. While this movie steals from many sources, its biggest influence might be *The Elephant Man*, because at the center of the film is Jean-Claude Van Damme staring into the camera and saying: "I

am not an animal. I am a human being. I am a man!" And by the time this movie ends, you'll believe that a man can cry.

music box

Ladies! I Can't Hear You! No, Really, I Can't Hear You!

Where did all the female rappers go?

By Jonah Weiner

Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 6:46 AM ET

This winter, Queen Latifah is set to release her eighth album—her first to feature rapping since 1998. As her star has risen in Hollywood, onetime collaborators Monie Love and KRS-One have given way to Steve Martin and Diane Keaton, and her most recent LPs have consisted of jazz standards and classy throwback ballads. The hip-hop world spins quickly, and you wonder whether she can avoid disappearing with a quick, irrelevant fizzle upon re-entry.

Still, one thing hasn't much changed since Latifah's 1989 debut: Female rappers are as scarce today as they were then, if not scarcer. This estrogen deficiency gave Latifah something to rap about when she was a brash 19-year-old, and it might well give her something to rap about now. Her late-'80s contemporaries have either disappeared or been exhumed and reanimated as reality-TV personalities (Pepa on the *Surreal Life*; Yo-Yo hosting VH1's *Miss Rap Supreme*, a competition that made sport, literally, of the "femcee" phenomenon). The '90s stars that followed her—Lil' Kim, Eve, Lauryn Hill, Da Brat, and Missy Elliott chief among them—have either faded or flared into tabloid ignominy. Today, female rappers are flukes on the charts, and exactly zero women were nominated at this year's BET Hip-Hop Awards and VH1 Hip-Hop Honors. What happened?

The word that most beguiles rappers is *I*, particularly as it appears in the phrases "Who I am" and "What I do." Male MCs have long controlled the microphone, so women with rap dreams have faced the steep challenge of attempting self-definition in a genre whose louder, deeper voices have already done much to define them (in narrow and frequently noxious terms, at that). In large part, the story of female hip-hop is the story of that challenge.

The first female rap star was Sha Rock, a 10th-grader from the Bronx who helped found the Funky 4 + 1 in 1978; the first female rap group of prominence was the Sequence, three teens who released a rowdy single called "[Funk You Up](#)" in 1979. At its start, hip-hop was primarily party music, competing with disco for crowds, and that environment was apparently

welcoming to women on and off the stage—"I never experienced any kind of sexism," Sha Rock has said. Really, what party worth its piñata would turn girls away at the door? Like their male counterparts, Sha Rock and the Sequence trafficked in dance-floor chants and well-landed brags, spiced, in their case, with some streetwise, G-rated coquettishness.

Formed in 1985, the New York trio Salt-N-Pepa elaborated on this tradition, fashioning themselves as sassy, hair-tossing flirts in neon spandex—although "flirt" is a mild word for "[Push It](#)," the throbbing electro-bass hit the group built around a decidedly single-entendre. Salt-N-Pepa made their sexiness their chief subject, and they liked to emphasize the ways that sexiness served them. In their songs, their pleasure is always paramount and men are always disposable; they're happy to wield their desirability against no-good lovers ("Chick on the Side") and romantic competitors alike ("I'll Take Your Man," which plays like a hip-hop version of *Mean Girls*).

Uninterested in flirtation, Roxanne Shanté was hip-hop's first pit bull in lip gloss. Shanté wrote her assaultive 1984 breakthrough, "[Roxanne's Revenge](#)," in response to UTFO's dorky hit "[Roxanne, Roxanne](#)." The original concerns a "stuck up" femme fatale who rebuffs the Brooklyn threesome's leering advances; in her song, then-14-year-old Shanté rapped from the ice-princess perspective, mercilessly detailing why she'd turned the guys down (short version: they were losers). "Roxanne's Revenge" was a legendary stunt (no discussion of iconic rap feuds omits it), but it was also an elegant bit of defiance. UTFO's fictional object of desire and scorn had roared improbably to life and spoken for herself.

With the rageful, late-'80s ascendance of gangsta rap, hip-hop's gender wars grew far more hostile. The post-Imus debate over the prevalence of the slurs *bitch* and *ho* in the genre can be traced to this period, when they were scraped hard into the lexicon. This is the context into which Queen Latifah made her debut, and from 1989's "[Ladies First](#)" to 1993's "[U.N.I.T.Y.](#)," she often took the form of a protest rapper, dressing down misogynists and encouraging women to stand strong before a mounting wave of bile.

In "U.N.I.T.Y.," though, Latifah voiced doubts about one type of female strength: "A minute ago you was a nerd and nobody ever heard of ya—now you a wannabe hard." The previous year, New Jersey rapper Apache had released "[Gangsta Bitch](#)," a *Bonnie and Clyde* fantasy stocked with matching Carhartt gear and his 'n' hers .9 mms. Gangsta bitch soon became its own microtrend, exemplified by Boss, a sawed-off tough from L.A. On 1993's "Recipe of a Hoe," she taunted, "Ya dick'll be getting shot clear the fuck off if ya keep talkin' that shit, cuz all bitches ain't hos." Elsewhere, she threatened to lure men home and rob them or worse—Boss wanted to reimagine the money-grubbing ho as a Machiavellian gangsta in her own right.

Less aggressive, and far more successful, was Brooklyn's MC Lyte. In 1988 she released "[I Cram To Understand U](#)," which turned a familiar hip-hop narrative (a parasitic ho sleeps around and siphons a guy's cash) upside down (here the parasite is a crack-addicted, pocketbook-plundering boyfriend). Gender friction fills Lyte's catalog, but she preferred to dive into the genre's storytelling capacities unencumbered by agenda; she specialized in odd fables with no readily apparent moral. Her "[Cappuccino](#)" is a wonderfully strange tale of the afterlife and cocaine abuse; in "[Poor Georgie](#)," Lyte mourns a libertine, drug-free alcoholic who suffers from colon cancer and dies in a quasi-suicidal car crash. Missy Elliott, who frequently mentions Lyte's influence, can thank her for the liberating notion that a woman can be not only a serious MC but a serious weirdo.

If the pervasive spirit of female rap's early days was defiance, the mid-'90s gave rise to a sort of radical compliance. In their porno-grade raps, Lil' Kim, Foxy Brown, and Trina offered themselves up almost as grotesques, inhabiting lewd sexual fantasies almost to the point of caricature. Kim—who offset constant demands for cunnilingus with a famous brag about "how I make a Sprite can disappear in my mouth"—was the best of these, and the only pop star in history to serve as muse to both Notorious B.I.G. and Marc Jacobs. Her take-no-shit attitude appealed to hardened hip-hop fans, while her hypersexualized camp made her a [gay icon](#). Hip-hop femininity is often described in binary: Women are either "independent"—they pay their own bills and, conveniently, ask men for nothing—or they are hos. Lil' Kim made the case for the independent ho. (Sometimes another option, cited in the case of confident female rappers, appears: lesbian.)

So why has female hip-hop made so few lasting inroads over 30 years? For one thing, what most of the women mentioned above have in common is that their music rebuts and responds to guy-spun gender narratives. One effect of this is to make female rap seem second class, occurring outside the "real," "primary" work of hip-hop canon building, even as it argues for first-class citizenship. When we hear the word *rappers*, we think of black males; they're what feminists would call hip-hop's [unmarked category](#). This makes tough going for pretenders outside of this category, and it's meant that many of the identities that female comers have carved for themselves—Boss' gangsta bitch, Kim's badass nympho, or, recently, Lil' Mama's lunchroom alpha girl—have registered as one-offs or fads. (We see the same thing with white rappers, whether it's the Beastie Boys' nerdy boogie or Eminem's white-trash horror-core.)

At one point, seeing a way to reach previously estranged female audiences, rappers rolled out protégées the way they roll out energy drinks today: Ice Cube boosted Yo-Yo, Jay-Z boosted Amil, the Wu-Tang Clan boosted N-Tyce (who released an obscure infidelity gem called "[Hush Hush Tip](#)"). These days, rappers have learned they can appeal to women by hiring an R&B singer for a chorus—ladies' jam? Check!—then return to

their normal business. At the same time, singers like Mary J. Blige, Keyshia Cole, and (the rapperly) Beyoncé have proven that contemporary R&B offers women plenty of room for toughness, too.

The great hope of female rap today lies on the pop fringes and in the fact that the distance between fringe and center shrinks daily. Cultural politics are looser and market concerns less overriding on the indie circuit, where artists like Baltimore's Rye-Rye, Tampa's gay booty-bass duo Yo! Majesty, and the New York eccentric Jean Grae make exciting music for devout followings. M.I.A. and Kid Sister—avant-gardists who admire the '80s-era sass of Salt 'N' Pepa and the sonic experimentation of Missy Elliott—have gone a step further, parlaying hipster popularity into mainstream-rap incursions. Kanye West guest starred on Kid Sister's "Pro Nails," and M.I.A. scored an unlikely smash with her single "Paper Planes," hitting No. 5 in pop and inspiring remixes by 50 Cent and Jim Jones. In September, M.I.A.'s voice showed up, sampled, on "[Swagger Like Us](#)," a posse cut starring A-list rap gatekeepers West, T.I., Jay-Z, and Lil' Wayne. The song is a small coup: It's a chest-bumping locker-room bromance, but when M.I.A.'s refrain comes around—"No one on the corner has swagga like us"—the boys' club is breached, the swagger shared. Maybe next time they'll actually invite her to rhyme.

other magazines

To the Left, to the Left

The *New Republic* on how America is becoming more liberal.

By Kara Hodge

Friday, November 7, 2008, at 11:48 AM ET

New Republic, Nov. 19

A [feature](#) argues that the United States is becoming fundamentally more liberal. The realignment stems from an increase in the number of American professionals in recent decades, from 7 percent in the 1950s to 20 percent of today's work force. Since 1988, professionals have been voting Democratic. Support for Obama among women—who began to move left in 1980—also reflects a shift toward liberalism. ... Another [article](#) considers the influence that John Podesta, founder of the Center for American Progress, will have on Obama's administration as co-manager of the president-elect's transition team. Podesta is known for running a tight ship; his staffers refer to his alter ego, "Skippy," as the boss they don't want to cross. However, "the cult of discipline can also staunch the healthy tensions that produce intellectual rigor and new ideas."

Time, Nov. 17

The [cover story](#) offers a rhapsodic analysis of Barack Obama's historic victory. He won "because at a very dangerous moment in the life of a still young country, more people than have ever spoken before came together to try to save it." As he faces the grave challenges of his presidency, Obama "needs to use his power in ways that make both parties equally unhappy, to dust off the weighty words we need to hear, not just the uplifting ones—like austerity, sacrifice, duty." ... A [feature](#) looks at past "presidential rookies" to see what advice Obama can gather from their experiences in office. Despite the parallels pundits have drawn between Obama and Abraham Lincoln, a more likely model for the president-elect is Woodrow Wilson, whose "reserved and intellectual approach to managing the national welfare" helped him "stabilize and equalize a volatile national economy."

***Economist*, Nov. 8**

An [editorial](#) lauds Obama's refreshingly cosmopolitan perspective thanks to his "half-brothers in Kenya, old schoolmates in Indonesia and a view of the world that seems to be based on respect rather than confrontation." The article offers the needless reminder that "under George Bush America's international standing has sunk to awful lows," but the magazine has confidence in "the redeeming effect" of Obama's election. The editors recommend reaching out to Republicans by keeping Robert Gates as defense secretary and finding roles for Nebraska Sen. Chuck Hagel and even defeated opponent John McCain. ... A [special report](#) on Spain assesses that country's risk for falling into a steep economic decline. From 1994 to 2007, Spain was "responsible for creating about one in every three new jobs in the euro zone." Now Spain, too, has suffered a burst housing bubble and faces rising unemployment and a stagnant economy.

***New York Times Magazine*, Nov. 9**

The cover story examines the evolution of congressional oversight and revisits the legislature's strengths and weaknesses during the last few administrations. During the Bush years, most senators failed to "stand up for Congress in the battle over the president's wartime powers." The author points to the Clinton impeachment trial as the turning point, in which senators were "trying to balance their party loyalty with their duty to keep a close eye on the executive branch." Now Congress faces the challenge of "reassert[ing] itself in the next administration" in order to "restore the constitutional balance" of powers. ... A feature investigates "a Saudi government initiative that seeks to deprogram Islamic extremists." Inmates who have been "convicted of involvement in Islamic extremism" undergo a two-month-long program that prepares the young men to re-enter society without succumbing to the social "alienation" that might have driven them to become jihadists in the first place.

***Vanity Fair*, December 2008**

An article compiles an [oral history](#) of Motown 50 years after its founding. Smokey Robinson, Martha Reeves, Lionel Richie, Stevie Wonder, founder Berry Gordy Jr., and others chime in on Gordy's vision for a record label that united cultures during the civil rights movement with its "infectious kind of music." ... A [feature](#) explores the "isolating effects" of reporting on the Iraq war from the Baghdad bureau of the *New York Times*. "The day-to-day toll—the infighting, isolation, and near-death experiences—of covering the most important story no one wants to read" has made it harder for the *Times* to convince new reporters to go to Iraq. It has also strained relationships among those journalists already there. Still, the paper has the strongest presence there among the Western media, and "for the moment at least, it is setting the standard" for coverage of Iraq.

Must Read

New York's [feature](#) on the capture of fugitive murderer James Kopp, who killed a doctor who performed abortions, is a thrilling read that reveals the moral reasoning behind the actions of some of the most radical anti-abortion activists.

Must Skip

An [interview](#) in *Time* with Obama pollster Joel Benenson on how Obama won lacks structure and coherence as it meanders around the obstacles the president-elect faced during his campaign.

Best Politics Piece

A *New York Times Magazine* feature shows how congressional oversight of executive authority became so weak and why it needs to be strengthened in the next administration.

Best Culture Piece

Vanity Fair's Motown [history](#), accompanied by a [portfolio](#) from Annie Leibovitz, looks at the friendships that still endure among the Motown family, such as founder Berry Gordy Jr. and Smokey Robinson, who still get together "for ferociously competitive games of chess and good-natured bouts of musical one-upmanship."

Late to the Party

The *Economist's* [piece](#) on blogging as a standard feature of the mainstream media is absurdly behind the times.

other magazines

Barack's To-Do List

Newsweek on the meaning of an Obama presidency.

By Kara Hodge

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 3:08 PM ET

Newsweek, Nov. 10

The [cover story](#) predicts that the United States is entering a period of slow recovery that will trigger feelings of "affluent deprivation" nationwide. To bring the country back up to speed, the next president must allow government intervention and room for "risk-taking" by, in part, lightening the tax burdens that hinder Americans' entrepreneurial spirit. ... A [piece](#) suggests that racism persists in Americans' private lives, despite becoming less common in the public sphere. An Obama presidency might diminish the segregation that persists in the private sphere both by improving "the economic condition of all disadvantaged Americans" and by influencing blacks "to embrace those mainstream cultural values and practices that have served him so well." ... Another [essay](#) points out that "little is known about who [African-American women] are, what we think and what we face on a regular basis." As first lady, Michelle Obama will face the daunting task of showing the nation that black women are not all "hot-tempered single mothers who can't keep a man."

The Nation, Nov. 17

The [cover story](#) proposes "that the answer to our social, economic and ecological crises can be one and the same: a green economy strong enough to lift people out of poverty." The author advocates a "Green New Deal" that would unite labor unions, students, religious organizations, environmentalists, and social-justice activists "to win government policy that promotes the interests of green capital and green technology." ... An [interview](#) with Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann describes the president of the U.N. General Assembly as a "revolutionary priest [who] now wears muted diplomatic pinstripes" some 30 years after the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. The Rev. d'Escoto hopes "to keep a light shining on the most dispossessed nations and people" in his new role but also offers harsh criticism of the United States for having "dragged [the United Nations] down" in recent years.

The New Yorker, Nov. 10

A [feature](#) delves into the study of psychopathy, an underresearched mental disorder thought to afflict 1 percent of adult males. The author visits a New Mexico prison, where a portable fMRI machine has been installed to examine the brains of inmates. Psychopathy, while not officially recognized as a mental illness in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, "affects between fifteen to twenty-five per cent of the North American prison population." ... A [piece](#) discusses how the world of finance "went postmodern." While the arts entered Modernist periods early in the 20th century, it wasn't until the 1970s that finance had its first Modernist moment, when derivatives trading took off and finance experienced "a break with common sense, a turn toward self-referentiality and abstraction and notions that couldn't be explained in workaday English."

New York, Nov. 10

A [profile](#) looks for the secrets to "wonky lesbian pundit" Rachel Maddow's success on MSNBC. "Geek chic" is part of her appeal, but her talent on-air also stems from an "intense" work ethic and distinguished background. Before punditry, Maddow did "stints as an AIDS activist, barista, landscaper, Air America host, and mascot in an inflatable calculator suit." With degrees from Stanford and Oxford, the foreign-policy specialist landed her first broadcast job at a local Massachusetts radio station as a way to pay the bills while writing her dissertation. There, she discovered a natural talent that eventually landed Maddow her own cable news show. ... A [feature](#) chronicles the circumstances that led an FBI informant to "betray a lifelong friend" in order to catch the murderer of an abortion doctor. The informant accompanied his friend and the friend's wife deep into the world of radical anti-abortion activists until they led the FBI to fugitive murderer James Kopp.

Reason, November 2008

An [interview](#) with presidential candidate Bob Barr charts the former Republican's "unlikely journey from drug warrior to Libertarian standard-bearer." The native Georgian quotes Dante to explain his decision to run for president after denying any interest two years ago. He also modifies his stance on the Iraq war, which he voted to authorize while in Congress, by describing it as "a very inappropriate use of our military and a huge number of taxpayer dollars." ... An [article](#) marks the 30th anniversary of the TV show *Dallas*. The show was a "bourbon-and-sex-soaked caricature of free enterprise that proved irresistible and catalytic not just to stagflation-weary Americans but to viewers in France, the Soviet Union, and Romania" who admired American pop culture.

poem

"Upon Hearing a 2-Year-Old's First Attempts at an Elvis Impression, I Recall the Difficulties of Her Birth"

By John Hodgen

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 7:10 AM ET

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

When the syndicate doctors took us aside to say earnestly,
insistently,
in the way that syndicate doctors are instructed to say, in that
sibilant whisper
that comes unbidden, that my wife and I should not offer hope,
not so much,

should be aware that the baby, if delivered, might not survive,
that our daughter, stitched up, cerclaged, should not drink from
that cup,
should not get to believing, should know instead that this child
might be
damaged at best,
we held on, earnest in our own way, in the way we had come to
believe.

And when my daughter went down on the intensive care floor,
the way a tree bends
in the face of a storm, the way a woman bends to wash a man's
feet with her hair,
when she writhed with medication, shaken to her core,
convinced in her way
that love could be that cruel, that she could be the engine of her
daughter's demise,
her tremors generating the contractions that would kill her, we
held on,
convinced that love would tender us, would hold us tenderly,
too.

And when the nurses came to us, one by one, over time, in the
way
they have instructed themselves to do, in their secret, shared
alliance,
each driven to believe that the heart can hold on, each of them
saying,
Fatima-like, in their own sense of what it takes to be divine,
each of them nodding like a chorus, like backup singers, saying
again and again
that the baby would be fine, the baby would be fine, we held on.

And this girl-child, this hey baby, fully present in the blue suede
world,
runs now, all shook up, in some hound-dog dervish, some
jailhouse-rocking circle of joy,
from the phone, around the kitchen again, and back to the phone,
saying, *Hey Baby, Hey Baby, Thankyouverymuch,*
Thankyouverymuch.

politics

Welcome to Washington

A primer for the Obama family.

By Marjorie Williams

Friday, November 7, 2008, at 10:15 AM ET

As a U.S. senator, President-elect Barack Obama has been a part-time Washingtonian for four years. But Washington remains largely terra incognita to Obama's Chicago-raised wife, Michelle; to his two young daughters, Malia and Sasha; and to

*his mother-in-law, Marian Robinson, who will move to D.C. to be near the family. To introduce the Obama family to the eccentricities of the federal city, **Slate** excerpts the following primer from [Reputation: Portraits in Power](#), a new anthology of profiles by [Marjorie Williams](#). Williams, a [frequent contributor to Slate](#), died in 2005. The book is edited by her husband, **Slate** senior writer Timothy Noah, who also edited an earlier collection of Williams' work, [The Woman at the Washington Zoo: Writings on Politics, Family, and Fate](#).*

The essay that follows was written in 1993 as another Democratic president—Bill Clinton—was settling into the White House. Glaringly dated references have been edited out, but it's still remarkable how little of the city's character has changed.

"Washington City is the poorest place in the United States from which to judge the temper of the nation," wrote a columnist named Frank Carpenter in 1882. "Its citizens have a different outlook on life than those of the individual states, and the atmosphere is artificial and enervating."

Two centuries after the city's founding, Carpenter's observation makes a good starting point for a tour of the capital's soul. For Washington is a much-maligned city, butt of a thousand campaign slurs and target of resentment by the legions of Americans who feel estranged from their government. And no one dumps on the city more than the people who live here. This is not, we tell ourselves guiltily, the real America. The population is too transient, we say, too obsessively focused on government. The city is provincial, we add. The theater is still second-rate at best, the food—despite the ethnic enclaves and a small if growing number of inspired restaurants—a pale shade of the diversity that New York or Chicago can offer.

The wise defender of Washington knows that you will get nowhere by trying to refute the common criticisms; you must begin by embracing them. To love Washington is to champion its amateur status as a city. Washington is unfashionable, and God bless it. Despite the grandly conceived boulevards and circles, laid out by Pierre L'Enfant in 1791, the city feels more suburban than urban—in design, in atmosphere, in ethos. Gore Vidal wrote, correctly, of the "calculated dowdiness" of old-line Washington society. This is a town of the comfortably, proudly unchic—of the grosgrain hair band, the plaid skirt, and the boiled-wool jacket. When Washington does feint in the direction of trendiness, it comes across like a man in midlife crisis sporting bell-bottoms and a bolo tie. The city's priorities are simply different from those of other cities. Although there are a great many six-figure salaries here, the superrich are almost absent, and along with them the need for plumage. Washington is less about money than—exactly as the flabby clichés insist—about power. Its credit system is proximity; its currency, information.

There are two distinct Washingtons—the local city and the national capital. The former is the actual community made up of the District of Columbia and its booming suburbs. It is one of America's youngest great cities and one of its most paradoxical stories of urban success and failure. Supported by the steady engine of federal spending, greater Washington is one of the richest metropolitan areas in America, measured by education level and household income. Washington also has one of the highest per capita murder rates in the country. Race relations follow the same pattern. The area is home to a huge proportion of middle- and upper-income blacks, but the city itself retains a depressing level of informal segregation. Washington proper is a mecca for African-Americans, with a thriving black culture, but white Washingtonians know little about this side of the city. To the hordes who are drawn to the city by ambition, it is Washington's other life—its role as the national capital—that has the most vivid reality. This split personality is the continuing legacy of Washington's birth, for it was a capital before it was a city, selected by George Washington in 1791 on behalf of a bickering Congress. Only after the location was chosen, for its ambidextrous appeal to both the North and the South, was Pierre L'Enfant commissioned to make it real.

How far apart the two Washingtons lie was rather poignantly suggested in 1990, when federal authorities set up an undercover drug purchase in Lafayette Park, just across the street from the White House, in order to provide a prop—a seized bag of crack cocaine—for a televised speech by President George H.W. Bush. (The president intended to hold up the bag of crack and intone sadly that drugs were sold everywhere—even across the street from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.) Alas, when the order went forth to find the evidence, it turned out that crack arrests were unknown in the heavily policed blocks surrounding the president's home. In the end, someone had to be induced to sell crack across the street from the White House. When the Drug Enforcement Administration instructed its mark, a local dealer, that the buy would take place in Lafayette Park, he said, "Uh, where?"

Across the street from the White House, the agents explained.

"Where the fuck is the White House?" asked the dealer, who had grown up in southeast D.C.

To the city's striving political class, of course, the White House is and always will be the center of the universe. This state of mind is summed up, for me, by the view from the Presidential Suite of the Hay-Adams Hotel, where Bill Clinton spent his first night in Washington as president-elect. If you gaze out the south-facing window in the sitting room, across petite Lafayette Park, the White House is a thing of marzipan, improbably near and intimate in scale. To the initiated, Washington is a place where power seems just this seductively close at hand. I spent my wedding night in the same suite at the Hay-Adams and keep a rich memory of it. I like to imagine that late at night, after

meeting with the outgoing president and fending off the press and dining with a few dozen ambitious strangers, Bill and Hillary turned out all the lights and stole over to the window in their bathrobes to assimilate at last the awesome turn in their lives.

The fables of power in Washington are, of course, 95 percent hooey; the truth is far more prosaic. Policy is made by a thousand tiny engines. A Cabinet secretary has social firepower, but it's the analysts who report to the deputy assistant secretaries who are really writing the rules, along with certain staff members on certain Senate and House subcommittees—the men and women who live for the day the *Washington Post* will describe them as "key staffers." And they aren't out at Hollywood's idea of a Glittering Washington Party; they're back at their scrungy government-issue desks, scarfing down a Domino's pizza over another late-night assignment. Under either party, late-night revelry is unknown to "official" Washington. It's been suggested that one reason sex scandals have such an explosive impact on Washington is that there is so little sex going on here in the first place.

A different kind of myth obscures Washington's charm for the casual visitor, who may find that the city's most renowned features are some of its most overrated. The cherry blossoms may be beautiful, yes, but the area around the Tidal Basin is always mobbed while they are in flower, and the glory lasts for only a few days before the scene disintegrates into what looks like bare trees banked in patches of wadded Kleenex. (Far better to spend an afternoon in the gardens of Georgetown's glorious Dumbarton Oaks.) The Museum of American History at the Smithsonian surprises you with the feel of a crowded attic. (Try, instead, a Sunday afternoon at the Phillips Collection.) Of the city's monuments and public spaces, the best are those that have been transformed by the visible use others have made of them. The Mall, which forms the great spine of L'Enfant's original plan for the city, is in fact a rather dull, naked rectangle—until you reach the Reflecting Pool and your mind's eye summons the sea of humanity that crowded around it to hear Martin Luther King describe his dream. This is why the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is the single mandatory stop on any visitor's trip. The sense of action there, of being embraced by a live event, is unexpectedly powerful—especially for the visitor who pays attention to the tributes left daily by mothers and buddies and sons and strangers at the foot of the black granite wall.

The membrane between society and Washington's power crowd is a porous one. Some new presidents, like George H.W. Bush, are already creatures of Washington when they move into the White House. Others, such as Ronald Reagan, must court the locals like the ambitious son of a banker wooing the daughter of old aristocracy. He badly wants her cachet to take the edge off his raw money; her secret is that she wants his money just as badly. Every rung of the social ladder has its counterpart on the power ladder: The president first, of course. Below him the

White House chief of staff (who has only delegated power, to be sure, but remember, proximity is all) and the top three Cabinet members—the secretaries of State, Defense, and Treasury. A senior senator who chairs a powerful committee ranks near the top (though a more junior senator can transcend an unsexy committee assignment with charm), as does a justice of the Supreme Court.

Though a common complaint is over the city's transience—no one who figures in official Washington is *from* here, after all—the truth is, many newcomers stay forever, secretly at home in the city everyone loves to hate. As each administration departs, it leaves behind a layer of flotsam on the shore—lobbyists, lawyers, public relations people—all now too smitten or too connected ever to move away. The city happily absorbs its quadrennial infusions of new blood. But Washington always does more to change its newcomers than the newcomers do to change it.

politics

Obama's Muscle

Rahm Emanuel will bring discipline to the White House. And lots of profanity.

By Christopher Beam

Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 6:18 PM ET

Rahm Emanuel's first task upon becoming Barack Obama's chief of staff will be to track down and fire whoever the *fuck* leaked word that he was offered the job. Even if that means he has to fire himself.

It wasn't a promising start for the president-elect's transition team. Job offers are supposed to happen behind the scenes. But Obama's courtship of Emanuel was [made public](#) nearly a week before Election Day. It's unclear who leaked the news, but Emanuel, not known for his reticence, had been talking to reporters even before the latest wave of speculation. Luckily for Obama, Emanuel [accepted](#)—but only after days of what looked like dallying. (Emanuel told a TV station he needed to consider his family, which would have to move from Chicago to D.C.; he would also have to shelve ambitions to become speaker of the House.) Maybe he just didn't want to jinx Obama's victory. Regardless, the impression was that Emanuel wasn't sure he wanted the job.

Whatever his reservations, Emanuel fits the mold of the ruthlessly efficient underlings Obama tends to hire. (Without David Plouffe's intensity, Obama would never be able to remain so stoic.) He's also opinionated. In interviews and debates and even in his [books](#), Obama comes off as the [Vishnu](#) of decision-making—*on the one hand, on the other hand, on the other hand,*

etc. Emanuel is unlikely to take "maybe" for an answer. And while the cantankerous former ballet dancer is known best for engineering the Democratic takeover of Congress in 2006, he knows more than fundraising. He's also a shameless wonk who [co-authored](#) a blueprint for future Democratic administrations. And in the three years before his congressional run, Emanuel made \$16 million on Wall Street (something the RNC will be delighted to tell you more about).

Also, as a veteran of the Clinton administration, Emanuel knows what *not* to do. During his tense first 100 days, President Bill Clinton was poorly served by his well-intentioned but ineffective chief of staff, Mack McLarty, whose nickname was "Mack the Nice" and who often tried to smile his way to compromise. Emanuel's nickname is "Rahmbo," and he is known for mowing down his opponents. Coming out of Chicago, both he [and Obama](#) know the value of muscle.

Of course, steamrolling doesn't win you friends. But making friends isn't Emanuel's job. The chief of staff is tasked with making sure the trains run on time. Taskmaster is Emanuel's middle name. (Imagine Ari Gold—the *Entourage* character based on Rahm's brother—with an even fouler mouth and a weakness for polls.) He must also frame policy questions in a way that helps the president make decisions. Emanuel knows policy: During the Clinton years, he helped lead (successful) efforts to pass NAFTA and the administration's (less successful) efforts on universal health care. Plus, it's the most demanding job around, and Emanuel is known for sleepless nights and dervishlike energy.

Emanuel's appointment is good for the press, too. (Like you care. But you should!) While Obama got glowing press coverage during the campaign, he also ticked off journalists by limiting access. Emanuel knows the value of press access and is skilled at working the refs. In an Obama administration, with which the media will quickly [fall out of love](#), public relations will be key.

Most important, though, Emanuel knows Congress. McCain spent his final days warning about the perils of undivided government. But undivided government is powerless if it can't bridge divides within its own party. (Just ask Clinton, whose stance on gays in the military faced stiff opposition among Democrats.) Emanuel will serve as an unofficial liaison between Obama and Congress. After all, he got several of them their jobs. Campaign promises like renegotiating NAFTA and taxing windfall profits will likely require serious diplomacy. Handling the results of the bailout—which many congressional Democrats opposed—will be its own mess.

For these sorts of things, Emanuel is well-equipped. It helps, too, that he's no liberal weenie. Emanuel is a classic DLC New Democrat centrist: for fiscal restraint, against punishing businesses. For those who still think Obama is the most liberal

member of the Senate (a [crook](#)), Emanuel's presence may provide comfort.

Does that mean he's perfectly suited? No. The Republican Party already released an [oppo dump](#) on Emanuel, describing him as "hyperpartisan" hack with a penchant for "bare-knuckle tactics" who also happens to be in the pocket of Wall Street. It helpfully points reporters to several anecdotes about his famous temper, which makes John McCain's look mild. (Emanuel once sent a dead fish to an unlucky pollster. Another time, he mimed stabbing his political enemies with a steak knife.)

At the same time, expect some tensions in the West Wing. Emanuel withheld his [endorsement](#) of Obama for months—he was hiding under the table, in his words—until Obama's victory was [clear](#). Meanwhile, Emanuel makes no secret of his distaste for Howard Dean and his "50 State Strategy"—an approach that dovetailed perfectly with Obama's wide-net campaign. And Emanuel's partisanship—after winning back the House in 2006, he recommended that Republicans "[go fuck themselves](#)"—could undercut Obama's promises to reach across the aisle.

But whatever else it says about the Obama administration, Emanuel's appointment suggests that it will be just as tightly run as the Obama campaign. Discipline is the quality that carried Obama to victory over sloppier opponents, and it's a quality sorely missed in many past Democratic administrations. With expectations for Obama as high as they are, he could do worse than having a human cudgel at his side.

politics

Rogue No More

What Sarah Palin can do next.

By Christopher Beam

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 6:07 PM ET

PHOENIX—Sarah Palin suffered her final indignity as John McCain's running mate on Tuesday, when her request to speak at his election-night rally in Phoenix was [denied](#). So ended a GOP campaign that had been increasingly marked, in its final weeks, by [internal tension](#) and suspicion. But now that the campaign is over and President-elect Obama actually is "measuring the drapes," Palin can talk all she wants—and start making decisions for herself. So what is she likely to do?

First, Palin has some cleaning up to do back home. The presidential election, which focused unusual attention on Alaska and her hometown of Wasilla, left some enemies and former allies [seething](#). The national spotlight also tarnished what had been a stellar reputation, after revelations about massive earmark

requests and her "bridge to nowhere" switcheroo. She also faces tough budget decisions now that the price of oil, a major Alaskan revenue source, has dropped. Factor in Sen. Ted Stevens' indictment, conviction, and [subsequent re-election](#), and Palin's got her hands full.

Some image repair is also in order. By Election Day, two-thirds of the electorate thought Palin was unqualified to be commander in chief. Meanwhile, 44 percent of likely voters said McCain's veep choice made them less likely to vote for him, according to [one poll](#). Some [argue](#) that negative feelings toward Palin didn't convince people to oppose McCain—after all, of the 60 percent of voters who said Palin's presence on the ticket was an important factor in their decision, more voted for McCain than for Obama. But that doesn't mean Palin wasn't a drag on the ticket. It just means she didn't single-handedly sink it.

Then there's the identity crisis. Does Palin now govern as the nonpartisan, issues-based leader of yore? Or does she continue to carry the hyperpartisan mantle she embraced in the presidential campaign? The two modes aren't necessarily mutually exclusive. (Her spokesman, in one of the campaign's more inspired metaphors, [compared](#) her to a diamond with multiple facets.) But a national audience that knows her only as the Next Big Republican Thing might expect her to be partisan.

Still, as her former running mate would say, the fundamentals of Sarah Palin are strong. Her conservative detractors—Colin Powell, David Brooks, and Christopher Buckley among them—were put off not by her personality but rather her lack of knowledge about certain national and foreign-policy issues. Such deficiencies can be addressed easily. Meanwhile, to use another McCainism, Palin was a surge for the ticket. Rally attendance skyrocketed. Approval ratings went up. Palin's convention speech attracted more viewers than Obama's. "I'll take it," said McCain adviser Mark Salter, looking back.

Moreover, those who called Palin an embarrassment fail to consider the alternatives. If McCain had picked Mitt Romney, the narrative would have been how much they hated each other; Tim Pawlenty, and crowds would have remained in the low hundreds. "If we picked [Joe] Lieberman, that convention would have been a disaster," says McCain spokesman and blogger Michael Goldfarb. Once these alternate-reality scenarios become clear, aides say, Palin's candidacy will look better.

And anyhow, four years is plenty of time. Remember that Palin had all of two days' notice (if that) about her nomination, and less than a month to prepare for her [first debate](#). Even the best politicians have trouble shifting gears that fast. "Take John McCain and put him into the last 60 days of a governor's race in Alaska," says Republican strategist Stuart Stevens. "He wouldn't know the nuances of the North Slope vs. the suburbs of Anchorage."

From that perspective, Palin's unpreparedness wasn't her fault—if she really thought she was ready to be commander in chief, she could have run in the primaries. (Then again, she accepted McCain's offer.) Over the next four years, though, she'll have plenty of time to bone up on Russo-Georgian relations, missile defense, and her [least favorite Supreme Court decisions](#).

But the best thing Palin can do is go home and get back to work. Stevens calls it the Hillary Clinton model: Take a big personality, dial it back, and roll up your sleeves. That means tackling Alaska-specific issues—see through to completion the [pipeline](#) she has been championing; fix the ailing state budget; and introduce other energy initiatives. Some suggest she might run for Senate once Republican Lisa Murkowski's term is up in 2010, or in a special election if Ted Stevens gets booted from the Senate in 2009. But she's probably better off running for re-election as governor in 2010, says Stuart Stevens (no relation to Ted). "If she's a wildly successful governor, she can claim credit for what she does, instead of being one of 100."

None of this will happen in a vacuum. Over the next four years, Palin will get more national scrutiny than any Alaska governor ever has. (She's already received more invitations to appear on *SNL* than any sitting governor.) Her best strategy may be to ignore it all and focus on the mundane, essential, and below-freezing details of her home state.

politics

Props to Obama

Did he help push California's gay-marriage ban over the top?

By Farhad Manjoo

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 4:23 PM ET

Barack Obama won California overwhelmingly on Tuesday—his 24-point victory was the largest winning margin of any presidential candidate in modern times, including former Gov. Ronald Reagan. Obama did so well in part because he brought a new wave of African-American voters to the polls. But for Golden State liberals, minority turnout was a mixed blessing. Proposition 8, the California ballot initiative to ban gay marriage, [passed](#) by about four percentage points. According to exit polls, Obama's African-American supporters helped put Proposition 8 over the top. That's the irony of Obama's victory: Had black turnout matched levels of previous elections, the vote on the gay-marriage ban—which trailed in the polls for much of the summer—would have been much closer. It might even have failed.

California's same-sex-marriage fight began in the spring, when the state Supreme Court overturned a previous ballot initiative

that defined marriage as an institution between a man and woman. The court ruled that the ban violated the state constitution; Proposition 8 sought to address that problem by writing the same-sex restriction into the Constitution. [As I wrote last month](#), many political analysts predicted the initiative would face a tough battle. Since June, tens of thousands of gay couples have gotten married in California without incident. In a blue state that often favors progressive social policies, polls showed many voters would balk at "eliminating" those couples' "rights," as the initiative put it.

But Obama brought a huge number of strongly anti-gay-marriage voters to the polls. In 2004, African-American voters made up 6 percent of the California electorate—about 700,000, according [to the '04 exit poll](#). On Tuesday, 10 percent of voters were African-American; all of the state's ballots have yet to be counted, but if total turnout matched or exceeded the level of 2004, it would mean that at least 1.2 million African-Americans turned out to vote. According to the '08 exit poll, blacks favored Proposition 8 by a [margin of 70 to 30](#). (All other ethnic groups were about evenly split on the measure, with white voters leaning slightly against it.) Given these numbers, we can imagine an alternative history: Had 500,000 African-American voters stayed home Tuesday, Proposition 8 would have received 350,000 fewer yes votes and 150,000 fewer no votes. The measure is currently leading by at [least 400,000 votes](#), so the black turnout alone didn't flip it—but the margin would have been significantly closer had Obama's supporters not been out in force.

David McCuan, a political scientist at Sonoma State University, says that over the last 10 years, pollsters have noticed a "generational shift" in California on the issue of gay marriage. Voters, particularly younger ones, have become much more comfortable with the idea of equal rights for gays and lesbians. But that shift, he says, hasn't hit the African-American community. Obama opposed Proposition 8, but only guardedly—and he has always made plain his opposition to gay marriage. What's more, McCuan notes, Obama talks often of his faith and his ties to the black church. As a result, "the type of voter that he brings out in the African-American community, while they vote for Obama at the top of the ticket, they'll vote against gay marriage down the ballot," he says.

But if the anti-gay-marriage side was boosted by a one-time event—the first major-party African-American presidential candidate on the ballot—might supporters of gay marriage win in the future? McCuan says that's plausible. "In the abstract, there's a high level of support for equal rights, particularly among the younger generation." And support is growing fast. In 2000, 61 percent of voters approved of a [ban on same-sex marriage](#); this year, it was down to a bare majority. The "Yes on 8" campaign was particularly well-funded and savvy, blanketing the airwaves with ads suggesting that gay marriage would be taught in schools. If supporters of same-sex marriage wait a few

years, and if they can muster as effective a campaign as the one mounted this year by the other side, they could well change the law.

California voters are fickle, McCuan says. "They're driven by the clicker—it's like changing channels. Today the channel is 'Yes on 8,' but I would say in 2010 or more likely 2012, they're going to turn the channel."

politics

Yes, He Did

How Obama bent the arc of history.

By John Dickerson

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 2:11 AM ET

CHICAGO—Barack Obama faced a lot of big crowds during his campaign. Now President-elect Obama faces his largest one: a country of 305 million.

"We have a righteous wind at our back," Obama proclaimed in the closing days of the campaign. It turned out to be a gale-force wind. [He won](#) decisively with more than 350 electoral votes and 51 percent of the popular vote, the first time a Democrat has achieved a majority of the popular vote since Jimmy Carter and by the largest margin for a Democrat since Lyndon Johnson in 1964.* He won in working-class areas where there had once been concern about his ability to connect with voters. Obama won among women, who are 53 percent of the electorate, by 14 points. He inspired a host of new voters and young voters, who helped make him the first post-baby boomer president. They all call him Barack, and he responded by texting them on victory night: "All of this happened because of you. Thanks, Barack."

More than 200,000 people waited in Grant Park to welcome the first African-American president-elect to his new job. As Obama took his place between bulletproof glass that looked like a giant parenthesis, six beams of light shot toward the clear sky behind him. The weather was so perfect that, had it occurred earlier in the campaign, it would have spurred one of those e-mail rumors about him being "The One."

When Obama spoke, he was somber and serious. There were no jokes, and his optimism was tempered by realism. He talked of "the enormity of the task that lies ahead" and the challenges that "are the greatest of our lifetime." As he stood before 15 American flags, it didn't look like a campaign event. It was presidential. Gone were the blue placards from countless rallies. Instead, American flags waved. While the crowd waited for Obama to arrive, campaign music played. When he left the stage, the music was a more stirring anthem with a patriotic tone.

Obama wrapped his arms around the country he now leads, singing the song of its progress over the last 100 years. At the same time, he promised a renovation, a "new spirit of patriotism, of service and responsibility" as well as "a new dawn of American leadership" overseas.

He promised to be the president of all Americans. "To those Americans whose support I have yet to earn—I may not have won your vote, but I hear your voices, I need your help, and I will be your president, too." John McCain praised Obama at length in his [concession speech](#), testifying to the historic nature of the victory and Obama's ability to inspire the nation. Obama returned the compliment, saying of McCain, "He has endured sacrifices for America that most of us cannot begin to imagine, and we are better off for the service rendered by this brave and selfless leader."

Obama was also careful not to gloat: "While the Democratic Party has won a great victory tonight, we do so with a measure of humility and determination to heal the divides that have held back our progress."

It was not only Barack Obama who made history—so did his strategists. They designed a plan and executed it relentlessly through a brutal primary and general election. Twice they upended the idea that no plan survives engagement with the enemy. Obama won by driving up his vote in traditional Democratic areas, and he shrunk the margins in conservative areas. They also out-hustled the competition. According to exit polls, 27 percent of voters said they were contacted by the Obama camp. Only 19 percent say they were contacted by the McCain camp.

Exit polls also indicated that race was not a factor. Where voters said race was important, they voted for Obama. Those who said race *wasn't* important also voted for him—in relatively the same percentages. In Ohio, Obama won among whites making less than \$50,000, a group that was once supposed to be a big problem for him. In Pennsylvania cities like Scranton, Reading, and Allentown, where he was supposed to have the same problem, he won by healthy margins. "I always thought that there was a prejudice factor in the state," said Sen. Bob Casey, a Pennsylvania Democrat. "I hope we've now washed that away."

In the end, the voters favored change over experience 37 percent to 20 percent. People also seemed to vote against their economic self-interest, something liberal critics said only witless Republican voters did. Fully 70 percent said Obama would raise their taxes, while 60 percent said McCain would. They voted for Obama, anyway.

The first blow for McCain came just after 8:30 p.m. New Hampshire, the state where he had twice staged comebacks, went for Obama. In Grant Park, a young man threw his arms up in the air and twirled in the dirt: "We're going to do it!" Then 15

minutes later on the jumbo screen, Wolf Blitzer, as large as a single-family home, announced that Obama had also won Pennsylvania. The crowd erupted. McCain had put his hopes on the traditionally blue state as a break against Obama's likely wins in other states.

The next blow for McCain came in Ohio. With two days left in the campaign, Obama had visited Columbus, Cincinnati, and Cleveland. He out-organized McCain and outspent him. It paid off. There was no longer any way McCain could put together enough electoral votes. [The pace](#) picked up from there, with red states falling one by one for Obama: New Mexico, Iowa, Florida, and Virginia, where on the last night of his campaign Obama [drew a crowd of 90,000](#), just outside Washington—miles away from the first battlefield of the Civil War.*

At the start of his campaign, Obama often concluded his speeches by telling the story of his Senate campaign and how he prevailed in the southern part of Illinois despite its history of antipathy towards blacks. He cited Martin Luther King Jr., who said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." On Tuesday, 221 years after the adoption of a Constitution that allowed slavery to continue, an African-American won the presidency. In Grant Park, as Barack Obama left the stage, you could see that arc bend.

Correction, Nov. 5, 2008: *This piece incorrectly stated that Obama's victory was the first majority for a Democrat since Lyndon Johnson in 1964. Jimmy Carter won a majority of the popular vote in 1976, with a count of 40 million to Gerald Ford's 39 million. ([Return](#) to the corrected sentence.)*

Correction, Nov. 6, 2008: *This story originally claimed that North Carolina had gone for Obama. As of midday ET on Nov. 6, the race was still too close to call. ([Return](#) to the corrected sentence.)*

politics Class Act

McCain's respectful concession speech.

By Christopher Beam

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 1:02 AM ET

PHOENIX—A concession speech is a delicate undertaking. There are certain words you have to say: *Congratulate. Admire. Cooperation. Gratitude.* The challenge is to make people believe you.

By that standard, John McCain succeeded. In fact, he said all the things he *didn't* have to. He congratulated Barack Obama not

just for running a good campaign but for mobilizing millions of people who "once thought they had little influence in American elections." He acknowledged that his loss was America's win, at least in terms of historical progress: "I recognize the special significance it has for African-Americans and the special pride it offers them." (Weirdly, though, he didn't expand the sentiment to apply to all Americans.) He dwelled on the heartbreaking death of Obama's grandmother the day before the election—a personal note that a less sensitive candidate would have forgone: "She is with our creator and proud of the good man she helped raise."

McCain was humble, not defiant, about his loss—almost overly so. "We fought, and although we fell short, the failure was mine, not yours," he said. That said, he acknowledged that he faced "a difficult road"—circumstances that perhaps any Republican would have had trouble overcoming.

At the same time, McCain refused to revisit the past. "I don't know what more we could have done to win this election," he said. "I'll leave that to others to determine." (Offer [accepted](#).) Still, there was a hint of repentance about negative campaigning—even if McCain's campaign was [hardly the sleaziest ever](#). "We are all Americans," he said, "and no association has ever meant more to me than that." Bill Ayers, you can come out of your hole now.

The audience wasn't totally buying it. The first word to emerge from the crowd during McCain's speech came after he said he'd called Obama to congratulate him: "Bullshit!" McCain calmly tamped down objections—a move he's [mastered lately](#). The audience did applaud politely at the lines about racial progress. But the mood was mostly somber. "I can't believe Obama will be president," one woman from California told me before ordering a glass of wine, a shot, and a chaser from the bar.

McCain also reminded Republicans of the election's silver lining: Sarah Palin. Don't laugh. By picking Palin, McCain re-energized the party and gave it a personality likely to remain popular for many years. "She's one of the best campaigners I have ever seen and an important new voice in the struggle," for conservative principles, he said. Palin, who had flown to Phoenix with her husband, Todd, after casting her vote in Alaska in the morning, said not a word. She didn't have to—her smile said it all: "I'll be back."

McCain closed his speech the same way he closed his convention speech—with a call to arms. Only this time, in the wake of an Obama victory, his words sounded different. "Nothing is inevitable here," he said. "Americans never quit. We never surrender." He didn't shout the words. He spoke them like you'd read a bedtime story. "We never hide from history," he went on. "We make history." It's hard to imagine better words to usher in Obama's victory.

politics

Rebuilding the McCain Brand

Six ways he can recapture his former glory.

By Christopher Beam

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 11:23 PM ET

PHOENIX—One major casualty of the 2008 race is the McCain brand, as a big chunk of his former fans have turned critical. The media, a group John McCain once called his "base," have fallen off the boat. Independents who admired his stances on immigration and Bush's tax cuts have drifted away. Veterans of the 2000 campaign have said they [barely recognize](#) the 2008 Republican nominee. Mark Salter, McCain's co-author and confidante, has said that Obama has "dinged up" the McCain brand.

Well, now is the time to rebuild. McCain may have lost the election, but in the coming weeks and months, he'll have an opportunity to fix a damaged reputation. Here are a few things he can do:

Re meet the press. It's conventional wisdom in McCainland that the media jilted their candidate this election. "I think people wanted to see McCain lose with honor," says Michael Goldfarb, a spokesman and blogger for McCain. "That's how they wanted it to play out, like a fucking episode of *The West Wing*." But after McCain's candor created [some awkward moments](#), the campaign shuttered its doors and froze out the press—which only made the media pig pile grow. Whoever's to blame, McCain can make headway by resuming his old ways—giving interviews, reconnecting with alienated allies, and generally "going rogue," to use a current phrase.

Some aides doubt that will happen. "He's not gonna change anything to appease [the media]," says Goldfarb, who believes the media will revisit its coverage of the campaign on its own. "After some minimal self-reflection, they'll see they gave John McCain a really bad rap." But at the very least, McCain can make it clear there are no hard feelings. He offered a small olive branch Tuesday, when he came to the back of the "Straight Talk Air" to say goodbye. "We've had a great time. I wish you all every success and look forward to being with you in the future," he said.

Acknowledge campaign mistakes. A big part of the McCain "brand" was admitting when he screwed up. After his 2000 campaign ended, he [apologized](#) for his support for flying the Confederate flag above the South Carolina statehouse. McCain would do well to acknowledge his missteps this time around. Chief among them may be picking Sarah Palin as his running mate—which many former allies called the last straw. Sure,

McCain deserves credit for refusing to discuss the Rev. Jeremiah Wright or to demonize Obama because of his heritage or use his middle name (especially in defiance of staffers' urging). And this doesn't mean pointing the finger—postmortem recriminations always look bad ([Exhibit A](#)). But a full rehabilitation requires that McCain confront some of his campaign's less proud decisions.

Piss off Republicans. "Maverick" has always been part truth, part myth. But what wins McCain points among Americans may not win him friends among congressional Republicans, particularly when it comes to campaign-finance reform, immigration, and climate change. Now that McCain doesn't have to worry about "winning the base," he can return to emphasizing his less orthodox stances. There's a risk in being pegged as a flip-flop-flipper—*I was for pathways to citizenship before I was against them before I was for them!*—but unless he's planning a 2012 run, who cares?

That said, McCain's apostasy was appealing largely because Republicans were in charge. With Democrats in power, it may be harder to appear mavericky. If McCain joins Democrats on certain issues, it could look more opportunistic than brave, since they're now the majority.

Be funny. One of McCain's best selling points has always been his sense of humor—it's a big reason people (voters, reporters, other politicians) are attracted to him, and it will remain so. But it doesn't hurt to remind people. What can he do to get back his mojo? Go on *Letterman* and joke about the time he stiffed him. Poke fun at the new guy in the White House. Laugh at his own worst moments. His latest appearance on *Saturday Night Live* was a good start (and [at least one observer](#) saw it as an early indicator that he knew he wasn't going to win). But McCain should take every chance he can get—including his [concession speech](#)—to show he's not bitter.

Reach out to Obama. McCain's behavior—not to mention aides who know him—suggest he doesn't have a sparkling opinion of Obama. But from now on, *grace* is the word. Don't just stick to the concession-speech standards like congratulations. Offer to help Democrats reach across the aisle. Arrange meetings. Negotiate compromises. Suppress the urge to point out that you were the first to propose collaboration—(*cough*) town halls (*cough*). Both candidates have stood for cooperation—act on it.

Write a campaign memoir. McCain is always at his best when telling stories. So tell the story of the campaign. No candidate has ever done it—at least not as McCain would. McCain's books have always been windows into his mind (with Salter acting as a pane). He could win a lot of respect by penning an unvarnished account of the campaign, from his own perspective. Suggested title: *Travels With Lindsey*.

Maybe it's impossible for McCain to reclaim his brand. You can't just rewind the clock. Plus, many will say "the old McCain" would have won the race. But 2008 didn't get nearly as nasty as it could have, and the damage to McCain's brand, while significant, is not irreversible. As spokesman Tucker Bounds says, "John McCain *is* the brand." And he's not going anywhere.

politics

Now What?

Six ways Obama can show he'll be a different kind of president.

By John Dickerson

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 9:33 PM ET

CHICAGO—Barack Obama has said he wants to change the political system. Now that he is president-elect, we'll see what that actually means. As he works to remove the troops from Iraq, reform the nation's health care system, and promote American energy independence, we'll see how well he keeps his promise to reach out to others with different ideas. He once promised that negotiations about his health care plan would be shown live on C-SPAN. Is he really going to be that transparent?

It may take some time before we know these answers. But some indications of Obama's new kind of politics could come before he starts making policy decisions. In his acceptance speech, Obama plans to offer some symbolic gestures, such as reaching out to Republicans and not appearing overly celebratory. This is a good start, but there's more he could do. Here are a few suggestions:

1. **Embrace John McCain.** As the campaign wound to a close, Obama was already [saying nicer things about McCain](#). Behind the scenes, he was also pulling back. According to one aide, when campaign strategists said they thought Obama had a shot at being competitive in Arizona and that they should run ads there, he personally insisted that only positive ads be aired. "I don't want to put my foot on his neck," said Obama, according to the aide's paraphrasing.

Obama should go beyond the graciousness he'll no doubt show McCain in his acceptance speech. He should pledge to meet with McCain soon. This gesture would do several things: It would show graciousness in victory, which is an attractive quality in a president. It would also show that President-elect Obama is open to hearing ideas he disagrees with, and it would open the door to a man who could be an ally in the years ahead. And from McCain's standpoint, there are certainly benefits to reviving his brand as a bipartisan maverick at the end of his career. He won't be able to do that as a Mitch McConnell obstructionist; better to be a senator who is willing to work with the new administration.

Obama could ease that transition by testifying to McCain's honor.

2. **Appoint Republicans.** Obama and his top strategist, David Axelrod, have repeatedly talked about getting past the red-state/blue-state paradigm, and the senator has reflected more than once on Abraham Lincoln's Cabinet, famously described as a "[Team of Rivals](#)." He should turn his admiration into practice. There are several possible options. He could appoint Sen. Richard Lugar of Indiana as secretary of state. He could appoint Sen. Chuck Hagel of Nebraska ambassador to the United Nations. (Hagel, who wants out of the Senate, is a foreign-policy expert and wants to someday make money in the private sector.) Obama could also appoint Colin Powell to head his national service initiative or some other high-profile, nonmilitary project.

3. **Work without pay.** Obama has talked about a new era of sacrifice and has also promised to go through the budget "line by line," cutting out unnecessary programs. If he were to work without pay, he would show that he was doing his part. He can afford it: Obama's books have made him a wealthy man. And his next books will make him even wealthier.

4. **Increase disclosure and transparency.** Obama founded his campaign on removing the influence of special interests. "They have not funded my candidacy, and they will not run my White House," he has said repeatedly. To match this message immediately, Sheila Krumholz, executive director of the [Center for Responsive Politics](#), has a tidy little to-do list for the candidate who has promised unsurpassed ethical standards:

- Disclose donors who gave less than \$200.
- Disclose the amounts and professions of bundlers who helped him raise gargantuan sums.
- Disclose donors to his "[Obama Transition Project](#)."
- Disclose immediately online those who give to the inaugural committees.
- Promise not to raise funds anonymously for the presidential library until the end of his term.

5. **Hold one inaugural event outside Washington.** Obama has billed his campaign as a movement that merely carries him along. To symbolically ratify the outside-the-Beltway power of the coalition he built, Obama should hold a pre-inauguration event somewhere beyond the Beltway—maybe in Iowa, where he started his campaign.

6. **Meet with a cross-section of religious leaders.** Obama believes in faith-based initiatives of the kind President Bush also championed. By holding a public meeting with leaders from all faiths, Obama could kick-start his policies in this area. He could also send an important message to those who didn't vote for him that he is not the radical cultural liberal that Republicans tried to make him appear to be during the campaign.

politics

At a Loss for Words for Loss?

Note to John McCain: Read this before conceding.

By Ted Scheinman

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 10:20 AM ET

Sometime after sundown on Tuesday, barring a political upset of historic proportions, John McCain will address his supporters [on the lawn of the Phoenix Biltmore](#) to concede the 2008 presidential election. The concession formula is pretty simple: Accept tearful, painfully drawn-out applause; crack self-deprecating joke; congratulate opponent (and stanch booing that accompanies every mention of said opponent); pledge yourself to the cause of unity; and thank your family, your supporters, God, and the American people (though not necessarily in that order).

This formula calls for brevity, focus, and graciousness, qualities that have not always been evident in the McCain campaign. Here are a few things he can learn from previous losers—and a few ways the ["consummate maverick"](#) can close his campaign with words that actually matter.

Put Country First

Models: Adlai Stevenson, Hillary Clinton, Dan Quayle

A candidate whose slogan has been "Country First," McCain will need a special take on the obligatory call for patriotic unity. His best bet? A jarring fusion of Adlai Stevenson and Dan Quayle. Stevenson, whose [1952 concession speech](#) is a sterling example of the rhetoric of defeat, memorably intoned: "I urge you all to give General Eisenhower the support he will need to carry out the great tasks that lie before him. I pledge him mine. We vote as many, but we pray as one." That's a classy line—even better than Bob Dole's description of Bill Clinton in 1996 as ["my opponent and not my enemy."](#)

But after seeking to link Barack Obama to the two greatest American fears of the last century (terrorism and communism), McCain's got a long walk to the high road. He might win some bipartisan cred by examining Hillary Clinton's June 7 primary [concession speech](#)—or, if he wants to stay on his side of the aisle, Dan Quayle's astute but ever-so-slightly backhanded 1992 observation: "If [Clinton] runs the country as well as he ran his campaign, we will be all right."

Make It Funny

Models: Bob Dole, Al Gore

For a standard of dignified humor, McCain should turn to [Bob Dole's concession speech](#) in 1996. Trying to hush his supporters

so he could finish a sentence, Dole admonished: "You're not going to get that tax cut if you don't be quiet." It was a warm, sportsmanlike moment, the kind for which McCain once had a knack.

When it comes to good sportsmanship, the model is Al Gore in 2000, who [led with a joke](#) after a month of hard-fought legal battles: "Just moments ago, I spoke with George W. Bush and congratulated him on becoming the 43rd president of the United States. And I promised him that I wouldn't call him back this time." McCain should be able to muster some non-[Janet Reno-related](#) humor. (Potential joke: "If I ever need a good [nonlicensed](#) plumber, I know who to call.")

Talk Straight

Model: John McCain

This one's a long shot. But it would make for a landmark, distinctly nonboilerplate speech—one that avoids excessive references to Joe the Plumber, mavericks, and bear DNA. McCain can state plainly that Obama is neither a terrorist nor a communist (see: Country First) and that any discussion of "real" and "nonreal" Americas is fatuous. In his own defense and with only minimal disingenuousness, McCain can touch on his record of campaign-finance reform ([George Will be damned!](#)) and observe firmly but without bitterness that his commitment to public funds put him at a [colossal disadvantage](#). He can't go too far here—don't expect him to acknowledge any possible downsides to his pick of a No. 2, for example—but we could hear something refreshing nonetheless. McCain could easily acknowledge that the majority of Americans—plumbers, pundits, and those in between—want something different, and that Obama promises to provide it.

Exhort the Youth

The model: Michael Dukakis, George H.W. Bush

Again, the key here is salvaging a sense of decency and worth in politics—all the more crucial after a campaign based on such a thorough eviscerating of the individuals and institutions of Washington. Addressing the "young people" of America after his defeat in 1988, [Dukakis said](#): "There is nothing you can do in this world more fulfilling and more satisfying than giving of yourself to others and making a contribution to your community and your state and your nation and your fellow citizens." Four years later, George H.W. Bush [urged the same demographic](#) not to "be deterred, kept away from public service by the smoke and fire of a campaign year or the ugliness of politics."

Show Some Empathy

Model: Abraham Lincoln via Adlai Stevenson

McCain is at his best as the underdog who—with a nod and, yes, a [wink](#)—sees something nobler than the brawl. For the last two

months, he's been in the thick of it. In the early hours of Nov. 5, perhaps, we'll get a version of McCain who looks further than the next 24-hour news cycle. His most important job may be to provide some measure of visceral closure for his base—which provided this campaign with some of its [scarier moments](#)—not for the sake of making them feel good but to restore a sense of fellowship between them and their Obama-voting countrymen. McCain needs both to show his supporters he knows how they feel—and how important it is to move on. For this task, there are few passages better than Adlai Stevenson's invocation of Abraham Lincoln in his concession speech, delivered in Springfield, Ill., in 1952:

Someone asked me as I came in, down on the street, how I felt, and I was reminded of a story that a fellow townsman of ours used to tell—Abraham Lincoln. They asked him how he felt once after an unsuccessful election. He said he felt like a little boy who had stubbed his toe in the dark. He said that he was too old to cry, but it hurt too much to laugh.

politics

Fired Up and Ready to Go

Obama concludes his campaign on a high and wistful note.

By John Dickerson

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 12:39 AM ET

CHARLOTTE, N.C.—Politicians often start their speeches addressing the big development of the day. When Barack Obama took the rain-soaked stage here, the new material at the beginning was the sad news that his grandmother had died. "She has gone home," [he said](#), his voice halting. "It's hard, a little, to talk about."

Obama used a handkerchief to wipe away a few tears, a rare moment of spontaneity from a highly controlled candidate. He paid tribute to the woman who raised him in a two-bedroom apartment while his mother lived in Indonesia. She was one of the "quiet heroes," he said, moving her story into his stump speech. "Not famous names, not in the newspapers, and each day they work hard. They aren't seeking the limelight. In this crowd there are a lot of quiet heroes like that. The satisfaction they get is seeing that their children and grandchildren get a better life." It was to those quiet heroes, he said, that his campaign was dedicated.

Madelyn Dunham's grandson may be elected president Tuesday, which makes her death so poignant. A chapter in Barack Obama's life is closing in a definitive and complete way.

In Obama's last day of campaigning before the voters have their say, he traveled through Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia, facing the same large crowds that have met him at each stop along the way. "I have just one word for you," Obama said at the start of each of his rallies. "Tomorrow." His message was simple: "I've made the arguments. Now it's all about who wants it more."

After hundreds of arid hotel rooms, soggy sandwiches, and countless handshakes and smiles for the camera, Obama can now rest a bit—no matter what happens. No more making sure he thanks the right local officials before every speech and properly pronounces their names. No more unwrapping his hotel bathroom cup from the sanitary plastic. On Monday night, he went home to Chicago to sleep in his own bed. In the coming days, he'll stay there for the longest uninterrupted stretch in more than a year.

Obama's final day of campaigning began with 45 minutes at the gym and a phone call to African-American leaders. Joined by Oprah, according to *Politico*, Obama said he looked forward to watching his daughters play on the South Lawn of the White House.

Though it was his last day of campaigning, Obama did not let up on McCain. He did mix his remarks with occasional compliments, though. He congratulated McCain on "the tough race that he's fought" and reiterated that McCain was a genuine hero. When knocking him for misunderstanding the economy, Obama said: "It's not because he's a bad man. He doesn't understand what's happening in America."

On Election Day, Obama will vote and make a quick visit to neighboring Indiana. He'll also squeeze in a basketball game and visit with friends. His aides say he doesn't watch the election returns, because, as David Axelrod explained, making the universal hand signal for mindless talk, "He doesn't like all the chatter."

At the last rally of the campaign, in Manassas, Va., Obama faced a crowd of 90,000 spread up a hillside. Members of the audience said they had come to watch history. At the back of the crowd of mufflers and ski hats, school-bus-size letters spelled out "Vote for Change."

At the conclusion of his remarks, Obama, dressed in suit slacks and a black windbreaker, reprised [a story](#) that was once a staple of his stump speech but that he hasn't told for a while. He told of his encounter with Edith Childs, a city councilwoman from Greenwood, S.C., who had lifted his spirits at the start of his campaign when his rallies were small and no one gave him a chance. She inspired him with her chant of "Fired up and ready to go."

It's a story he's told hundreds of times but probably never so well. He lingered for effect, described the councilwoman's church hat with a broad theatrical sweep of his hand and somehow was able to convey a time when he was small and vulnerable to the crowd of 90,000 that came to see him. "That's how this thing started," he said. "It shows you what one voice can do. One voice can change a room, and if it can change a room, it can change a city, and if it can change a city, it can change a state, and if it can change a state then it can change a nation and if it can change a nation it can change a world."

As Obama told the story for the last time in this campaign, on the day his grandmother died, it was easy to imagine that, as he told it, he was thinking not only of Edith Childs but also of a woman he called "Toot."

politics

If McCain Loses, It's Not My Fault

Campaign aides are optimistic but also starting to assign blame.

By Christopher Beam

Monday, November 3, 2008, at 10:08 PM ET

If there is any pessimism in the McCain camp, it's not coming from the candidate. On the stump in a hangar near Pittsburgh, he had more energy than any septuagenarian should have on three hours of sleep. So he was a little loopy here and there—"If you're Joe the Lieberman or Joe the Plumber, you're the best," he said, before mumbling, "Joe Joe Joe Joe Joe"—but he seems determined not to go out gently.

McCain's aides are less successful at hiding their frustration. They exude optimism, too, but there's already a circular firing squad forming to assign blame. And in this firing squad, the guns point outward. The campaign pins the blame for McCain's struggles on an unholy trinity of factors: media (it's biased), money (Barack Obama has more), and milieu (politically, it's good for Democrats).

The examples of media bias are countless, says McCain adviser and co-author Mark Salter. When Obama tried to pin the blame for the collapse of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac on McCain, the media did not object. When the McCain camp was [accused](#) of racism for raising Obama's association with William Ayers—again, no outcry. And somehow McCain kept getting pegged as the more negative of the two, despite a [study](#) showing that Obama was running more attack ads. How can the media set things right between now and Election Day? "Get on some topic other than 'Obama's gonna win,'" says Salter.

Advisers and even McCain himself also bring up the Democrat's spending advantage at every turn. But could greater spending be

a sign of greater support? After all, as many observers have noted, Obama rallies attract far larger crowds than McCain rallies. But McCain aides are quick to say size doesn't matter. "Some of the biggest crowds I've seen came out for McGovern in '72," says Charlie Black. Salter cites cost. It's cheaper to book a smaller venue and, aside from the awe factor, just as effective in getting the message out. Obama's money also allows him to buy more ads—but as McCain adviser Rick Davis [suggested](#), Obama's decision to buy time in North Dakota, Georgia, and Arizona is a sign of desperation: He's not winning in the states he's supposed to win, so he has to try and expand the electoral map.

Finally, McCain's camp says his woes stem from an unfavorable political environment. There's not much you can do when your opponent keeps saying, "George Bush, George Bush, George Bush," Salter said, making punching motions. The Republican brand is hurting—a recent [poll](#) put the president's approval rating at about 26 percent and showed Democrats holding a 12-point advantage over Republicans on a generic congressional ballot. Obama has successfully lashed McCain to the sinking GOP ship. Again, Salter says, it comes back to cash: "They've spent a lot of money trying to dissipate the McCain brand," he explains. "Have they dinged it up? Sure."

It might be too early to call this venting *blame*. After all, McCain hasn't lost. But it's surely a preview of rationales to come if he does. Conspicuously absent from the scapegoats named above are two obvious ones: the economy and Sarah Palin. Blaming the economy would acknowledge McCain's perceived [weakness](#) on the issue. And blaming Palin would amount to questioning McCain's judgment.

Besides, there will be plenty of time for that kind of blame game later. In the meantime, the campaign is sticking with its comeback prediction: The polls are tightening, late deciders will swing heavily for McCain, and Obama tends to underperform in actual elections (as opposed to surveys).

That logic seems to be enough to keep McCain chipper. The senator has maintained an inhuman travel schedule, hitting seven states in 26 hours. He pulls this off by 1) leveraging the time zones to extend the day by three hours, and 2) holding most events at airports, thus justifying the *Top Gun* intro music. He also just added two 13th-hour stops in Colorado and New Mexico on Tuesday, despite the McCain tradition of [going to the movies on Election Day](#).

If McCain feels like this is the end, he doesn't show it. The rallies feel remarkably normal. He's got his usual merry band, including Joe the Lieberman and court-jester-in-waiting Lindsey Graham. He's even rolling out new material. McCain warned the Pittsburgh crowd that Obama [told](#) the *San Francisco Chronicle*—McCain said *San Francisco* like you'd describe a

turd—that "if somebody wants to build a coal-powered plant, they can. It's just that it will bankrupt them."

McCain pledged not to let coal factories suffer, although clean coal would be the eventual goal—a caveat that sort of killed the applause. He also chided Obama for his caution on nuclear energy. "Ask the Navy," he said. "We've been sailing ships around the world with nuclear power plants on them for 60 years!"

There's a sense among journalists that this story arc needs a resolution. In Indiana, two reporters lamented the lack of material: "I feel bad." "Why?" "Because I don't have anything." And McCain seems determined not to provide anything—for good reason. Not all campaigns end with an explosion or even a whimper. One moment they're going at breakneck speed, and then they stop.

politics

Slate's Election Day Tipsheet

Slate's hour-by-hour guide to reading the returns.

By John Dickerson

Monday, November 3, 2008, at 7:52 PM ET

Barack Obama's aides say that he doesn't like to watch the election returns on television because he doesn't want to hear all the cable-TV chatter. (On the stump, he's been calling on politicians to stop going on cable news to reduce the bickering and acrimony in Washington.) But not everyone has Obama's equilibrium. So here's a partial guide of things to look for on Election Day. (Note: All times are ET.)

Sunrise to 6 p.m.: Look for reports of voter turnout. Throughout the day, watch the crowds in any of the battleground states. Analysts generally agree that a big turnout helps Obama. For McCain, who has to make up deficits in early voting, watch to see if turnout equals or exceeds the turnout President Bush got in 2004. To win, McCain needs more than just his base, of course—but he really needs his base. Some places to keep an eye on:

- In Florida, there is the I-4 corridor from Tampa to Daytona Beach as well as the counties in the panhandle.
- In Ohio, look to turnout in Franklin County (home to Columbus) for McCain. For Obama, look at Hamilton County (home to Cincinnati) and other big, urban counties such as Cuyahoga (Cleveland), where new registrations and black voters should boost Obama's numbers. Watch northwestern Ohio, a solidly Republican corner of the state where Obama led in [two October](#) polls.

- In Pennsylvania, look to Allegheny, Butler, and Westmoreland counties (Pittsburgh and its suburbs) for McCain, and the inner suburbs around Philadelphia (Montgomery, Delaware, Bucks, and Chester) for Obama.

6 p.m.: Polls start to close in Indiana. This traditionally Republican state is at the outer edge of Obama's raids into McCain's territory. If Obama wins, it might very well mean he's won the whole election, because it will ratify the Obama strategy that has been employed throughout the battleground states. If McCain wins, we'll get a feeling for the contours of his defensive line. A McCain win in Indiana may mean that states like Missouri and North Carolina might not flip into the Obama category.

The polls in Kentucky also start to close at 6. (The Western part of the state closes at 7:00). For those watching to see whether Democrats will have 60 votes in the Senate, a win by Democrat Bruce Lunsford against Mitch McConnell will suggest it's possible.

7 p.m.: Polls close in Virginia and start to close in Florida (the Western part of the state closes at 8:00). If Obama wins Florida's 27 electoral votes, he'll have a big night. Watch the I-4 corridor, the area between Tampa and Orlando where both campaigns have been [working hard](#) in Hillsborough, Pinellas, Polk, and Osceola counties. In early voting in the state, Democrats have an edge of more than 300,000 [votes](#). Upon seeing this, some Republicans may head into the root cellar. That's a big margin for McCain to make up on Election Day. His team has to hope that the early voting came from reliable Democratic base voters, which would mean they've just gotten their usual Election Day support—just earlier than usual. Obama aides say lots of their early vote comes from new and sporadic voters. If they're right—and evidence suggests they may be—then Florida could go blue.

Virginia may be the Bush state where Obama has put in the most effort. If he wins the commonwealth and holds the states John Kerry won (as expected), then he'll need only five more electoral votes to get to 270. Virginia also matters because it will give us the first hints about which campaign is winning the turnout battle. The big question is whether those new and young voters turn out for Obama the way his aides say they will.

For those looking for 60 Democrats in the Senate, Georgia and Mississippi polls also close at this hour. To hit the magic number, Democrats will need a win in one of those states to add to the races they're more likely to win.

7:30 p.m.: Polls close in Ohio. Perhaps [you've heard of this state](#), with 20 electoral votes. Like Florida, it has been a part of the drama of recent close presidential races. In 2004, Democrats

won the big population centers, but Bush won the state by picking up lots of rural districts. Look to western counties like Auglaize, Darke, Mercer, Putnam, and Shelby to see if McCain is matching Bush's turnout. Watch enormous Hamilton County, a swing county Republicans think Obama might win. Bush won it last time. On the southeastern edge of West Virginia, look to Jefferson, Belmont, and Monroe to see how Obama performs with white working-class voters.

Polls also close in [North Carolina](#) at 7:30*. Like Indiana, an Obama victory here will suggest a rout. Look for Mecklenburg County around Charlotte, where Obama stopped before Election Day and where he needs to run up a big margin. He'll also need to swing Wake (Raleigh), Cumberland, or Buncombecounties, which went for Bush in '04.

8 p.m.: Polls close in Pennsylvania. McCain rolled all his dice here. If he can hold Florida, Ohio, and Virginia, then Pennsylvania may not mean as much. If he's lost any of those states, then Pennsylvania is a must-win.

Missouri also closes at 8. Watch Greene County, where Obama spent an evening late in the campaign. Bush won the county by 16 percentage points. Obama's aim is not to sweep places like that but to narrow the loss in Republican strongholds and run up large margins in urban areas.

9 p.m.: Polls close in New Mexico and Colorado. If the eastern red states of Virginia, Ohio, and Florida hold for McCain, Obama will have to rely on New Mexico's five electoral votes and Colorado's nine. In Colorado, look to see if Obama can hold down McCain's margins in rural districts and appeal to female swing voters in Larimer County and the Denver suburbs.

10 p.m.: Polls close in Iowa and Nevada. In the unlikely event that Obama loses in the red states where he was ahead in the polls, these are his two last best chances. Look to Elko, Nev., a small, heavily Republican district Obama visited three times in an attempt to drive up the Democratic vote in GOP areas.

Later: Democratic dreams of reaching 60 votes in the Senate might come down to the outcome of convicted Sen. Ted Stevens' re-election race in Alaska.

***Correction, Nov. 3, 2008:** This article originally gave the wrong time for the closing of North Carolina's polling places. ([Return to the corrected sentence.](#))*

politics Barbie '08

Archie Bunker, Mr. Clean, and more of history's greatest fictional presidential

candidates.

By Darren Garnick

Monday, November 3, 2008, at 2:08 PM ET

One of the top story lines of the 2008 campaign has been a [possible surge of fake voters](#). But as we concern ourselves with voter fraud, let us not forget our country's long history of fake presidential candidates. The San Diego-based Museum of Hoaxes just named its [top 20 satirical political candidates of all time](#), noting that comedians Will Rogers (1928), Gracie Allen (1940), and Pat Paulsen (1968) paved the way for this year's ill-fated bid by Stephen Colbert—and perhaps even [Al Franken's serious](#) bid for one of Minnesota's seats in the U.S. Senate.

Thanks to his son Morty, Paulsen is running for president this year from the grave. Franken and humorist Dave Barry have also gotten significant book-tour mileage in the past by declaring themselves Oval Office hopefuls. Beyond leveraging a fake political campaign for personal career advancement, the tactic is also a proven way to move products. More than a year before Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin was branded "[Caribou Barbie](#)," the doll herself launched her fourth bid for the White House. Corporate mascots such as Mr. Clean have long used election seasons to create buzz for supermarket coupons, while television shows like *All in the Family* and *Happy Days* have likewise been drawn to the allure of presidential marketing.

Click [here](#) to read a slide-show essay on history's greatest fictional presidential candidates.

politics Track the Presidential Polls on Your iPhone

Introducing *Slate's* Poll Tracker '08: all the data you crave about the presidential race.

Monday, November 3, 2008, at 6:14 AM ET

If you're a political junkie like we're political junkies, you have a

problem. You can track the McCain-Obama polls only at your computer. If you go to a ballgame, or a meeting, or your daughter's wedding, you enter a politics vacuum, cut off from the data you crave.

No longer. Today *Slate* introduces Poll Tracker '08, an application that delivers comprehensive up-to-the-minute data about the presidential election to your iPhone, iPhone 3G, or iPod touch. Using data from Pollster.com, the Poll Tracker '08 delivers the latest McCain and Obama polling numbers for every state, graphs historical polling trends, and charts voting patterns in previous elections. Poll Tracker '08 allows you to sort states by how contested they are, how fresh their poll data is, or how heavily they lean to McCain or Obama.

You can download Poll Tracker '08 on the iPhone App Store. It costs just 99 cents, a small price to pay for satisfying your craving for data anytime, anywhere. **Get it on the [App Store](#).**

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politics

If Obama Loses, Who Gets Blamed?

His loss would be disastrous for the media and political establishment.

By John Dickerson

Sunday, November 2, 2008, at 9:21 PM ET

CLEVELAND—If Barack Obama wins the election, it will be historic. And if he loses, it will be pretty historic, too: It would mark the biggest collective error in the history of the media and political establishment.

An Obama loss would mean the majority of pundits, reporters, and analysts were wrong. Pollsters would have to find a new line of work, since Obama has been ahead in all [159 polls](#) taken in the last six weeks. The massive crowds that have regularly turned out to see Obama would turn out to have meant nothing. This collective failure of elites would provide such a blast of schadenfreude that Republicans like Rush Limbaugh would be struck speechless (another historic first).

This situation lends a feeling of unreality to the proceedings as we begin to measure the time until Election Day in hours. It is the elephant on the campaign plane. No one is letting on. Journalists aren't supposed to. Plus, we've been wrong so often, and politics can be so unpredictable, it would be dumb to say that Obama is going to win big.

John McCain is still running hard, and Obama isn't doing any premature celebrating. Members of his staff are on a hair-trigger for any stories that might suggest he or they are displaying overconfidence. Aides said Obama was reacting to the apparent good news with trademark equilibrium though they did say he was happy to be at the end of his journey. "He's exhilarated," said David Axelrod. "He smells the finish line."

Despite Obama's even keel, there are a few small signs that suggest Obama is feeling good. He's flashing that magazine-cover smile, the one that takes over his face, a little more often. On the stump, where he's given nearly the exact same speech for a week, he's started to show some of the looseness of his earlier campaign. "Don't be hoodwinked," he said of McCain's claims, a standard line, to which he added a less regular filigree: "Don't be bamboozled, don't fall for the okey-doke."

In Columbus, Ohio, Obama even gave a shout-out to McCain. Talking about the need to improve the political discourse, he said that also included the need for more humor. "John McCain was funny yesterday on *Saturday Night Live*," he said. "I didn't see it last night but I saw it on YouTube. That's what our politics should be about, the ability to laugh at ourselves."

Obama has had the most fun with Dick Cheney, who recently said he was "delighted" to endorse John McCain. "You've never seen Dick Cheney delighted, but he is," Obama told a crowd here, chuckling to himself. "It's kinda hard to picture, but it's true." He went on to congratulate McCain. "He had to work hard for it!" The rain started pouring in the middle of his Cheney routine, but Obama didn't miss a beat. "Did you notice that it all started when I started talking about Dick Cheney? We've been through a nation of storms but sunshine is on the way."

In Cleveland, Bruce Springsteen opened for Obama. When he was finished, the Obama family joined him, and Springsteen brought up his wife Patty Scialfa and their three kids. Suddenly it was like we were all in the vestibule of a holiday party as The One and The Boss implored their children to step forward and shake the hands.

When the rally in Cleveland concluded, Obama was drenched but lingered for a moment in front of the crowd, estimated at 80,000, and did a few tiny little dance steps to "Signed, Sealed, Delivered, I'm Yours," the Stevie Wonder song that plays after each rally the minute he stops speaking.

It's hard to guess at a candidate's inner feelings. It is particularly hard with Obama, whose emotions are as carefully constrained as a bonsai tree and who keeps the press at a chilly distance. It could be that Obama is just happy to be with his family. Since Saturday, Obama's wife, Michelle, and children, Malia and Sasha, have been with him. The girls are clearly delighted to be in his company. At most stops, Michelle introduces her husband and implores the audience to help her husband finish the quest

he started in their name 21 months ago. "I would love to give credit to my husband," she said, "but this race is not about him but all of us, all of you. He's taken us 85 percent of the way. The rest is on us."

Obama told the crowd in Cleveland that the family time is shaping his mood. "The last few days I've been feeling good," he said. "You start thinking that maybe we might win an election November 4."

Great: Now another American institution could be in peril: If Obama loses, we may have reason to doubt the power of family, too.

press box

Rahm Emanuel, Press Tamer

What to expect as Clinton's enforcer becomes Obama's chief of staff.

By Jack Shafer

Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 6:51 PM ET

"Always be closing!"—shouted by Alec Baldwin in the movie version of David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*—could be Rahm Emanuel's slogan.

Working for Bill Clinton's first presidential campaign, the hyperaggressive Emanuel—who knows his way around lewd speech as well as any David Mamet character—raised money by the tanker-load, helping to make the Clinton victory happen. Inside the White House, he prodded, schemed, bullied, and screeched in service of his boss as a political director and senior aide.

After leaving the White House in 1998, he went to work for financier and [vanity-press mogul](#) Bruce Wasserstein and outdid the Baldwin character, who bragged about making almost \$1 million a year, by taking down at least \$16.2 million dollars in just two and a half years, according to a 2003 *Chicago Tribune* story. (A later *Fortune* article puts his haul at \$18 million.)

"It's a striking sum even in the richly paid world of corporate deal-making, let alone for someone without an MBA or any prior business experience other than running a small political consultancy," the *Tribune* reports. After closing that deal, Emanuel returned to politics, winning a House seat and going on to raise even larger mountains of campaign cash for the Democratic Party.

Today, Emanuel agreed to return to the site of his earlier victories by [accepting](#) the job of chief of staff under President-elect Barack Obama. Emanuel loves the press on many levels.

He loves leaking to them, manipulating them, packaging stories for them, and recycling crap to them. As the *New York Times*' Elisabeth Bumiller [wrote](#) in 1997:

Reporters say Rahm is smart, but complain that he has a bad habit of peddling shopworn goods as scoops. "I got along with him, but like everybody else who ever covered that place, I also hung up on him," says David Lauter, who was in charge of the 1996 election coverage for the *Los Angeles Times*. "You just want to say to him, 'Enough,' He'll call you up and start spinning something about how this is the greatest thing that any President has done in the history of man."

Howard Kurtz's 1998 book, *Spin Cycle: Inside the Clinton Propaganda Machine*, portrays Emanuel as a tireless, conniving salesman of Clinton hoo-ha. Once, when Emanuel fed an assortment of Clinton mini-initiatives to several newspapers, *USA Today* put "Clinton Lays Plans for Millennium Activities" on Page One. "Next, reporters joked, they would be leaking presidential Post-it notes," Kurtz writes.

But far from resenting the kibble that Emanuel scattered, some in the press corps made their resentment known when they missed a feeding. In one case, according to Kurtz, Emanuel leaked Clinton's decision to request a campaign-finance rule change to *USA Today*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times* but passed over the *Wall Street Journal*'s influential Michael Frisby. To abbreviate the story, Emanuel repaired relations by having the incensed Frisby ("I'm going to fuck you," he declared") fed an exclusive about Clinton's "national conversation" about race. Yes, this is how Washington journalism works.

Emanuel "spent perhaps 60 percent of his time" on the press, Kurtz writes, relying on charm, insults, and bluster to advance Clinton's many agendas.

"On a particular day he might chat up columnists Paul Gigot and Mark Shields, return calls from James Bennet and Todd Purdum at the *New York Times*, check in with the networks, have lunch with Cokie Roberts," Kurtz writes. "He would often call the network folks at 10:05 a.m., right after their morning conference call with New York, to find out what they were working on and try to shut it down if necessary." NBC Washington Bureau Chief Tim Russert got a couple of calls a week from Emanuel, who would complain about coverage, push a story, or just pester.

Writing in *Slate* in 1996, Jacob Weisberg [described](#) Emanuel as perhaps "the [Clinton] administration's most diabolically effective tactician" and credited him as being "largely responsible for moving the Clinton campaign beyond mere 'rapid response' to pre-emptive strikes—engineering, for instance,

Clinton's endorsement by the Fraternal Order of Police on the day Bob Dole was set to launch a major attack on the president's crime record."

Bumiller writes that after Clinton won in 1992, his advisers, including Emanuel, met at [Doe's Eat Place](#) to discuss taking revenge on journalists (and others) who had wronged them during the campaign. Even so, Emanuel appears to be a proud member of the "Fuck you—let's go to lunch" school of press management. William Safire, who called Hillary Clinton "a congenital liar" in 1996, may have earned White House enemy status, but to Emanuel, the columnist was "Uncle Bill," Kurtz writes, and Emanuel "even had Safire over for dinner." Michael Kelly of the *New Republic* won a lunch date with Emanuel for calling Clinton "a shocking liar," "occasional demagogue," and worse. (*Note to White House reporters*: For a face-to-face with Emanuel, write the most scathing thing you can about Obama.)

Emanuel games everybody and everything, so the press shouldn't take it personally—and it won't. In fact, as I write, the White House press corps is doing [whippits](#) in celebration of his appointment. The Obama campaign famously kept the press at arm's length. Emanuel, on the other hand, can't shut up. (Whose fault do you think it is that the whole world knew for days that Emanuel had been offered the chief of staff job but couldn't make up his mind?)

The Obama campaign provided the press with no internal drama, forcing reporters to intuit the real agenda. Emanuel, on the other hand, is a drama queen; seething, foaming Mamet production; a big mouth; and a calculating mensch who loves nothing more than to stoke the feed bag for press-corps nosherers. With Emanuel at the top, the Obama administration might not get the stories it wants, but with the Emanuelian forethought and topspin, it might just avert the stories it dreads.

Thanks to the *Washington Post's* Howard Kurtz for writing a book that I could sieve into a column so efficiently. He's very thoughtful, that Kurtz. And it's a good book. Read any good books about media manipulation lately? Send titles to slate.pressbox@gmail.com. (E-mail may be quoted by name in "The Fray," *Slate's* readers' forum; in a future article; or elsewhere unless the writer stipulates otherwise. Permanent disclosure: *Slate* is owned by the Washington Post Co.)

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press box

Wolf Blitzer Is "Watching Very Closely"

A crash course in Blitzer-ese.

By Jack Shafer

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 9:37 PM ET

Was Wolf Blitzer's first language English, or was it Esperanto?

On CNN's *The Situation Room*, which he anchors, Blitzer draws on such a limited vocabulary that I predict that when he dies and the coroner cores his skull, the world will learn that he possesses a brain the size of a walnut.

Like a windup toy, Blitzer repeats the same stock phrases into the camera like an ad man. Other CNN talking heads working political stories with Blitzer aren't just his colleagues; they're "the best political team on television," an [empty boast](#) that ever echoes on CNN.

"I'm Wolf Blitzer," he intones like an automaton. "You're in *The Situation Room*." Actually, you're not in the CNN situation room. You're at home or at work or at the bar, of course, and it's *Blitzer* who is in the situation room. But apparently, that has not yet been explained to him.

The full extremity of Blitzer's very handicap is revealed, however, in those moments that he tosses the story to one of CNN's correspondents or attempts to impress viewers with CNN's devotion to a news topic. Blitzer announces that he or a CNN reporter "will be watching" or "has been watching" the topic "closely."

Before the second hour of tonight's election coverage had concluded, Blitzer had leaned on his "watching" construction so many times, I had to remove my shoes and socks to keep up with the count.

"We're going to watch it closely," Blitzer said at about 8:43 p.m. ET, *it* being the early electoral returns that were spelling terrible news for John McCain.

Here's a sampler of Blitzer boilerplate in action over the past couple of months, paired with the name of the thing being watched:

"Al-Qaida supporters seem to be watching this presidential campaign rather closely."
—Oct. 23, 2008

"We're watching this very, very closely." (*Hurricane Ike*)
—Sept. 12, 2008

"We're watching all of this very closely." (*Hurricane Gustav*)
—Sept. 1, 2008

"And Rick Sanchez is going to be watching that very, very closely." (*Hurricane Gustav*)
—Aug. 30, 2008

"Meanwhile, the Republicans are watching very closely." (*The Obama nomination*)
—Aug. 27, 2008

"We're watching it very closely." (*Obama's vice-presidential pick*)
—Aug. 20, 2008

"You're watching this about as closely as anyone, Zain [Verjee]." (*North Korean shenanigans*)
—June 26, 2008

"We're watching all of this very, very closely." (*Obama's delegate count*)
—June 3, 2008

"We're watching this number very closely." (*Obama's delegate count*)
—June 3, 2008

"We're watching it about as closely as we possibly can." (*How to count Michigan and Florida*)
—May 31, 2008

Why can't Blitzer break out of his cliché patter? Doesn't he prepare before his shows? Won't CNN spring for a vocabulary builder? Or a speech coach? Is it not his fault because the network overworks him, and it needs to hire a co-anchor or a co-anchor to take pressure off him? Or doesn't anybody at CNN watch these broadcasts critically?

Addendum, Nov. 5, 10 a.m. Blitzer's Final Count

Thanks to Nexis, it can now be revealed that on Election Night, Blitzer went for the "watching" something "closely" construction at least 17 times, and on at least three occasions, he reached for its cousin, "looking closely." Here's Blitzer's final tally:

"There's a balance of power in the House and in the Senate that people are going to be looking at very closely, because you and I know, and our viewers know, the way Washington works, the executive branch is important, but the legislative branch is pretty important as well."

"Indiana and Virginia—those are battleground states. So we're going to be watching those very, very closely."

"What are you watching for most closely right now?"

"Fifteen states, and the District of Columbia at 8:00 p.m. Eastern, will be closing, and we'll be watching very closely to see what's going on."

"We're watching Georgia closely."

"We're watching this race closely, Virginia with about 3 percent of the precincts reporting, McCain with 56 percent, Obama, 44 percent."

"And West Virginia, we're going to watch all of that closely."

"We're watching Indiana very closely because that's turned out to be a battleground state."

"And we're going to watch very closely to see what happens in these states, because some of these states could be indicative of a trend that could be emerging in the course of this night."

"Now, we're going to watch it closely."

"[Shaheen] is ahead by almost 10,000 right now with almost 10 percent of the precincts in. This is a race that we're watching very closely as well."

"I want to take a look at some numbers coming in, ballots coming in, and some Senate races that we're watching very closely."

"So, it's shaping up. It's still very, very early. We're watching it closely."

"Campbell and John—Ohio—I don't think we can stress how important it is, and we're watching this state very closely."

"We're watching all these states. They're getting—they're very close in several of these states."

"We're watching all of these races very closely."

"I want to go to Campbell and John, because they're looking closely at this very important balance of power in Congress."

"We're watching those states very, very closely."

"Before I go over to John King, I want to show what's going on in these four Senate races that we're watching very closely."

"So that's why we're looking at this so closely."

press box

The Coming Obama-Press War

It's inevitable.

By Jack Shafer

Monday, November 3, 2008, at 4:11 PM ET

The press corps works to hold the president accountable for what he does and extra hard to hold him accountable for what he does not do, a territory so vast and encompassing that foraging journalists assigned to the beat can never hunger for a story. Everything and nothing become fixings.

So even before Barack Obama swears to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution on Jan. 20, the press corps—which has failed to make anything it has [thrown at him stick](#) (Wright, Rezko,* Ayers, voting "present," his FISA, the surge, guns, capital punishment, and campaign finance [flip-flops](#))—will finally start extracting maximum punishment.

Those who predict a three-month honeymoon between journalists and the incoming President Obama have not been reading their daily newspaper. In ordinary times, only short-term rewards can be reaped from being the president's best friend in the press corps. No president is ever as good and wise and fair and tough and patient and tactful and brave as lickspitting reporters try to make him sound, and the glorifiers tend to retreat after a bit because they know they're depleting their credibility with all the flattery.

But these are not normal times. The economy has fallen into an abyss, Afghanistan appears lost, and Obama's own party will turn on him if he doesn't transform the country into Sweden overnight. No matter how well he prepares, every new president faces a damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't template, as James Deakin explains in his 1984 book *Straight Stuff: The Reporters, the White House, and the Truth*. These either-or constructions, Deakin writes, include:

How is the president getting along with the news media? Are they treating him well or badly? Is he a master of communications or an ineffective performer on the tube? Is he accessible to reporters and candid with them? Or is he secretive, misleading the press and throwing a cloak of national security over the administration's precious bodily fluids? Why doesn't he have more press conferences? Why have his press conferences become such

increasingly meaningless spectacles? Why does he manipulate the press so brazenly to achieve his purposes? Why doesn't he use the press more effectively to achieve his purposes? Why is the press so subservient to the president? Why is the press so hostile to the president?

To Deakin's list of relations-with-the-press critiques that a president inevitably faces we can add these either-ors that Obama will have to endure from the press: Is he moving too fast on the economy or too slow? Is he too deferential to Congress or too pushy? Is he coddling Iran or baiting it? Why isn't he making good on his Iraq pledge—why is he throwing the Iraq victory away? Why is he repeating Bill Clinton's mistakes? Why can't he govern from the center like Bill Clinton? Isn't it time he made good on his domestic campaign promises? What makes him think the current economy can take the shock of universal health care? He's as secrecy-obsessed as George W. Bush! He's more combative with Congress than Bush was! You call that a liberal appointment to the Supreme Court?!

Obama will abandon the habit of walking on water he picked up during the past two years because you can't build a moat around the White House the way you can a presidential campaign. His administration may stay on message and never leak, but it won't be the only circus in town. Few Cabinet secretaries, members of Congress, federal bureaucrats, federal grantees, soldiers and sailors, or others drawing a salary from the U.S. Treasury get the love or respect from the president that they think they're owed. They'll leak because it will be in their interest to leak, and the press will feast. When they leak, he'll do what every president has done. He'll flip out.

Obama looks invincible only because he's been a smart candidate running a smart campaign. It's the nature of campaigns that the greatest negativity slung at a candidate usually comes from his competitors, but at the close of a campaign, the rules change. Plus, you can't FOIA or sue a stonewalling campaign, but you can FOIA and sue the bejesus out of stonewalling administration. Hundreds of careers will be made by beating on President Obama, with many of the most critical stories originating with his constituents. Complaining that he's moving too slow, the unions will demand immediate passage of card-check legislation. Doves will urge instant defense cuts. Enviros will push for an end to coal, the establishment of a solar economy, and the criminalization of carbon. Even if Obama had the votes (which he does) and the money (which he doesn't), Congress isn't in session long enough to pass the encyclopedic Democratic agenda.

Presidents inexorably blame the press for their "failures." As Deakin notes, their attempts to make things secret prompts secrecy penetration by the press, and the journalistic attempts to understand presidential decision-making tends to undermine

decision-making—at least in the minds running the administration, which prefers silence while it thinks. Competing journalists like nothing more than an uproar.

Obama the candidate thrived on the strategic ambiguity that made liberals think he was liberal, moderates think he was moderate, and conservatives think he was tolerable. But after the election, ambiguity must be replaced with action, and action is controversial—that is, the stuff of news.

It won't be war until Obama fights back, as he will. Everything the press does makes the job of governing more difficult, Deakin observes, even putatively sympathetic reporting. As Obama faces that reality, he'll become less and less Obama-esque, more vengeful and cloistered, and the press will have a fresh story to pursue: the decline of Obamaism and the triumph of Washington as usual. How much will pent-up antagonism at the overcontrolling Obama campaign contribute to the abrasive reports? You have to ask?

The White House will counter by serving the standard ration of seduction and hostility to the press because, as Deakin explains, it's as much in the press business as the press is. Whenever possible, it seeks to scoop the conventional press. It wants the public lapping up its "reports," not those of the press, and its credibility logically increases whenever the credibility of the conventional press falls.

Being commander in chief of the armed forces is never good enough. Presidents always want to be the nation's editor-in-chief, too. Once they assume that title, total press war is just around the corner.

Deakin's book is such a trove of anecdote and example you'd be a moron if presidential press politics interest you and you don't pick up a used copy of it. I got mine through Amazon for [\\$.01 plus \\$3.99 handling](#), but there are a slew of cheap copies there and at [AbeBooks](#). Send your press-book bargain tips to slate.pressbox@gmail.com. (E-mail may be quoted by name in "The Fray," *Slate's* readers' forum; in a future article; or elsewhere unless the writer stipulates otherwise. Permanent disclosure: *Slate* is owned by the Washington Post Co.)

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Correction, Nov. 3, 2008: *This article originally misspelled the last name of Tony Rezko. (Return to the corrected sentence.)*

readme

McCain's Last Mistake

Undivided government won't be as bad as he warned it would be.

By Michael Kinsley

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 9:31 PM ET

John McCain's last, desperate argument to the voters was the danger of undivided government. Give the Democrats the White House, both houses of Congress, maybe even a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate, and they will be unstoppable. And then God knows what they'll do.

As I write, it's still too early on Election Night to know whether the Democrats will actually achieve their filibuster-proof Senate majority. If they don't, there will be wise observers all over TV and in Wednesday's newspapers asserting that the voters have chosen divided government or decided to warn the Democrats not to go too far, or some such nonsense.

In fact, almost no one actually chooses divided government. Almost everyone who votes for Obama also votes Democratic for the Senate and the House. Ditto McCain and the Republicans. Divided government results when those totals are close, and just a few ticket-splitters can produce a divided result. McCain was not asking voters to split their tickets. He was urging Republicans tempted to vote for Obama *not* to split their tickets, for fear that undivided government would be the result.

But what is the appeal of divided government? Why would people hope for it or vote for it? Why would Republican strategists choose this argument as their Hail Mary pass? The reason is fear of change. There is no subject on which the American voter is more hypocritical than on the alleged desire for change. It sounds wonderfully civic in the abstract: You are fed up with "business as usual," and you demand that things be done differently. Many Americans say they feel this way and probably even believe they feel this way. But in the particular, they actually don't mind things the way they are. In fact, much of what gets billed as "change" in our politics is actually stasis.

The best example is health care reform. Hillary Clinton's reform attempt of the early 1990s stumbled over the issue of whether her reforms would allow you to keep your current doctor. God forbid you should have to change doctors as the price of bringing health care to everyone and preventing it from swallowing up the economy. The only reform that came out of Hillary's effort was a law attempting (with limited success) to guarantee that people who already had health insurance would not lose it if they changed jobs. Health care was an issue once again in the 2008

campaign, and the first thing out of Obama's mouth when he described his ideas on the subject was usually a solemn promise that you could keep your own doctor.

Maybe it is possible to reform the health care system without forcing people to change doctors. But it is not possible to reform health care, pensions, and everything else Obama has promised to tackle—and solve the financial crisis, guide us through a recession, and wipe out the federal deficit—without multiple changes that citizens will find more wrenching than this one.

If you really long for change, divided government is the last thing you should want. In a parliamentary system, like the one in Britain, divided government is impossible. You vote for the party, not the person. Whichever party wins the most seats or can cobble together a majority through alliances with other parties gets to form a government and choose a prime minister. The winning party is generally able to enact its agenda. More important, that party can be held accountable if it does not enact its agenda or if it does and the policies fail.

In our country, there is always an excuse. The president wanted to do something-or-other, but Congress stopped him. Even an incumbent president can run for re-election on good intentions. This habit of thought is so built in to our system that it even works when the president's party actually does control Congress, as it did in the early years of George W. Bush's tenure. But paralysis is guaranteed if the White House and Congress can quibble and blame each other. Quibbling and finger-pointing are two of the bad habits voters are said to despise. And yet many of these same voters long for an arrangement that will guarantee more of both.

People who want divided government are afraid of politics. They imagine that under divided government, the wise elders of both parties would sit around a table and "rise above politics" with pragmatic solutions for everything. But it doesn't work that way, and it shouldn't. Our disagreements are generally about trade-offs—money for some new government benefit, the blood of our young for some foreign-policy goal, freedom for protection from terrorists, bureaucracy for the safety of drugs or cars or financial derivatives. All of these trade-offs could be settled by letting some board of elders split the difference. But then it wouldn't be much of a democracy, would it?

Unfortunately, politicians in a system without accountability get elected by promising to ignore all these inevitable trade-offs. "Yes, we can" will come back to haunt Barack Obama, because often we can't. Inspiration is no match for mathematics. So the Democrats who now control the agenda face a moral dilemma: Should they do what is right or do what they promised?

recycled John Leonard, RIP

Remembering the great *New York Times Book Review* editor.

By Meghan O'Rourke

Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 5:57 PM ET

*John Leonard, journalist, novelist, and critic, [died of lung cancer Wednesday at the age of 69](#). In 2003, Meghan O'Rourke recalled Leonard's editorship of the *New York Times Book Review* in the '70s, a time she called the publication's "golden age." The article is reprinted below.*

For 107 years, the *New York Times Book Review* has been the Goliath of American book reviews. It has also been the section that everyone loves to hate: Decade after decade, the epithets pile up, from "terminally dull" to "[the drab wallpaper of the book world](#)." One gets the sense that readers find its very judiciousness annoying, like finding yourself seated next to a chaste, fair-minded guest at a raucous, gossipy dinner party. This may be an institutional problem, but now that the *Book Review's* current editor, Charles McGrath, who has held the position since 1995, is stepping down, the *Times* will inevitably wrestle once again with its image.

In looking forward, the *Times* might want to look back—to what was widely agreed to be the *Book Review's* golden age, from 1971 to 1975, under the editorship of John Leonard. Nostalgia is obviously a perilous emotion, but in this case, the golden years prove to be more than just the gilt of yesteryear. They provide a useful model for what tomorrow's *Book Review* could look like—should it choose to.

What was so special about Leonard's *Book Review*? From the very start—his first issue was January 10, 1971—it stood out for its editorial brazenness and its engagement with current affairs. The reviews of Horace translations and the histories of Modernist little magazines slimmed down or shuffled to the back; in their place came a riotous thicket of pieces on film, the [black arts movement](#), the Vietnam War, E. M. Cioran, B. F. Skinner, Michel Foucault. (Remember, it was 1971.) Women began to review political books. Feminist novelists were evaluated thoughtfully but not forgivingly. In 1972, Don DeLillo's second novel, *End Zone*, was given the lead review—which in those days meant it began on the cover. DeLillo was a

relative unknown. When I spoke to Leonard by phone last week, he told me he'd made the unusual decision to put him on the cover because he liked the review enough to read the novel—and when he did he saw something new in it.

Mostly, though, Leonard's *Book Review* was distinctive because its pieces took a clear position—not only on the book at hand, but on the subject at hand. You get the sense that someone sat down and said, OK, what's a provocative way to talk about this book—why are we interested in reviewing it in the first place? (And if we don't have an answer, let's not review it.) The result was opinionated writing by journalists and specialists alike, often polemical but rarely prescriptive (as one might have expected): pointed re-examinations of everything from Vladimir Mayakovsky's "hooligan communism" to Noam Chomsky's antiwar stance (more an "outcry against the absurdity ... than a sustained argument against it") to the critical reception of Albert Speer's memoir. On the fiction front, the equivocation that has become the hallmark of today's reviews nationwide was nowhere to be found. Instead, heavy-hitters like Eudora Welty, John Hawkes, and Toni Morrison weighed in firmly, dispensing with disposable literary novels—a "drafty little fable"—and fiercely taking on top-tier writers like James Jones: He "writes abominably, like Dreiser." A sub-par Joyce Carol Oates novel was described (by a reviewer who liked her work) as "bad, very bad." This wasn't the dismissive showboating that's recently won the name "snark"; it was the conviction of engaged people holding one another to high standards.

Finally, unlike many things of its era, Leonard's *Book Review* remains visually stylish—jazzy and unorthodox but not too arty. Leonard exploited illustrations for their documentary value and power: contact sheets of Charles Manson; a stunningly bored young Carson McCullers at a party; a nearly full-page black-and-white photo of Janis Joplin performing at Madison Square Garden, eyes closed, fists clenched, her dark hair striped by stage lights. This image, from Leonard's second issue, sent a visceral message about the modernity of the new editorial sensibility. It also bolstered a point that Jonathan Yardley was making about the perils of rock journalism.

In short, Leonard's achievement lay in recognizing that the majority of books published any given year are most interesting as an expression of their culture—not as things to be assessed in and of themselves. And so he selected books accordingly, turning the reviews into a probing dialogue about that culture, finding reviewers who were eager to plunge into controversy and urging them on. Senior statesmen like Alfred Kazin and John Kenneth Galbraith shared space with brash younger writers (now our senior statesman) eager to take one another on—Jonathan Yardley, Toni Morrison, Morris Dickstein, John Ashbery, A. Alvarez, Nancy Milford, Hilton Kramer. One of Leonard's early, risky moves was to make the *Review* the voice of the antiwar movement. Characteristically, he began, in March of 1971, by publishing a long, splashy essay on whether civilian deaths in

Vietnam should be tried as war crimes; it touched on tens of books, including Seymour Hersh's *My Lai 4*.

In a sense, Leonard had it easy when he set out to make a talked-about section. He presided during a moment that had a distinct sense of itself as a historical anomaly. The Civil Rights movement, Vietnam, the push for a younger voting age—all stirred up debate. It was an era that lent itself to the creation of an opinionated, youthful, intelligent literary journal. And he had about 80 pages to work with, where today's has about 30. (It helped, too, that in the midst of this cultural turmoil the *Times* wasn't sure what editorial direction it wanted to take with the *Review*, according to Leonard.) Of course, people did complain—mostly that the *Review* was too much like the *Voice*, he told me—and in recent years, [as he recalls](#), one colleague said that Leonard had not been a "*Times*man." Ironically, this failure may have contributed to his achievement: He saw his role as an occasion to put a critical sensibility to work, rather than to keep an institution intact. And when people mention Leonard's *Review* today, it's with the kind of wistfulness that Kane said, "Rosebud."

What lesson might the *Book Review*'s next editor draw from the Leonard years? For one thing, we're clearly at another crucial historical moment—one at which smart people disagree about big issues (the aftermath of Sept. 11 and the war in Iraq being only the most obvious examples). American culture is on the defensive, its distinctiveness under renewed scrutiny. Meanwhile, with the rise of the superstore, the advent of the Internet, and the ever-increasing number of books published each year, the *Review*, though influential, no longer makes or breaks a book as it did even 10 years ago. The editor in chief of one publishing house describes the *Review* instead as a "piece of the puzzle"—which now includes TV publicity and decisions made by Barnes & Noble's buyers. You could lament such a diminishment of cultural authority, except this one provides an opportunity for the *Review*: It may have more freedom than ever before to re-imagine its role. Leonard's provocative tack simply may not be what the *Times* wants, or has ever wanted, but at this particular moment Rosebud looks within reach.

recycled Dead by Inauguration Day

What happens if a president-elect passes away at the last minute?

By Nina Shen Rastogi

Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 5:12 PM ET

The historic election of Barack Obama as president of the United States, along with revelations of [plots against his life](#), has many Explainer readers worried. What would happen if, God forbid, he died before Jan. 20? In September, Nina Shen Rastogi explained what happens when a presidential candidate expires

at the last minute. The article is reprinted below, including a Bonus Explainer about what happens when the candidate is president-elect.

Vice-presidential candidates Sarah Palin and Joe Biden will face off in [their first and only debate](#) this Thursday in St. Louis, Mo. Quite a few Explainer readers have asked what would happen if one of the presidential candidates were to die or become otherwise incapacitated before Election Day: Would Palin or Biden assume the nomination?

Not necessarily. Each party has its own protocol for this scenario, but in neither case does the running mate automatically take over the ticket. If John McCain were to die before the election, the [rules of the Republican Party](#) authorize the Republican National Committee to fill the vacancy, either by reconvening a national convention or by having RNC state representatives vote. The new nominee must receive a majority vote to officially become the party candidate. If Barack Obama were to die before the election, the Democratic Party's [charter and bylaws](#) state that responsibility for filling that vacancy would fall to the Democratic National Committee, but the rules do not specify how exactly the DNC would go about doing that. (Congress could also pass a special statute and push back Election Day, giving the dead candidate's party time to regroup.)

What happens if the party doesn't have time to select and endorse a new candidate? In 2000, Akhil Reed Amar [outlined](#) for *Slate* some of the head-scratching scenarios that might occur if a candidate died just before the election, without enough time to prep new ballots or to decide how votes should be counted.

The outcome would be a little more straightforward—though not necessarily more politically satisfying—if the candidate dies between the general election on Nov. 4 but before the Electoral College votes on Dec. 15. There's no federal law that mandates how electors must cast their votes; theoretically, if the candidate to whom they were pledged dies and their party has not made a preferred successor clear, electors can vote for their party's VP candidate, a third-party candidate, or a leading pre-convention contender within their own party. Under this scenario, however, individual state laws have the potential to make things murky, given that each state has the power to determine exactly how its electoral votes are to be cast and distributed.

Bonus Explainer: What if the candidate dies *after* the election but before the inauguration on Jan. 20? [The 20th Amendment](#) states that if the president-elect dies before beginning his term, then the vice president-elect assumes his or her spot. However, the point at which a candidate officially becomes "president-elect" is debatable. He or she definitely assumes the title after Jan. 6, when a joint session of Congress officially counts the Electoral College votes and declares a winner. But the shift could be said to occur immediately after the Electoral College

vote. (See Pages 2 and 3 of [this PDF article](#) from the *Arkansas Law Review*.)

If a candidate dies after Dec. 15 but before Jan. 6, Congress, when it convenes, has to decide whether to count the votes cast for him. (In 1872, three electoral votes cast for the late Horace Greeley were discounted by Congress, but it's unclear whether votes cast for a living candidate who subsequently dies would be treated the same way.)

If Congress decides the votes are valid, then the laws of presidential succession kick in, and that candidate's running mate moves up the ladder. If Congress decides to throw out the votes, then the question becomes whether the living candidate can be said to have a majority of the overall electoral votes—if not, then, according to the [12th Amendment](#), the House of Representatives must elect the president from among the three candidates with the most votes.

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

Explainer thanks Bruce Ackerman of Yale Law School, John Fortier of the American Enterprise Institute, Heather Gerken of Yale Law School, Nathaniel Persily of Columbia Law School, and Michael Czin of the Democratic National Committee.

recycled Michael Crichton, RIP

Remembering Planet Earth's novelist of doom.

By Bryan Curtis

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 1:49 PM ET

Michael Crichton, the author of Jurassic Park, Rising Sun, Disclosure, and many other best-sellers, [died of cancer on Tuesday](#). In a 2004 assessment of the writer, Bryan Curtis wrote, "When I first read Crichton at age 13, I loved the way his writing was curiously formal: He wrote about childlike subjects in a fussy, scientific way that gave them authenticity." Curtis lamented, however, that Crichton's later books bore the mark of "a political pamphleteer, a right-wing noodle." The full piece is reprinted below. In 1993, Crichton also famously predicted that "the mass media will be gone within ten years." In 2002, Jack Shafer wrote that [the media had dodged Crichton's prediction](#), but six years later Shafer argued that [the writer's forecast was looking better and better](#).

Who dino-soured Michael Crichton? Was it a comet or just the responsibility of being America's prophet of doom? In his new book, *State of Fear*, Crichton once again ascends to the pulpit to warn us of an impending horror. Like the diabolical Japanese businessmen in *Rising Sun* and the corporate vixen in

Disclosure, these new shadowy forces, Crichton says, lurk among us, poised to wreak havoc. They're among America's fiercest enemies. They're ... environmentalists.

State of Fear is a 600-page tirade about global warming. Crichton thinks environmentalists have become overheated about the threat and have substituted demagoguery for hard science. So he unleashes a cabal of ruthless greens, who build weather machines to punish their SUV-drivin', carbon-dioxide-emittin' neighbors with a plague of hurricanes and tsunamis. For Crichton's fans, this has got to be heartbreaking: The boy-novelist who engineered a tyrannosaurus in *Jurassic Park* and mysterious pathogens from outer space in *The Andromeda Strain* has become a political pamphleteer, a right-wing noodle.

When I first read Crichton at age 13, I loved the way his writing was curiously formal: He wrote about childlike subjects in a fussy, scientific way that gave them authenticity. Crichton described his human characters as a field biologist describes a giraffe: "He was surprisingly tall, maybe a hundred and ninety centimeters, well over six feet." Crichton's marauding adventurers were invariably white men with advanced degrees—paleontologists, psychologists, lawyers. Like the professor in *Tarzan of the Apes*, he is devoted to the notion that gentlemen-scholars can venture into the wild and, between claps of machine-gun fire, discuss the latest report from the Royal Academy. His heroes have an elegant way of losing consciousness: "[T]here was a burst of pain in her forehead, and she saw brief stars before blackness settled over her and the rumble of thunder faded to endless silence."

Crichton styled himself as a 20th-century Renaissance man, a dabbler in all the fine arts. After graduating medical school at Harvard, he became, at various turns, a novelist, film director (*Westworld*, *Coma*), screenwriter (*Jurassic Park*), TV series creator (*ER*), [futurist](#), and author of a monograph about [Jasper Johns](#). Crichton deftly juggled all these things, and success came fast and easy. In *Travels*, a 1988 memoir, he wrote about his first midlife crisis: "I had graduated from Harvard, taught at Cambridge University, climbed the Great Pyramid, earned a medical degree, married and divorced, been a postdoctoral fellow at the Salk Institute, published two bestselling novels, and now made a movie. And I had abruptly run out of goals for myself." Crichton was 30 years old.

He eventually gave up movies and solidified his niche as a thriller writer whose books often crept onto the top-10 lists. But Crichton's books have suffered as his right-leaning politics have come to the fore. Titles like *Rising Sun*, *Disclosure*, and *Airframe* (about the mendacity of the electronic media) were naked political screeds designed to land him on the op-ed page.

To understand how Crichton stumbled, it's instructive to compare him to two past masters of suspense fiction: Arthur Conan Doyle (whom Crichton celebrates in *Rising Sun*) and H.

Rider Haggard (whose *King Solomon's Mines* is a model for Crichton's safari book *Congo*). Doyle and Haggard opened their most famous novels by setting loose a familiar hero (Sherlock Holmes and Allan Quatermain) on a mystery or quest, complete with new enemies and a cast of supporting players. The joy of reading Doyle and Haggard is to enjoy the conventions and watch the authors sweat to provide inventive variations on a theme. Which clue will Holmes seize upon to crack the case? Upon which corner of Africa will Quatermain inflict his colonialist brio?

Crichton, on the other hand, eschews flesh-and-blood heroes; the star of his book is usually a high-concept premise—dinosaurs! killer viruses! Without a returning hero to lure readers (à la Tom Clancy), Crichton's concepts themselves must be nerdy and sufficiently topical. Crichton has an unparalleled genius for this—a gift for seeing years into the future. He began writing *Rising Sun* when the Berlin Wall was crumbling; by the time the book was published, in 1992, George Bush had thrown up in the lap of the Japanese prime minister. *Jurassic Park* arrived just as Steven Spielberg's imagineers figured out how to bring dinosaurs to the big screen, making it an iconic film of the age of computer-generated special effects. Before Bill and Monica hooked up, Crichton published *Disclosure*, a story of sexual harassment in the corridors of power. It was little surprise that this week, as *State of Terror* hit bookstores, ecoterrorists began popping up in the [newspapers](#).

One of the real pleasures of Crichton's books is their erudite polish. You can imagine Crichton leafing through obscure journals and textbooks to find scientific underpinnings for his outlandish premises—it's an overeducated novelist's penance for writing about the stuff of little boys. (Evidence of Crichton's genius: About half the world still believes you can re-engineer dinosaurs with DNA from mosquitoes trapped in amber.) But when Crichton begins to proselytize, *State of Fear*-style, the journal citations begin to seem indistinguishable from those contained in the latest study from the Brookings Institution or the American Enterprise Institute. Instead of being charmed by the nerdy footnotes, you feel suspicious of them—they're propaganda.

This isn't to say that Crichton doesn't believe his right-leaning, contrarian poses. It's his belief in these poses that's the problem. Crichton's early novels were escapist fantasies that happened to be instructive. His political books are hectoring screeds that incidentally turn out to be thrillers. (As one character in *State of Fear* moans, "Did all this have to do with weather?") Crichton's early work was often conceived on a dare—How can I convince people that dinosaurs could exist in the real world?—and despite their documentary elements, the books seem to have remained fantasies to him. But as Crichton waded into the real world, and the documentary elements have become the backbone, his charm has disappeared. His novels have gone from dares to graduate seminars.

Crichton is like a college professor who insists on lecturing 10 minutes after the class period ends, when his students are edging toward the door. In *State of Fear*, the narrative stops cold for climate charts that are printed on the page ("Goteborg, Sweden: 1951-2004"). When one of Crichton's heroic skeptics makes a controversial statement about global warming, Crichton tags it with a footnote—look it up for yourself, liberal critic! The novel ends with 20 pages of bibliographical references and the author's 25-point "message" about global warming. It's a bulwark for what Crichton thinks will be a backlash from the newspapers, the same sour reaction that greeted *Rising Sun* and *Disclosure*. But first, doesn't somebody actually have to finish reading *State of Fear*?

Crichton seems to sense that he's become too much of a pedant. As *State of Fear* races to a close, he wedges in some swashbuckling pratfalls. The heroes are kidnapped by cannibals in the Solomon Islands, who tie them to wooden posts and poke at them with bats and knives. A woman named Sarah, fleeing from a man-made lightning storm—don't ask—crawls smack-dab into the middle of a nest of ... scorpions. Why scorpions? I have no clue, but I loved it. It's like something a grade-schooler would have thought up—it has childlike, "top this" passion. Amid the pages of climate charts, it may be the only proof the novelist hasn't become a dinosaur.

Slate V: An interview with Crichton from Charlie Rose:

recycled

Can a Dead Woman Vote?

Obama's late grandmother's absentee ballot will count in Hawaii, but not every state has the same policy.

By Chris Wilson

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 10:49 AM ET

*A Hawaii election official says the state will [still count the absentee ballot](#) of Madelyn Dunham, Barack Obama's grandmother, even though she [passed away late Sunday](#). In a similar case from the Democratic primary, a woman named Florence Steen voted for Hillary Clinton by absentee ballot in South Dakota but passed away before the day of the primary. In a May 14 "[Explainer](#)," Chris Wilson found that, unlike in Hawaii, South Dakota does not count such ballots, a policy that varies by state. The article is reprinted below. **Update:** While Hawaii law states that absentee ballots should not be counted if the voter dies prior to the election, officials there say [it is too late to remove Dunham's ballot](#).*

At the conclusion of her [victory speech](#) in Charleston, W.Va., on Tuesday night, Hillary Clinton told the story of a supporter named Florence Steen, who passed away last Sunday. The 88-year-old South Dakotan had just voted for Clinton by absentee

ballot, ahead of the state's June 3 primary. It's a touching story, but will her vote still count?

No. As dictated by a [2001 state law](#), the South Dakota Department of Health is responsible for furnishing the county auditors with a list of registered voters who have died each month. This information is used to update the state's electronic voter-registration file, which was created by [a different 2001 law](#). Absentee ballots are collected by county auditors and remain sealed until the election, so if an absentee voter dies prior to the election, then her ballot is never opened.

The 2001 South Dakota law originally required this monthly list of deceased voters to be transferred to the county auditors by the 10th of the following month—which in this case could have occurred after the June 3 election. However, updates to the legislation passed in the wake of 2002's [Help America Vote Act](#) now require more frequent electronic reporting.

Because election law is governed by states, the rules vary widely when it comes to how this issue is handled. Had Steen lived in Florida, for example, her vote would have counted. [Florida state law](#) dictates that "the ballot of an elector who casts an absentee ballot shall be counted even if the elector dies on or before election day" so long as the ballot was postmarked or received by the election supervisor prior to the voter's death. Steen's daughter tells Explainer that she postmarked her mother's absentee ballot on April 29 or April 30, nearly two weeks before Steen passed away.

In 2004, *USA Today* [reported](#) that California, Texas, Tennessee, Ohio, and West Virginia all allow for the counting of absentee ballots of deceased voters while many other states technically do not. Many states that prohibit these so-called "ghost votes," however, lack the reporting system to quickly update voter rolls with recent deaths. That means it's very unlikely that a recently deceased voter would have his or her absentee ballot nullified.

Because most absentee ballots are mailed in the few weeks prior to the election, the likelihood that a significant number of voters will have passed away in the interim is fairly small. Election experts tend to agree that absentee ballots cast legitimately by voters who die soon thereafter are a minor issue compared with concerns about voter fraud or errors in how votes are registered.

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

Explainer thanks Doug Chapin of Pew's Electionline.org, Jennifer Krell Davis of the Florida Department of State, Richard L. Hasen of Loyola Law School, Richard Hauffe of the South Dakota Democratic Party, Kathy Krause, Pennington County Auditor Julie A. Pearson, Randy Riddle of Renne Sloan Holtzman Sakai, and the South Dakota Office of the Secretary of

State. Thanks also to reader Jeannine Chanes for asking the question.

recycled Highlights From *Slate's* Political Coverage

Memorable articles about an election that is finally over.
Monday, November 3, 2008, at 4:00 PM ET

Admit it: As much as you profess to be relieved that the election is finally over, you're going to miss it when it's gone. Here are a few of *Slate's* best political articles from the 2008 election to stir the memories.

"Obama's New Rules: In the past 10 days, he has turned American politics upside down," by Jacob Weisberg. Posted Oct. 26, 2006.

"Barack Star: Following Obama through New Hampshire," by John Dickerson. Posted Dec. 11, 2006.

"Obama Is Google, McCain Is GM: Presidential candidates as stocks," by Daniel Gross. Posted April 21, 2007.

"McCain and Obama: How the front-runners are alike," by Jacob Weisberg. Posted Jan. 7, 2008.

"The Baby Primary: Can I get my 5-month-old daughter photographed with every presidential candidate?" by Darren Garnick. Posted Jan. 7, 2008.

"Confessions of a Young Hillary Supporter: Or, how I became the loneliest man on campus," by Alex Joseph. Posted Feb. 4, 2008.

"It's Not You, It's Me: Letter from a young, hip, cynical former Obamamaniac," by Dahlia Lithwick. Posted Feb. 14, 2008.

"How Obama Does That Thing He Does: A professor of rhetoric cracks the candidate's code," by Jack Shafer. Posted Feb. 14, 2008.

"Taking Offense Is the Best Offense: How umbrage has become this year's hottest campaign tactic," by John Dickerson. Posted Feb. 25, 2008.

"Bugs Bunny vs. Daffy Duck: Why voters always choose the wascally wabbit for president," by Jeff Greenfield. Posted March 4, 2008.

"The Tall Tale of Tuzla: Hillary Clinton's Bosnian misadventure should disqualify her from the presidency, but the airport landing is the least of it," by Christopher Hitchens. Posted March 31, 2008.

"The Great McCain Story You've Probably Forgotten: What an old anecdote about Mo Udall in the hospital reveals about McCain's character," by Michael Lewis. Posted April 9, 2008.

"Drop Out, Obama: Clinton won't drop out, so Obama might as well," by Chris Wilson. Posted April 24, 2008.

"Did McCain Create an HDTV Monster?" The technology he helped bring to market could kill his candidacy," by Timothy Noah. Posted May 19, 2008.

"We Need To Talk: Looking for some way to repair the feminist gender rift," by Dahlia Lithwick. Posted June 7, 2008.

"The Untouchable: Why nothing the press throws at Obama sticks," by Jack Shafer. Posted July 29, 2008.

"Tuesday With Lanny: A day in the life of Hillary Clinton's biggest fan," by Christopher Beam. Posted Aug. 27, 2008.

"Go on Without Me: Hillary Clinton throws *almost* everything behind Barack Obama," by John Dickerson. Posted Aug. 27, 2008.

"Questions for a Superhuman Mom: The complicated business of judging Sarah Palin," by Emily Bazelon and Dahlia Lithwick. Posted Sept. 2, 2008.

"Bloette Girl: The shrewdly constructed persona of Meghan McCain," by Noreen Malone. Posted Sept. 16, 2008.

"The New Complacency: Democrats relearn how to take the presidency for granted," by Timothy Noah. Posted Oct. 7, 2008.

"Vote for Obama: McCain lacks the character and temperament to be president. And Palin is simply a disgrace," by Christopher Hitchens. Posted Oct. 13, 2008.

"Stolen Elections—as American as Apple Pie: Dissecting John McCain's hyperbole about voter fraud," by Jack Shafer. Posted Oct. 21, 2008.

[Listen to Slate's Political Gabfest podcasts](#)

From *Slate V*

"Hillary's Inner Tracy Flick," posted Jan. 14, 2008.

"[Mitt's Wonder Year](#)," posted Feb. 8, 2008.

"[The Democratic Race in Seven Minutes](#)," posted May 1, 2008

"[Leave Barack Alone!](#)" posted Aug. 1, 2008.

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The Campaign's Last Week in Two Minutes

A daily video from *Slate V*

Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 3:42 PM ET

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Wolf Blitzer, Meet Princess Leia

A daily video from *Slate V*

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 2:38 PM ET

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Update: Life Imitates "The West Wing"

A daily video from *Slate V*

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 12:21 PM ET

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Dear Prudence: Cat Lady Mother-in-Law

A daily video from *Slate V*

Monday, November 3, 2008, at 11:04 AM ET

sports nut

Bowling for Dollars

Why college football is more cutthroat and competitive than the NFL.

By Michael Oriard

Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 6:47 AM ET

What's the biggest story in college football so far this season? The dramatic surge of Alabama in Nick Saban's second year? Early losses by Ohio State, USC, and Georgia, opening up room at the top for the Crimson Tide and others? I'd nominate the [SEC's \\$2.25 billion deal with ESPN](#) for rights to televise the conference's games through 2025. With an additional \$55 million annually from CBS, the SEC will get \$205 million a year over the life of the television contracts, a little more than \$17

million per school per year. Those figures don't resonate with football fans as much as, say, the latest jockeying in the Heisman Trophy race, but it's these figures that will shape the game's future.

We've been hearing for years that big-time college football is becoming indistinguishable from the NFL. I disagree: College football is much more cutthroat and competitive. On account of pro football's revenue sharing—most importantly, nearly \$4 billion in television money gets split up between the 32 NFL clubs each year—it's hard for even a lousy pro football team to lose money. NFL clubs do not constantly have to upgrade their facilities in order to attract players. Instead of recruiting wars, pro teams take turns selecting the best college players, whom they pay a fixed percentage of the league's revenues. NFL clubs also don't steal one another's coaches, and what they pay the men on the sidelines is not governed by fear of losing a successful coach to another team.

College football programs share revenue, too, but not nearly as much and only within conferences. That's why the SEC's extraordinary windfall could change the basic structure of big-time football. (While basketball and other sports are included in the conference's TV deal with ESPN, football is the clear driving force.) In 2006-07, the most recent year for which we have data, Division I-A (now Football Bowl Subdivision) schools generated \$2.04 billion in revenues. That same season, NFL clubs generated \$6.54 billion (increasing to \$7.09 billion in 2007), with revenues ranging from the Cowboys with \$312 million to the Vikings with \$182 million. Compare that relatively narrow range with that of the Football Bowl Subdivision, where the University of Texas led with \$63.8 million in revenues and New Mexico State sat at the bottom with \$1.1 million. The largest revenue for a school outside the [six BCS conferences](#), TCU's \$13.3 million, ranked 55th. Of the \$2.04 billion in total revenue, nearly \$1.8 billion went to BCS schools.

Whether the actual numbers are familiar, the huge gap between BCS and non-BCS programs is common knowledge. But let's dig a little deeper into the BCS conferences, where disparities are also striking. These are the average revenues for schools in the six major conferences:

SEC: \$38.2 million
Big Ten: \$33.7 million
Big 12: \$24.8 million
Pac-10: \$22.9 million
ACC: \$19.5 million
Big East: \$15.2 million

The SEC was already the wealthiest conference before its latest TV deals, which will nearly triple the league's annual media revenue. With its recently launched [Big Ten Network](#), the second-wealthiest conference has seen its media revenue

increase to \$15 million per school per year. (ESPN dumped its billions on the SEC to prevent it from following the Big Ten to creating its own network.) With ESPN now so heavily committed to the SEC, there's little chance that any of the remaining four conferences will receive such a windfall. The six majors will begin to look like a top two and next four. (There's also the unique case of Notre Dame, which has [a big-money contract with NBC through 2015.](#))

Why does any of this matter? It matters most because of the relentless and relentlessly increasing pressure on the lesser football programs to compete with the greater ones. It is ironic that we have heard much in recent years about a new parity in college football, wherein a school like Appalachian State can knock off Michigan, and South Florida, Wake Forest, and Kansas have contended for the national championship. The occasional upset and rogue title contender shouldn't obscure the fact that mostly, the same schools contend for the championship each year. Parity does not extend throughout the BCS conferences, let alone into the midmajors. The one-time appearance of a Utah or Boise State or Hawaii in a BCS bowl game is misleading. These outliers break through one at a time, then promptly lose their coach to a major BCS power temporarily fallen on hard times (or lose their star quarterback to the NFL) and once again take their proper places in the food chain.

When an outlier breaks through to a BCS bowl, the relative distribution of revenues between BCS and non-BCS conferences is barely affected; the overwhelming majority of non-BCS schools are not affected at all. With the BCS adding a fifth bowl game in 2006-07, the six major conferences now claim nine or 10 huge payouts instead of seven or eight, and every big-conference school gets a share. Non-BCS conferences without a representative in a BCS bowl share almost nothing. The 11 highest football revenues in 2006-07 belonged to Texas, Notre Dame, Georgia, Ohio State, Florida, Auburn, Alabama, Michigan, LSU, Iowa, and Penn State. Notre Dame is a unique case, and we would certainly have to add Oklahoma (16th) and USC (just 21st) to our list of perennial contenders, but does anyone really doubt that the wealthiest programs will provide most of the contenders for national championships into the foreseeable future? (Should Texas Tech pull off a miracle this season, it will be a "miracle" precisely for this reason.)

While public attention is always on these top programs, the bottom ones face the most brutal challenges. An infusion of an extra \$100 million or \$150 million into a couple of conferences—for facilities, coaches' salaries, academic tutors, and all of the rest (though not for paying the "amateur" athletes, God forbid!)—increases the advantages for a few and raises the ante for the other conferences desperate to stay competitive. The programs with the highest revenues can cherry-pick the best athletes and then have the most resources to keep the weakest students among them on track academically. (Whether these

resources translate into a good education is an issue for another day.) After three years under the NCAA's new initiative for academic reform, the [Academic Progress Rate](#), only three BCS programs have been penalized (Arizona, Kansas, and Washington State), a tiny fraction of the non-BCS and Division I-AA programs that have been hit. While Toledo and LSU have to meet the same APR standard, only the latter can afford a \$15 million learning center for athletes.

Under Myles Brand, the NCAA is pursuing a two-pronged agenda: *mandatory* academic reform (via the APR), with a risk of losing scholarships and bowl appearances for failure to reach the minimum standards, coupled with *voluntary* fiscal restraint. Limits on spending, whether on coaches' salaries or facilities or any other feature of a first-class program, can only be voluntary, due to the risk of an antitrust lawsuit, such as the one in 1984 that ended the NCAA's monopoly on selling television rights.

College football's lack of spending limits means that high-revenue schools will forever be at a competitive advantage. LSU made \$48 million off football in 2006-07 and spent \$16 million. The University of Toledo made \$1.6 million and spent \$4.6 million. With state legislatures decreasing investment in higher education and nonelite private colleges facing their own financial squeeze, football below the elite level has become a loss-leader for luring in potential donors. Most college-football fans do not worry overmuch about the fate of Baylor and Cincinnati (bottom feeders in the BCS), let alone Toledo. But it's worth remembering that a lot of schools are spending educational dollars to subsidize athletics out of the desperate hope for "intangible" benefits, and a lot of athletes are making the academic sacrifices demanded at all levels of Division I without institutional resources to support them.

The media-rights windfalls for the Big Ten and SEC, then, will not introduce inequality into big-time football but rather reconfigure the inequalities that have long existed. The big winners will be the schools in those two conferences with smaller-budget football programs: Mississippi State, Vanderbilt, Mississippi, Northwestern, Indiana, and Minnesota, all of them with football revenues under \$20 million in 2006-07. But disparities within conferences will remain huge. With \$63.8 million in revenue in 2006-07, Texas made \$26.6 million more than its closest Big 12 rival (Oklahoma, at \$37.3 million). Now the Longhorns are exploring the possibility of [launching their own statewide TV network.](#)

While a University of Texas TV network seems like an unlikely prospect considering that all of their games are already on TV, it's not surprising that college football's top tier is exploring such a move. (Like the SEC contracts and the Big Ten Network, the proposed UT network is for all sports, and the fact that the football games are already televised is what makes the prospect unlikely.) It is inconceivable to me that top programs will choose to share more revenue, and the NCAA is powerless to mandate

such sharing. At some point, this inequality between and within conferences will become unsustainable for those at the bottom, perhaps even for those just below the top. Not by free choice but from overwhelming external forces, a dramatic reconfiguration of big-time football will come. What it will look like is unpredictable: Conference realignments that exclude the small-revenue schools? A single superconference along the lines of soccer's [Premier League](#), with the remaining teams consigned to lesser status? What is clear is that whatever happens will be determined by those on top, while the rest scramble to salvage what they can.

supreme court dispatches

Shit Doesn't Happen

The Supreme Court's 100 percent dirt-free exploration of potty words.

By Dahlia Lithwick

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 6:51 PM ET

Well, shit. There was supposed to be swearing. They swore like sailors when this case was argued in the 2nd Circuit. (Watch [here](#).) Judges and lawyers both! Those same judges swore themselves silly in the [appellate opinion](#). Advocates swore ([a lot](#)) in the [merits briefs](#). Promises [were made](#). But today, in a case about how and when the FCC can regulate so-called "fleeting utterances" of words like *fuck* and *shit*, the saltiest language comes when Solicitor General Gregory Garre, arguing for the FCC, warns that the agency had an obligation to guard against the possibility of "Big Bird dropping the F-bomb on *Sesame Street*."

The F-bomb? What, are we all of us in the *Dora the Explorer* demographic now?

There's a famous story about oral argument in [Cohen v. California](#), the landmark 1971 case about the right to wear a jacket bearing the words "Fuck the Draft" in a Los Angeles courthouse. [Listen here](#). Calling on Mel Nimmer, who represented Cohen, then-Chief Justice Warren Burger cautioned the lawyer: "Mr. Nimmer, you may proceed whenever you're ready. I might suggest to you that ... the court is thoroughly familiar with the factual setting of this case, and it will not be necessary for you, I'm sure, to dwell on the facts." Nimmer waited a whole two minutes and 11 seconds before saying "fuck." But today? The F-bomb.

FCC v. Fox Television is not a First Amendment case. It's a First Amendment-minus case, in that while the various justices insist that it need not be decided on constitutional grounds, it nevertheless provokes one of the best First Amendment debates I have ever heard. Since the Supreme Court decided [FCC v.](#)

[Pacifica](#) in 1978, which found the midday radio broadcast of George Carlin's "[Filthy Words](#)" monologue to be indecent, the FCC rule has been this: The agency may regulate a daytime broadcast of the sort of "verbal shock treatment" of the Carlin monologue, but it will overlook the "isolated use" of one-off potty words. A 2001 clarification of the FCC policy provided that a finding of indecency requires that the naughty word "describe or depict sexual or excretory organs or activities" and be "patently offensive as measured by contemporary community standards."

Enter Bono, who accepted his 2003 Golden Globe with the heartfelt (live) declaration that the honor was "really, really fucking brilliant." Oh. And Cher, who received her 2002 *Billboard* music award with the gracious, "I've also had critics for the last 40 years saying that I was on my way out every year. So fuck 'em." And the ever delightful Nicole Richie, who wowed them at the *Billboard* awards the following year with the observation that "it's not so fucking simple" to remove "cow shit out of a Prada purse."

Kinda makes you long for George Carlin, doesn't it?

The FCC would have ordinarily ignored these fleeting expletives, but it announced in 2004 that "given the core meaning of the F-word, any use of that word or a variation, in any context, inherently has a sexual connotation" and thus constitutes indecency. Then the FCC went around tagging everyone and their uncle for various fleeting expletives, from *NYPD Blue* (for "bullshit" and "dickhead") to the CBS *Early Show* (for "bullshitter"). Fox and its friends appealed, arguing, among other things, that the FCC's sudden rule change violated the federal Administrative Procedure Act, which bars "arbitrary and capricious" agency policy changes or those made without a "reasonable basis." The federal appeals court didn't want to discuss the First Amendment issues when it squashed the FCC like a bug, but it did so anyhow. The Supreme Court does the same today, leading Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, at one point, to observe that the whole case has an "air of futility" because, if the court just decides the narrow administrative issue, the First Amendment problem is still "the elephant in the room."

Garre, arguing for the FCC, defends the policy change because the FCC "concretely explained it" and it was "consistent with its mandate." Justice Ginsburg can't understand why an expletive-rich broadcast of *Saving Private Ryan* was spared the FCC's wrath while a program about the history of jazz was tagged for indecency. "There's very little rhyme or reason which one of these words is OK and which isn't," she tuts.

Garre points out that 28 percent of the viewing audience for the offending Nicole Richie broadcast were children under age 18. He says her swearing "was shockingly gratuitous and graphic." He adds that the "F-word is one of the most graphic, explicit, and vulgar words in the English language." Justice John Paul

Stevens asks if that's still the case when the word is used "with no reference whatsoever to sexual function." Garre says yes because it "inevitably conjures up a coarse sexual image."

Ginsburg wonders how "contemporary community standards are determined." Garre says the FCC asks its "collective experts: lawmakers, broadcasters, courts, interest groups" and the [Church Lady](#). When Ginsburg points out that *Pacifica*, the Carlin case, was decided in 1978, before the Internet, Garre replies that the proliferation of smut on cable and the Internet are all the more reason to strictly regulate network TV: So people can turn on their sets and eat dinner, confident that they will "not be bombarded" with Big Bird. Dropping the F-bomb.

Justice Stephen Breyer wants to know how the five-second-delay-bleeping thingy works and why it only works sometimes. Garre explains that Richie's expletives weren't bleeped because "they only had one person working the bleeping machine" that night.

Stevens proves he is our kind of jurist when he asks whether the FCC ever "takes into consideration that the particular remark was really hilarious?"

Carter Phillips, representing Fox, says the FCC's change of policy about fleeting expletives was sneaky. From 1978 to 2004, words were only indecent if they described sexual or excretory organs or activities; that changed in 2004 for no discernible reason. Scalia retorts that the F-word *always* referred to sexual activities. Adds Chief Justice John Roberts, "The reason these words shock is because of the association." Scalia deadpans, "And that's why we don't use the word *jolly-woggle* instead of the F-word." Even Justice David Souter argues that if what changed between 1978 and 2004 was that the FCC determined that viewers were deeply offended by fleeting expletives, then the change of policy might not be arbitrary and capricious. Phillips replies that this isn't the only question here. "This was not about regulating the price of oil going through a pipeline," he says. "This is about regulating speech." Neither Scalia nor Roberts will accept his argument that there is some higher standard to be met for administrative regulation just because speech is involved.

Phillips adds that this is a statute with criminal penalties—including potential fines of \$325,000. The FCC policy represents an "extraordinary *in terrorem* regime," he argues, citing amicus briefs describing the writers block faced by TV writers and broadcasters who no longer know which circumstances will set off the FCC's moral whack-a-mole. (Disclosure: I am a trustee of the Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression, which also filed an amicus brief in this case.) What, wonders Phillips, about small TV stations afraid to carry local sports for fear of a student letting loose?

Roberts says awards shows are different. Nicole Richie has many youthful fans because she is a "celebrity" and they "like her music" and "want to hear what she has to say." (Name one Nicole Richie fan, Mr. Chief Justice, I defy you.)

When Phillips says that allowing a handful of objectors to set broadcast policy is a "hecklers' veto," Scalia heckles him right back. "So those of us that don't like it are hecklers, and you can't take our position into account?"

Stevens asks whether Americans today are more tolerant of foul language than they were 30 years ago, and when Phillips agrees they probably are, Scalia says, "Do you think your clients had anything to do with that?" Phillips retorts, exasperated: "Go to a baseball game, Justice Scalia. You hear these words every time you go to a ballgame." Scalia snaps back that this is still "not normal in polite company" and a "coarsening of manners."

It's hard to say how this all shakes out. Three justices say very little. Two clearly favor granting the FCC even more standardless discretion. The rest keep offering peanuts to the elephant in the room. It's a safe bet that the court will try to stick to the narrow administrative question, despite the justices' itch to talk dirty. Mostly, though, it's a bitterly disappointing day for those of us who'd looked forward to hearing some filthy words at the high court. But, having run the whole case through the FCC's highly subjective, context-based smut filter, I did come up with the following list of dirty words from today's arguments: Briefs. Golden globes. First blow. Dung. Pipeline. Jolly-woggle. Perhaps it's true that the Supreme Court can take away our F-bomb. But they cannot touch our dirty, dirty minds.

supreme court dispatches

Label Conscious

The Supreme Court gets positively passionate about pre-emption.

By Dahlia Lithwick

Monday, November 3, 2008, at 7:57 PM ET

Here is the [human version](#) of *Wyeth v. Levine*: Free-spirited Vermont singer/songwriter goes to clinic for a migraine. She is treated with an "IV push" of Phenergan, an anti-nausea drug. Her right arm—the "joyous" one, the [guitar-strumming one](#)—goes gangrene, requiring amputation. Wyeth, the maker of Phenergan, was aware of the danger of an "IV push" (increased likelihood of hitting an artery) yet failed to provide an adequate warning label. A jury awards her a \$6.7 million judgment. She is [still writing songs](#).

Here is the [Vulcan version](#) of *Wyeth v. Levine*: Levine's case is tragic, but accidents happen. The Food and Drug Administration

approved Phenergan as safe and effective in 1955. After decades spent weighing the costs and benefits of the "IV push" method of administering the drug, the FDA crafted a warning label that—while not prohibiting it—indicated that the IV push was not "preferred." As a result of physician error, Levine's injection hit an artery. Wyeth is being punished because, although it complied with the FDA labeling standard, it failed to provide a second, stronger warning that would satisfy a hippie Vermont jury faced with an amputee guitarist. Drug companies should be required to meet a single, rational safety standard, not 50 standards set willy-nilly by juries in every state. The only solution to this dilemma: All state product-liability claims should from now on be pre-empted (read: obliterated) by federal law. The FDA is to have the first, last, and only word on prescription-drug labeling.

Wyeth is being called the most important business case of the year because, if the court finds that the FDA warning occupies the field of drug warnings, it will effectively immunize drug makers from many state tort suits. If it finds pre-emption here, the most business-friendly Supreme Court in decades can cancel the room with two queen-size beds and order a single king for itself and big pharma.

Argument this morning is Vulcan, in that the court's conservatives get most passionate and irrational about their own rationality. The transcript is [here](#), and it offers more in the way of reason than rhyme. Former Solicitor General Seth Waxman represents Wyeth, and almost before he can get off an opening thought, Justice Anthony Kennedy assails him with the language of logic: "You argue that it's impossible for Wyeth to comply with the state law and at the same time the federal label. As a textual matter, as a logical matter, as a *semantic* matter, I don't agree."

Waxman points out that the FDA label already conveyed all the risks of Phenergan, with "four different references" to the dangers of an IV push. But Justice Samuel Alito wonders how the FDA could have possibly weighed the costs and benefits of Phenergan when, as he says, "on the benefit side of this you don't have a life-saving drug, you have a drug that relieves nausea. And on the risk side you have the risk of gangrene!"

Fie upon your logic, Justices! Waxman retorts: "This is labeling directed at *medical professionals*." Not only are juries too emotional and irrational to perform a cool cost-benefit analysis, evidently Supreme Court justices are as well.

One of the concerns about setting the FDA warning label as a "ceiling" beyond which states cannot deviate is that these labels [become frozen in time](#), even as the drug companies continuously learn of new dangers posed by their drugs. We have come to rely on the state tort system to force drug companies to report new dangers, having found that hoping for the very best from them does not always work out. This prompts Justice David Souter to

ask why Wyeth—based on new evidence the company had accumulated about Phenergan—didn't think the label ought to be changed. "Wyeth could have gone back to the FDA anytime, and it simply didn't do it," Souter says.

Waxman points out that Wyeth did seek a stronger warning label, which the FDA declined to adopt. Eureka. It's the FDA's fault! And that's why the FDA should be given exclusive authority to determine the content of all warning labels for all time.

Deputy Solicitor Edwin Kneeder has 10 minutes to argue on behalf of the Bush administration, which came into this case on Wyeth's side. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg demands that Kneeder clarify whether this is a dramatic departure from former FDA policy, which until very recently took the position, as she says, that "tort suits were a helpful adjunct to the FDA's own efforts to protect consumers." The subtext here is whether this kamikaze pre-emption blitz is part of some Dr. Evil-style effort by the Bush administration to [block lots and lots of product-safety suits](#), a conspiracy theory shored up somewhat last week with the [release of internal documents](#) showing that career officials at the FDA objected to using federal pre-emption doctrine to Bigfoot state lawsuits. One such official wrote that reliance upon the pre-emption shield "is not, as it purports to be, consistent with the agency's role in protecting the public health."

Ginsburg is also a little worried about the FDA's ability to effectively monitor the "11,000 drugs that have its approval. Is the FDA really monitoring every one of those to see if there is some new information that should change the label?" Kneeder waxes enthusiastic about all sorts of 2007 reforms that will now give the FDA new authority to do just that kind of monitoring. "Enforcement tools," "clinical studies," "430 new employees"!! Justice Stephen Breyer notes politely that this all happened a little late to help Ms. Levine.

This launches the court onto a new tangent about whether the new information about the harms of the drug must be "old" or "new" or "borrowed" or "blue" in order to justify a label change. David Frederick has 30 minutes to represent Levine, and he starts by trying to explain what triggers a label revision but quickly runs into the Tasmanian Scalia, who will detain him for the bulk of his argument. Justice Scalia wants to know whether "opening up stuff that's already been considered by the FDA would make a mush out of it." Justice Scalia wants to know why, if Levine thinks the FDA acted irresponsibly, she isn't suing the FDA. Justice Scalia wants to know why the physician wasn't responsible for failing to follow the FDA warning. When Frederick responds that the amount of Phenergan administered "had no bearing" on the case, it was hitting the artery that did the damage, Justice Scalia wants to know, "Are you serious?"

Chief Justice John Roberts, for his part, wants to boil the whole case down to this: "So, your case depends upon us determining

that the risk presented here was a new risk that the FDA did not consider?" Round and round they go over whether the duty to warn arises with new, newish, or old information and whether the misbranding begins when the old information becomes brand-new or when the new information becomes newly dangerous. Frederick contends that Wyeth knew, or should have known since at least the 1970s, that the dangers of an IV push of Phernergan warranted stronger warnings. He says Pfizer, by contrast, stopped allowing an IV push for its own anti-nausea drug after just two amputations.

Poor Diane Levine. She has lost most of her arm, her livelihood, and now her whole story to the doctrine factory that is the Supreme Court. She [told Tony Mauro this week](#), "I thought this case had to do with me." No, ma'am. This case is so deep in the pre-emption weeds, the word *guitar* was never even whispered. On the one hand, draining cases of their heated emotional component is what courts do best. On the other hand, why do the court's conservatives turn so purple when they are trying to sound most dispassionate? And on the other hand, well, shouldn't the other hand matter just a little?

BONUS reader contest: Anyone wanna place a bet on which justice will cuss first in [tomorrow's FCC case](#) and what word he or she will say? Send mail to jurisprudencecontest@gmail.com.

technology

No More Palin, No More Polls

How to kill time on the Web now that the election's over.

By Farhad Manjoo

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 7:01 AM ET

The election's over, and you're bored. You're not really elated that your guy won or dismayed that he got crushed—really, you just wish you knew what to do with yourself. Over the last few months, you've spent hours each day poring over polls and reading every pundit. Now all that is done, and the Web seems so ... empty. Politico is full of stories about the transition team and RealClearPolitics is focused on 2012, but it's just not the same.

I'm here to help because I'm pretty much in the same boat. Now that the election's over, I've got several spare hours a day. What'll I do? Here are some ideas.

Follow the financial crisis. The presidential race might be over, but news junkies looking for a fix are in luck—the economy looks sure to provide months of daily excitement. Of course there are many mainstream sources—the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Times*, *Slate's* sister pub [The Big Money](#)—but the Web

abounds with smart bloggers who follow the financial crisis with the sort of precinct-by-precinct detail you've come to expect of election news.

I asked Andrew Leonard, who manages *Salon's* excellent globalization blog [How the World Works](#), for tips on blogs to follow for financial news. His suggestions: [Calculated Risk](#), [the Big Picture](#), Portfolio's [Felix Salmon](#), and [Naked Capitalism](#), all of which offer ridiculously in-depth coverage—think of them as the [Ben Smiths](#) of economic news. I'd also add [Planet Money](#), NPR's fantastic blog and podcast, which excels in explaining the meltdown for people who barely understand their 401(k)s.

Watch CollegeHumor. When all else fails, turn to funny videos. The Web is full of them, and new ones come out every day—just head to [Digg](#), [FunnyOrDie](#), [the Onion](#), or [BuzzFeed](#) for the latest and greatest.

One suggestion: If you missed "You Suck at Photoshop," the 20-episode Web series in which a disaffected loser dishes about his miserable life as he tries to teach you how to edit photos, stop reading this and [watch it immediately](#). (Note the mysterious celebrity cameo in the final episode, which just hit the Web last week.) After that, head over to CollegeHumor.com, which for my money produces the funniest videos on the Web. As the name implies, CollegeHumor deftly traverses the line between the clever and the sophomoric—it knows every [pot-smoking joke you can think of](#), but it's also got a mean way with Internet memes. (See [Professor Wikipedia](#) or this much-passed-around clip imagining a business meeting of the kind of people [who write comments on blogs](#).) My favorite CollegeHumor series is [this incredibly cruel prank-war](#) between two of the site's regular performers. The whole thing's true—these guys really pulled these pranks. They start off innocently enough but over time escalate into a battle so big that it's kind of sad. But mostly [it's hilarious](#).

Visit Google Trends. Whenever I run out of [Web aggregators to read](#), I load up Google's hourly snapshot of keywords people are looking for online. [Google Trends](#) offers a picture of the Web's deepest desires. A word of warning: Not everything you'll find here is interesting, and a whole lot of it is bizarre, but if you follow some of the threads, your chances of coming upon something worthwhile are pretty good.

On one recent morning, for instance, Trends tipped me off to news of [a huge trade in pro basketball](#); a [site](#) to show you whether you're eligible to vote and how to do it; details of the [Jennifer Hudson family funeral](#); an [obituary for Yma Sumac](#), a Peruvian singer with a multioctave vocal range; and word that skier [Picabo Street got married](#). Before forwarding to all your friends, be sure to follow links for the search terms lighting up Google Trends because people are often searching for stuff that's wrong. Sunday night, for instance, Trends blew up with the

phrase "lil wayne dead." [Not true! The rumor of the rapper's death](#) was tracked to a site imitating the BBC.

Join a niche social network. When looking for stuff to do online, lots of people turn to Facebook and MySpace. These can be fun, but their thrill wears off fast—how much time, really, can you spend looking up your first-grade classmates?

Let me suggest some more specialized social nets—sites that hook you up with people just like you. Do you have a dog? Join [Dogster](#): Create a profile for your pooch and chat with other owners about all that's going on in your dog days. If you knit, check out [Ravelry](#), which has attracted tens of thousands of knitters who trade patterns, offer advice for getting through knotty problems, and critique one another's creations. There are also social networks for [birders](#), people [recovering from addiction](#), [divorced women](#), and people [living with chronic diseases](#). The über-social network [Ning](#) lets you create your own specialized network—you'll find user-created sites for [Pentecostals](#), [pagans](#), [geeks](#), [fans of New Kids on the Block](#), and others.

Some of these sites may sound a bit overnarrow; TechCrunch, for instance, [is astonished](#) that a knitting social network has taken off. But I know people who are absolutely addicted to the site, which makes sense—when you're in one of these target groups, meeting people who feel exactly as you do is a heady experience. It's what made the Web so great in the first place.

Play World of Goo. Over the last couple of years, while you were spending your late nights thinking of ways to turn out voters in Cleveland, the Web turned into a haven for addictive video games. Now irresistible little puzzlers are just a click away; they load up right in your browser without the need for installation—you can play them at work, in the hours you used to spend studying the polls at [FiveThirtyEight.com](#).

I asked Scott Lamb, an editor at [BuzzFeed](#) who always seems to find the best games first, for suggestions. His recommendation: [Fantastic Contraption](#), a fun physics game in which you draw little machines to move a ball from one place on the screen to another. (FC is similar to the [long-dreamed-about](#) game [Crayon Physics Deluxe](#), which made its debut in a [stunning YouTube video](#) but isn't yet available for download.)

If you're a fan of tower-defense games—like the famous [Desktop Tower Defense](#), in which you try to build a fortress against an onslaught of oncoming enemies—there are lots of derivatives for you to try, including [Whiteboard Tower Defense](#) and [Bloons Tower Defense 3](#). Lamb also suggests [Light-Bot](#) and [Chronotron](#), two games in which you play a robot trying to navigate a map; Light-Bot asks you to think like a computer programmer while Chronotron features a loopy bit of time travel reminiscent of the movie [Primer](#).

But my favorite new time-waster is [World of Goo](#), a physics-strategy game that's something of a cross between Legos, [Super Mario Galaxy](#), and a Tim Burton movie. World of Goo is not a Web game; it sells for \$20 and is available for PCs, Macs, and as a download for the Wii. To get a flavor of the game, download the PC-only preview [Tower of Goo](#), in which you're charged with stacking elastic goo balls as they rain down the screen. World of Goo expands that mandate—there are different kind of goo balls (goo that explodes, goo that floats, goo that sticks), and you've got to arrange them into bridges and towers and huge machines that stretch and sag across a beautiful and bizarre hand-drawn landscape. Trust me: This is way more fun than frantically refreshing Pollster.com.

television

Yes, We Can Be Serious

The networks play it cool. Except for that crazy hologram.

By Troy Patterson

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 3:35 PM ET

One pleasant shock of election night was that the major networks and their cable-news kin decided to behave reasonably and catch a subdued tone. They were fairly cautious about presumptions and predictions at the outset. Fox's slightly extended (and thus slightly *louche*) early-evening pondering of exit polls ranked as the friskiest behavior. On the other end of the spectrum, a guarded CNN made a point of flaunting its guardedness, having its anchors almost defensively explain why they weren't ready to call Pennsylvania even as their buzzy body language suggested that they very much wanted to do so.

As the hours zipped on, the use of the assiduous subjunctive ("The effect of an Obama victory, if it happens ...") became gradually more strained. The final gasps of puffing and pandering (with Fox News noting that the McCain campaign "objected" to Pennsylvania's being called blue) were received ever more clinically. As Obama's victory became apparent, viewers may have begun to steel themselves for hysteria, hyperbole, and quests for rhetorical grandeur that went over the top, there to be blown away by the strength of their own wind.

But the anchors arrived at a different idea and glided through the night making relaxed attempts at gravitas. (Had all of them searched for a mood in synch with the president-elect's self-possession?) Though gravitas is itself an elusive and somewhat dubious concept, perhaps we can agree that achieving it is a matter of trafficking in poised phrases, controlled sentimentality, comforting historical perspective, capable timing, and, mostly, knowing when to shut up. At the conclusion of Obama's speech,

most anchors left their golden throats silent and let the crowd noise in Chicago tell the story.

Still, it wouldn't have been television news without some bravura hype and aggressive flashiness. On CBS, Katie Couric (as calm and confident as she's been at the anchor desk) hosted a sober presentation. Every other set looked like something you'd pick up at a Circuit City in Dubai. Within ABC's airy and glossy Times Square set, Charlie Gibson poked and pinched a touch-screen election map every bit as snazzy as CNN's. NBC and MSNBC leaned more heavily than ever on reports from virtual-reality rooms, their maps and graphs floating in front of some digital recreation of a set from *The West Wing*. But those gizmos—merely straightforward efforts to present data engagingly—were nothing compared with an embarrassing stunt that CNN first attempted in the 7 o'clock hour.

Wolf Blitzer was in his New York command center standing 10 paces away from a 3-D rendering of a reporter: "[Jessica Yellin via hologram in Chicago](#)." The effects were such that she was ringed in an off-purple aura from head to toe (a distance, it seemed, of about 4 feet). This was distracting, perfectly superfluous, and in no way an advance on the good old two-dimensional Yellin to whom we are accustomed. This was just the latest example of CNN's weakness for state-of-the-art technology that shows you little more than its state-of-the-artiness. On the other hand, the moment proved a worthy demonstration of Blitzer's professionalism. As a YouTube commenter quickly remarked, "He is being awfully nonchalant about [the hologram]. I'd be trying to stick my hand through it and all that!" Even in the face of howling inanity, it was a night to play it cool.

television

Watching the Election

Fox is going a little crazy; the twilight of Joe the Plumber.

By Troy Patterson

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 4:15 PM ET

The Balsams is a mountain resort of the type where gentlemen must wear jackets in the evening and the windows will be draped in chintz until the end of time. It is here that television's Election Day ritually begins, as the village of Dixville Notch, N.H., undertakes its midnight vote. Around 12:01 a.m., CNN lost its video feed, so its correspondent was forced to phone in to *Larry King Live* with the news of an Obama victory (15 votes to McCain's six) and, no less important, of journalists on the scene outnumbering voters (by a ratio of 3-to-1).

Viewers with a deep thirst for this kind of harmless nonsense switched over to MSNBC, where we saw the Dixvillians doing their duty for American democracy and well-hyped Americana.

They dropped their paper ballots into a wooden box under the warm eyes of some avuncular public servant. His bow tie was more punctilious than the landscaping of the hotel's croquet lawn. I should have gone to bed right then to dream cozily of supercompetent election officials and the straight-backed citizens who owe them trust but greedily did not, and so witnessed MSNBC's David Schuster interviewing the bold bald head of Joe the Plumber, that walking talking point and little-league demagogue. In his role as the leading pseudo-celebrity of this election season, he quasi-said some semi-things.

In Joe's defense, his enablers at the cable news networks have been up to the same thing for a few days. You would, too, given this much air to fill, these many camera setups to test, and so much nothing to report. Consider a Monday CNN segment hosted by Campbell Brown. (I single out Brown only because she, bright-eyed and spunky, is my new favorite; last week, she teased footage of Joe the Plumber press coverage with the irked caveat that the matter would be addressed "briefly, believe me.") Yesterday, Brown spent a good deal of time telling us how to watch tonight's coverage—what to make of the big picture as particular states were called. While this was a reasonable way to warm up some new graphics, it seemed a bit much for CNN to ask of its most spoiled viewers. Learning *how* to watch the coverage? Some of us had been expecting that we could just tune in and they'd tell us what was happening as we went along.

This afternoon, CNN has not quite been watchable, purely on account of a cognitive-dissonance-inspiring weather report flashing on the right-hand side of the screen: The reporter will be speaking from Cleveland, say, but the text and map will be featuring Fargo, N.D., and you've got to get away from the juxtaposition and find the ibuprofen. Meanwhile, the other news channels are discovering their own cluttered ways to build tension and to stimulate information overload in the absence of actual information. Fox News is discovering new frontiers in polling: "How long would you wait in line to cast your vote?" MSNBC is frolicking out-of-doors, having thrown up some handsome bunting in Rockefeller Plaza and sent out people dressed as donkeys and elephants to pat at one another with furry paws—and now, as I type this, Joe the Plumber's set to rear his talking head on CNN again, a godsend to TV producers in their time of waiting.

the big idea

Spread It Around

Barack Obama favors redistributing wealth. So does John McCain.

By Jacob Weisberg

Saturday, November 1, 2008, at 7:55 AM ET

In the last lap of his limping campaign, John McCain is claiming

that [Barack Obama "believes in redistributing wealth."](#) The problem with this charge is not that it's untrue. It's that McCain—and most of his supporters—favor redistribution, too.

Government redistributes wealth to some extent by its very existence, since it's impractical for citizens to pay for or benefit from it in equal proportion, even if that were desirable. So long as you have a system of taxation and a spending on public goods like education and roads, some people will do better in the bargain than others. The real questions are whether public policy consciously tries to affect the distribution of wealth, how much it tries to change it, and in what direction.

Redistribution has a "from" side—taxation—and a "to" side—spending. On the "from" side, the notion that government should use taxation to increase rather than decrease equality is hardly Marxist. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith begins his [section on taxation](#) with the following maxim: "The subjects of every state ought to contribute towards the support of the government, as nearly as possible, in proportion to their respective abilities." To ask otherwise, Smith writes, would be obviously unfair.

Until the 20th century, the bulk of government revenues came from tariffs, which are regressive, meaning that they redistribute income away from the poor. The progressive principle was enshrined in American practice with the arrival of the federal income and inheritance taxes. The champion of these policies was none other than John McCain's hero, [Teddy Roosevelt](#). We got progressive income taxes with the passage of the 16th Amendment in 1913. The federal estate tax we have today came in 1916.

Even in his current proposals, McCain adheres to his hero's principles. Unlike George W. Bush, John McCain supports the retention of an estate tax (he favors reducing it to 15 percent on estates above \$5 million). McCain opposes the Flat Tax, which would repudiate progressivity (though with a [\\$46,000 exemption](#), it would still redistribute income). Some of us still remember the John McCain who opposed Bush's 2001 tax cut on the argument that it was unfairly tilted toward the rich.

On the "to" side of the ledger, large-scale redistributive policies owe their existence to the other President Roosevelt. The biggest and most important of these is Social Security. FDR understood that an income support program that was too explicitly redistributionist would be unlikely to survive politically, which is why everyone who works and pays into the system has a right to benefits. But the Social Security Administration does quietly shift money from relatively richer to relatively poorer—even if [recent research](#) indicates that it may do so less than intended, largely because poor people have shorter life expectancies.

Curiously, the most prominent proponents of more-aggressive wealth redistribution have been Robin Hoods of the right. Milton

Friedman is considered the [father of the negative income tax](#), a 1960s-era proposal to simply give cash to the poor. Richard Nixon proposed a version of this plan in 1973. The idea was that simply writing checks would be preferable to more bureaucratic programs like welfare. Our most explicit redistributive program today is probably the Earned Income Tax Credit, which supplements the incomes of people who work but don't earn enough to escape poverty on their own. Gerald Ford signed this bill into law, and Ronald Reagan greatly expanded it.

John McCain has long favored the EITC, calling it "a much-needed tax credit for working Americans." McCain doesn't support the repeal of Social Security, or Medicare, or a raft of other wealth-spreading programs like food stamps. McCain also supports new redistributive measures, such as a tax credit to help people with lower incomes purchase health insurance.

McCain might respond by saying it is not the principle of redistribution that makes Obama's policies objectionable but rather the extent of them. Socialistic Sweden, with its generous social benefits and a government consuming around 55 percent of GDP, exists on the same continuum with the mildly distributive United States, where you can't get by on welfare payments and where total government spending is in the range of 30 percent of GDP. McCain is trying to argue that an Obama presidency would lead us toward the [Swedish model](#).

Perhaps, but there's little in Obama's background or writings to suggest that he favors more-ambitious redistributive policies. His most expensive new social program is an expansion of health care coverage that would not create a universal entitlement (as many Democrats want to do). It has been [credibly priced](#) at less, or only slightly more than McCain's plan. There's little reason to think that Obama would depart from the bipartisan consensus that has favored federal spending at approximately the same level for the past 40 years.

What has changed in that period is the way the market has distributed wealth. Since the 1970s, income inequality in the United States has [increased dramatically](#). Obama, like a lot of his fellow liberals, wants to find ways to reverse that trend without diminishing overall economic growth. The old John McCain worried about that problem, too. We may see that guy again after the election.

the dismal science

What's In It for Me?

How congressmen decided whether to vote for the bailout.

By Ray Fisman

Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 6:46 AM ET

In July, the U.S. government got into the housing business with the passage of the American Housing Rescue and Foreclosure Prevention Act, which authorized \$300 billion to insure refinanced mortgages. A few weeks ago, the government got into financial services as well with the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act, which gave Hank Paulson and the U.S. Treasury \$700 billion to bail out the U.S. banking system. The subsequent [lobbying frenzy](#) has many people worried about whether the bailout funds will serve Main Street's economic interests or line the pockets of special interests.

Chicago Business school professors [Atif Mian](#), [Amir Sufi](#), and [Francesco Trebbi](#) have [already](#) run the numbers on politicians' voting records for both bailout packages, and [their findings](#) won't ease concerns about misspent billions. They find that congressmen from foreclosure-ridden districts were far more likely to vote for the mortgage bailout, and lawmakers who received big checks from the financial-services lobby were likely to cast votes in favor of the bank recapitalization plan. Given that the politics of the bailouts has already proved to be focused narrowly on local interests and strongly influenced by special interests, there's good reason to worry about what will happen when taxpayer dollars actually start getting spent.

Few economists questioned the need for a bailout of some kind, and in theory there's nothing wrong with politicians working for their constituents—the need to get elected and re-elected naturally pushes representatives toward a focus on the people who vote for them. But serving local interests has also given us [bridges to nowhere](#), [studies on human hibernation](#), and other earmarked expenditures that put local politics ahead of national interests. While both bailout plans were national in scope, some electoral districts will benefit more than others. Using data from a national consumer-credit-information provider, the researchers find that while the country as a whole has been slammed with mortgage defaults—payment on more than one in 20 mortgages was delinquent in the last quarter of 2007—the pain was spread very unevenly. Lots of congressmen's districts had default rates above 8 percent, while others were closer to 3 percent.

In voting on the mortgage bailout, congressmen responded strongly to local constituencies' need for government action. About 25 percent of Republicans in Congress cast "yes" votes on the AHRFPA. (The economists look only at the votes of Republican representatives, since Democrats were near-unanimous in their support of the legislation.) Yet among those representing default-battered districts (those with defaults above 7 percent), this figure rises to nearly 40 percent, while only around 10 percent of representatives of low-default districts (below 3.5 percent) voted for the legislation.

The lawmakers proved to be remarkably calculating in casting their votes. Within each congressman's district, political allegiances vary neighborhood-by-neighborhood. But

Republican lawmakers responded to the default rates only in their districts' Republican-dominated areas. For example, Texas's District 26 is painted, for the most part, a deep Republican red. But it encompasses a few Democratic neighborhoods as well—and these happened to be the ones hammered by the housing crisis, with default rates of nearly 12 percent. (District 26's Republican areas, by contrast, had a default rate of below 5 percent.) The district's Republican representative, Michael Burgess, voted against the mortgage bailout.

Constituent interests also mattered more in competitive districts—the effect of defaults on a representative's vote was nearly twice as large for congressmen who had an electoral margin of less than 2 percent in 2006.

The bank bailout served a different set of interests. By proposing to buy up many of the bad mortgages that were weighing down bank balance sheets, the government hoped to stop the downward spiral of U.S. financial markets. This would also have the collateral effect of [rescuing many of Wall Street's fat cats](#), and, needless to say, the fat cats [went all-out to ensure the bailout plan would get enough votes to pass](#).

Some congressmen seem to have been more open to these advances than others. Financial services companies have contributed many millions to political campaigns in the 2008 election cycle (the top donor, Goldman Sachs, has handed out \$4.5 million so far), and the researchers found that lawmakers who benefited the most from this largesse were more supportive of the Wall Street-friendly bailout. They calculate that the odds of congressmen well-funded by Wall Street—the 60 or so with contributions above \$200,000—voting against the bailout were 30 percent. Among representatives largely passed over by the finance lobby (with contributions below \$30,000), the chances of a "no" vote rise to nearly 50 percent. (As with the mortgage bailout, congressmen were also looking out for their voters in the bank rescue plan—legislators representing districts with high rates of finance-industry employment were more likely to cast "yes" votes.)

That said, strongly held beliefs *can* trump naked political interests. For fiscal conservatives like Texas Rep. Jeb Hensarling, both bills embodied the further intrusions of big government. (The bank bailout would "fundamentally change the role of government in the American free enterprise system," Hensarling [told the press](#).) So despite more than [\\$450,000 received from real estate and finance industry interests](#) during the 2008 election cycle and a mortgage-default rate in his home district that ranks among the highest in the country, Hensarling voted against both bills. He wasn't the only conservative with a conscience. Using a [measure of political ideology](#) based on congressional voting records, the study found that conservative Republican congressmen were far more likely to vote against both pieces of legislation than their less conservative GOP

counterparts and were also less sensitive to voter and donor pressure in casting their votes.

Some corruption and waste may be inevitable in responding to disaster and crisis—we certainly found that out in [paying contractors in Iraq](#) and [rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina](#). Yet some ways of responding to emergencies are better than others. There are [a lot of ideas](#) out there on how to make the bailouts work effectively to mend U.S. financial markets, including plans for [quickly getting banks back to lending](#) and [minimizing the bailout funds that leak out to bank owners and executives](#). How many of these suggestions will be followed? While much has been made of the independence that the Treasury will have in administering the bailout, congressmen have certainly been known to [intercede on policy matters in the past](#). If this analysis of how congressmen made their voting decisions on the bailouts is any indication, political pressures rather than economic common sense may prevail in how the bailout funds get spent.

sidebar

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If you're wondering how these economists cranked out this analysis so fast, it's because this is the [Reese's Peanut Butter Cup](#) of research enterprises. Mian and Sufi study mortgage defaults. Trebbi studies congressional voting. They simply merged their datasets.

the green lantern The Great Coffee Debate

Could a French press be worse for the environment than a coffee machine?

By Jacob Leibenluft

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 10:44 AM ET

I work at an online startup, and, needless to say, we drink a lot of coffee around here. Last week, the brewing machine in our kitchen stopped working, and we're downright desperate to replace it. Should we stick to the same model, which uses paper filters and a glass jug? Or has this office tragedy given us the chance to invest in something greener?

The Lantern is beginning to worry that his readers are a little sleep-deprived. After all, there is probably no topic that comes up more frequently in his inbox than coffee. Already, we've

tackled the question of [what kind of cup to drink your coffee in](#) and [whether fair-trade beans make environmental sense](#)—and now, we'll consider the question of how actually to brew your cup of Joe with a little aside for the tea drinkers (green and otherwise).

Sustainability experts are similarly obsessed, having spent a disproportionate amount of their time looking for a greener way to brew coffee. In fact, one of the most popular computer programs used to create so-called life-cycle assessments—which measure the environmental impact of products, from mining the metals to tossing them in the trash—uses coffee makers as a [case study](#) (PDF).

That program, called SimaPro, helps users assign a score to each product, using a point system that compares its overall impact to the effect the average European has on the environment in a single year. The case study starts with a traditional coffee maker, finding that the bulk of the environmental impact comes from the electricity required to heat up the coffee in a glass pot and the disposable paper filters. The analysis finds better results with a machine that has a Thermos-style metal coffee pot as well as a reusable [metal filter](#). The stainless-steel vessel in this type of machine holds its heat better than a glass jug, which saves a good deal of electricity. Meanwhile, the reusable filter eliminates the need for throw-away accessories. Overall, the thermos-style pot comes out with a score that's about 35 percent better than your basic glass-and-paper model.

It's not always a good idea to rely on these magic life-cycle scores, but in this case the logic seems to make sense. Still, coffee addicts have options beyond brewing a full pot of coffee. If the problem is keeping that big pot warm, wouldn't a [single-serve coffee machine](#) be a better choice? The Lantern isn't fully convinced. If those machines were turned on only when you dropped your pod of coffee in, they might save a little electricity. But many on the market today remain powered up at all times to keep the water at a minimum temperature. The disposable plastic packaging wrapped around each serving of coffee may be even worse for the planet than those paper filters.

Or you could forgo the all-in-one machines completely and outfit your office kitchen with a French press. In that case, you'd still need to figure out the greenest way to boil water. (That's the key question for tea drinkers, too.) The [consensus](#) appears to be that an electric kettle works more efficiently than a microwave or—if your workplace is really homey—a stove. (For a nice *Slate* discussion of electric kettles—which are far more popular in the British Commonwealth—see this [review](#).) Buying a kettle means you need to purchase one more device, but the Lantern imagines that the impact from manufacturing a kettle and a French press can't be much more than the full-up coffee machine. The French press may require a bit more cleaning per cup of coffee, but if you're light on the soap and the hot water, it's probably the best overall option. (One tip, though: When you

boil water, make sure you pour only as much as you need; estimates from Britain show [significant energy wastage](#) due to the fact that people heat water they never drink.)

If all these different choices make your head spin—particularly when you haven't had your daily fix of coffee—the Lantern suggests a simple rule of thumb. Focus first on reducing the amount of time you're keeping these appliances running; after you do that, try to keep disposable waste to a minimum. In the long term, your choice of an office coffee machine won't make nearly as much of a difference as the type of refrigerator you use to store your milk. But the coffee maker will hog energy whenever it's left on, and it won't cost your business an arm and a leg to get one that's a bit cleaner and more efficient than what you had before.

Is there an environmental quandary that's been keeping you up at night? Send it to ask.the.lantern@gmail.com, and check this space every Tuesday.

the undercover economist

Money on the Brain

What can "neuroeconomics" teach us about how we shop?

By Tim Harford

Saturday, November 1, 2008, at 7:55 AM ET

This morning, I had a remarkable experience: I strolled into a delicatessen and bought some delicious Stilton. What made the shopping trip unusual was that I was wearing a brain scanner while I did it. My costume consisted of an electroencephalograph cap, which looks like a polka-dot shower cap with wires plugged into it; a pair of wraparound glasses with a tiny video camera attached; a clothes peg on one finger to measure my heart rate; two other finger monitors that function like a lie detector; a thermometer patch on a fourth finger; and a satchel to hold a computer gathering the data.

Most of these devices, or their equivalent, can be hidden under clothes or baseball caps so that the wearer looks as if they are sporting only shades and an iPod, but in my case the boffins hadn't bothered, and so I entered the deli looking like an extra from a 1970s episode of [Doctor Who](#).

This was all part of my efforts to understand "neuroeconomics," a new, controversial, and eclectic marriage between economics, marketing, and various branches of physiology and brain science. With very different aims, economists and marketers are attempting to tap into the dramatic advances in our understanding of the brain that have taken place over the past 15 years. Their tools encompass mood-altering drugs, tests for hormone levels, animal studies, and fMRI scans (which use

immobile scanners to measure blood flows deep inside the brain).

"Neuromarketing" is the simplest application, and the one in which I was participating. David Lewis, a neurophysiologist at [the Mind Lab](#), a spinoff from the University of Sussex, showed me how the physiological readings could be viewed alongside output from my camera to provide a simple but—presumably—useful demonstration of what really grabbed my attention in the deli. Among Lewis' findings are that eating chocolate is more exciting than making out (at least, making out in an electrical shower cap while surrounded by men with clipboards) and that, subconsciously, young men are more interested in sneakers than in the wares on display in an [Ann Summers sex shop](#).

While the possible applications for marketers are obvious enough, such trials are hardly unlocking the deepest secrets of thought. It remains to be seen whether neuroscience has much to contribute to economics itself, a subject that has long focused on the decisions people make, without relying on any particular theory of how they make them. It is also hard to point to anything terribly interesting that the neuroeconomists have discovered, although neuroeconomics may contribute more as time goes by.

Neuroeconomics may provide more shape to the older and more famous field of behavioral economics. A mixture of economics and psychology, behavioral economics has used laboratory experiments to expose a bewildering number of exceptions to the traditional economic theory of rational choice. At present, though, there is little pattern to what the behavioral economists are observing, and it's possible that a greater understanding of how the brain works might help to provide one.

Yet neuroscience might also help reinforce the traditionalists. Wolfram Schultz, a neuroscientist at Cambridge who studies how the brain processes risk and reward, says that just as the brain registers sensations such as sight, he can now see it registering rewards. There was no reason to expect that the mathematically convenient economists' fantasy of "utility" had any real analogue in the brain—but it seems that it might, after all. There's a thought.

this just in

Where Should the Polls Stay Open?

The question of the evening.

By Emily Bazelon and Juliet Lapidus

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 8:50 PM ET

The presidential election is coming to a close in the time-

honored way—with widespread anxiety about voter fraud, voter suppression, mechanical glitches, and long lines at the polls. Here at *Slate*, we're keeping track of the outrages unfolding nationwide. Check this page often for the latest news.

Tuesday, Nov. 4

[Problems](#) with provisional ballots in Ohio. No surprise there. Whether or not it matters tonight, the state has work to do on this. ... **8:50 p.m.**

Via the [Advancement Project](#), four problems in Virginia—which we identified earlier as a possible problem state. 1) Long lines in Chesapeake, 2) lots of people (unclear exactly how many) who registered at the DMV didn't make it onto the rolls, 3) some students (again, unclear how many) had to use provisional ballots in the Norfolk area, and 4) wet ballots in Hampton Roads (where it rained this morning) are causing optical-scanning-machine jams. ... **7 p.m.**

Via [866ourvote.org](#), we hear that dozens of voters in St. Louis submitted change-of-address forms well before Election Day that have not been processed. A local judge is refusing to hear requests for "form approval," so it's likely these voters will be disenfranchised. Of course, "dozens of voters" is small potatoes in comparison with previous election cycles, but Missouri is a battleground state, and it's possible this snafu is indicative of larger problems statewide. ... **6:56 p.m.**

In Virginia, there's an [early bid](#) to keep the polls open late. (They are scheduled to close at 7 p.m. there.) If lines persist—and why wouldn't they?—this will be the first of many such efforts. Many states basically provide for keeping the polls open for everyone who gets into line before the official closing time. But advocacy groups rush to court and ask judges to stop the polls from closing anyway as an insurance policy.

The other issue to look out for as the evening wears on: wrangling over the counting of provisional ballots—especially in Ohio, but also in other states like Virginia, where the McCain campaign has sued about the tabulation of absentee ballots. (The judge in that case just [wrote a note](#) that suggests he might keep this open until Nov. 10. Good grief.) If state-by-state contests aren't close, these battles won't matter. If they are—and there are congressional and state races to consider—the lawyers will be busy.

Meanwhile, in Missouri, voters in a suburb north of St. Louis [report](#) waiting six and half hours. Ugh.

And in [Indiana](#), the Marion County Election Board unanimously removed two Republican poll workers for improperly challenging ballots. ... **5:28 p.m.**

By law, Ohioans [must show identification to vote](#), like a driver's license or a military ID. It doesn't matter if the address on the license is different from the address on the registration form—you should still be able to vote. But we're hearing scattered reports that Ohio poll workers haven't been trained properly and are giving would-be voters with mismatched information a hard time, in some cases requiring them to cast provisional ballots.

Reader Philip Sandifer alerts us to a [livejournal entry](#) by a College of Wooster student, which reads, in part: "So the law says that anyone with an Ohio driver's license can use it to vote, even if the address is different from the one they are registered at. Poll workers at St. Mary's (the largest polling location for the college) are REFUSING to do this. ... A lot of college kids are being disenfranchised. The out-of-state kids had to request a utility bill from the dean as a proof of residence. They're set. The Ohio kids didn't know they needed this letter. The dean's office is closing at 5, refuses to remain open past that."

The [Columbus Dispatch](#) also quotes a reader whose registration was challenged due to a mismatch problem. He had to return home to retrieve proof of residence before casting a ballot. ... **5 p.m.**

Third-party supporters, I've got just the polling station for you! At Pleasant Township Hall in Knox County, Ohio, a touch-screen machine [would only register votes for Ralph Nader](#). Somewhere out there, a computer programmer thinks Nader never got enough credit for the [Ford Pinto](#) recall. ... **3:35 p.m.**

Fox News [reported](#) earlier that two Black Panthers stood at the door of a Philadelphia polling place, one of them holding a nightstick, and made voters feel intimidated. One called the police, and the guy with the nightstick was escorted away. [Here's the transcript](#); here's a [clear picture](#) of the two men. The story checks out. It's also an isolated incident. ... **3:20 p.m.**

Update, 4:22 p.m.: An Obama volunteer [denies](#) that the Panthers were being intimidating. She says they were "guarding the polling place, a nursing home on Fairmont Avenue in north Philadelphia" but that "one was an officially designated poll watcher" and the other was a friend of his.

It looks as if Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Virginia are the states to watch this year. But, especially compared with 2000 and 2004, the problems are slight so far—mostly long lines and minor computer glitches.

Florida: Via [Ourvotelive.org](#), voters showed up to the polls in Tallahassee only to find ... no ballots! A rehab center for elderly residents never received absentee ballots. And reports of broken optical-scanning machines are pouring in from Tallahassee, Tampa, Broward County, and Miami-Dade County.

Michigan: [Wired reported yesterday](#) that optical scanners manufactured by Election Systems & Software failed pre-election tests—producing different results for the same ballots. Today, there are major machine malfunctions all across the state. According to the [Detroit Free Press](#), complaints from voters in 13 different cities—including Detroit, Grosse Pointe Woods, and Battle Creek—had already come in by 11 a.m.

Pennsylvania: Republican poll watchers have been [tossed out of a half-dozen polling stations](#) in Philadelphia. Also in Philadelphia, [machines in multiple polling places are out of order or never arrived](#).

Virginia: [Widespread machine malfunctions](#) are leading to inordinately long lines—including a seven-hour wait in the 32nd precinct.

E-mail us at slate.votingtrouble@gmail.com if you have something to report. ... **2:05 p.m.**

Ohio Republicans are worrying about the state's infamous provisional ballots. Again. [These ballots](#) are the ones voters file if they're challenged at the polls or vote late; they aren't counted until after the election. Earlier in the month, the Supreme Court [dismissed](#) a lawsuit by the state GOP over whether the Ohio secretary of state (Democrat Jennifer Brunner) had to turn over the names of thousands of newly registered voters that didn't appear to match other state records when Brunner said the glitches were due to errors in record keeping, not fraud or other real problems. Today, the GOP [filed the suit](#) for the second time, amending it to claim (among other things) that Brunner hasn't ensured the uniform counting of provisional ballots and has "seemed to encourage local officials to overlook non-matching signatures." As a result, the votes of legitimate voters are being impermissibly "diluted," the suit claims.

This is a placeholder lawsuit: It will allow the Republicans to contest the results of the election after the fact under the federal Constitution, because Ohio has an unusual rule that took away the right to contest results in state court, says Ned Foley of Ohio State University's election law project.

It's also worth noting, though, that there are no reports as yet of hundreds or even tens of people leaving the polls because of the long lines in Ohio or any other battleground state. Also, no suits over the waiting times in places like Pennsylvania and Missouri. So maybe the delays aren't disenfranchising people, so far. ... **12:50 p.m.**

Starbucks is halting its [much-publicized plan](#) to give voters free coffee today. It turns out that offering "gifts" constitutes a felony under election law in many states. In Georgia, for example, "Any person who gives or receives, or offers to give or receive, or participates in the giving or receiving of money or gifts for the

purpose of registering as a voter, voting, or voting for a particular candidate in any primary or election shall be guilty of a felony" (via the [Atlanta Journal Constitution](#)). But the coffee chain has found a way to foil the election Grinches—they're [extending the freebie to everyone](#) who orders a tall brewed coffee. Alas, no caramel lattes. ... **10:50 a.m.**

Lines, lines, and more lines. So *this* is what happens when Election Day turns into the main attraction opening at a theater near you. As Nathaniel Persily of Columbia Law School points out, this is when early voting starts to look like a real blessing.

In [Virginia](#), waits of two hours or more around Richmond and half that in other parts of the state. Reports of machines breaking and jamming, though some of them are getting fixed. Also, [phony calls](#) telling people their polling places have changed. Hang up!

In [Pennsylvania](#), early-morning backups. Also in [Michigan](#) and Missouri. A polling place in Kansas City, Mo., had the [wrong list of voters](#), causing more delays. So much for voting before work. The *Morning Call* of Allentown, Pa., sensibly [reminds](#) readers that around 10 a.m., the rush should ebb for a few hours. Till lunch? ... **10 a.m.**

Misinformation roundup: In Indiana, Virginia, and Pennsylvania, robo-calls and fliers are instructing people to vote on Wednesday (via [ourvote.live.org](#)). Likewise, in North Carolina, fliers left on cars at a shopping mall instruct Democrats to vote on Wednesday and Republicans to vote on Tuesday (via the [Brennan Center for Justice](#)). Also, a reader reports that someone hacked into the provost of George Mason University's e-mail account and sent this message to the whole student body: "To the Mason Community: Please note that election day has been moved to November 5th. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause you." ... **9:19 a.m.**

Over at [Election Law@Moritz](#), Ned Foley [says](#) he's especially worried about Pennsylvania on Tuesday. His big concern is overcrowding. The governor and the mayor of Philadelphia warned on Monday that polling places may be overburdened by heavy turnout and urged residents to vote midday, rather than before or after work. Last week, a court ordered the Pennsylvania secretary of state to issue emergency paper ballots if 50 percent of the machines at a polling place malfunction. The ruling is framed in terms of the problem of voters waiting in long lines and as a protection of their constitutional rights. Foley asks, "If a polling place has only 50 percent of the voting machines that it arguably should have to handle the level of anticipated turnout," is that the same sort of constitutional violation that the court found in last week's [ruling](#)?

Another problem state: Virginia. The Advancement Project, on behalf of the NAACP, filed a lawsuit against Gov. Tim Kaine for "unconstitutional allocation of polling place resources." The

two groups were seeking: a reallocation of existing machines and poll workers so that these resources are equitably distributed across precincts, the option to vote by paper ballot in the event of long lines (i.e., more than a 45-minute wait), and extended voting hours. But the outcome of this lawsuit is just the opposite of the Pennsylvania case discussed above: A Federal Court in Richmond ruled against the Advancement Project.

The [Minuteman Civil Defense Corps](#) has launched a "poll watching" campaign. According to President and Founder Chris Simcox, the organization is urging volunteers across the country to stand 75 to 100 feet outside polling stations with video cameras and to record any "suspicious activity" like "busloads of voters." Volunteers will be documenting license plates as a "deterrence effect against people voting illegally." The [Hispanic National Bar Association](#) has sent out a press release stating that the Minuteman campaign is "nothing more and nothing less than an effort to intimidate Hispanics and other minority voters on Election Day." (Thanks to Tracey Meares for the tip.)

E-mail us at slate.votingtrouble@gmail.com if you have something to report. ... **7:15 a.m.**

Monday, Nov. 3

About one-third of the electorate voted early this year in a gambit to avoid procedural snafus and encountered—you guessed it—lots of procedural snafus. Here's a brief account of problems experienced by early voters.

Technological Glitches

- In **Atlanta**, four of five terminals connecting a polling site to the [secretary of state's voter database](#) malfunctioned because "the state was having an Internet connectivity issue." It took about an hour and a half to fix the problem.
- Voters in **North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia** using [iVotronic](#) touch screens [reported "flipping"](#)—wherein their choices were switched from Barack Obama to John McCain or vice versa. With help from poll workers, voters were able to correct their ballots.
- In **Park City, Utah**, [voters had to cast provisional ballots](#) because of a computer glitch that made it appear as though they had already voted.
- The summary page on **Knox County, Tenn.**, voting machines [displayed only the first three letters of the candidate's first name](#). Votes for Barack Obama were recorded as "BAR"—leading some to believe, mistakenly, that they'd selected Bob Barr, the Libertarian candidate.
- Absentee-ballot distribution in **Fairfax, Va.**, was [frozen](#) by an e-mail blitz from a group that was trying to

express concern about the adequacy of the state's voting system.

- **Oprah Winfrey** had [trouble using a touch screen](#), which initially didn't record her presidential vote.

Long Lines

- Wait times averaged [two to four hours](#) at the 17 early-voting sites in **Broward County, Fla.** Last Monday, one site closed at 10:30, three hours late, to accommodate demand.
- [Four-to-five-hour waits](#) were reported in **Charlotte, N.C.**, on Saturday—the last day for early voting in that state.
- In **Columbus, Ohio**, on Saturday, voters waited outside a polling site for an hour and then inside the building for [another two to three hours](#).
- The line to vote at the Cleveland County Election Board in **Norman, Okla.**, was [two blocks long](#) on Friday.
- Last Monday, voters in the **Atlanta** metro area waited in line for [six to eight hours](#). On Tuesday and Wednesday, the average wait went down to about two hours.

Intimidation and Malfeasance

- Poll workers in **Collin County, Texas**, demanded [photo IDs from voters](#) even though such identification isn't necessary.
- Common Cause of Colorado and two other groups sued **Colorado** Secretary of State Mike Coffman after he [purged 20,000 voters](#) from the state's registration list within 90 days of the general election. After the two parties reached an agreement last Wednesday, Coffman purged 146 more names from the list—a violation of federal law.
- The [Americans for Limited Government Foundation](#), a group committed to "rolling back government" at the national, state, and local levels, sent a threatening letter to approximately 11,000 donors to left-wing causes. (Thanks to James Horwitz for the tip.) The letter reads, in part: "Your name has been put in our database. We are monitoring reports of a wide variety of leftist organizations. ... Should any of these organizations be found to be engaged in illegal or questionable activity, it is our intent to publicize your involvement."

Bad Handwriting

- More than 3,000 absentee ballots haven't been tallied in **King County, Wash.**, due to ["signature issues"](#)—the signature on the registration card not matching the one

on the ballot, for example. *Slate* founder Michael Kinsley is one of many absentee voters who had to fill out a second form.

Bad Ballots

- In **Sullivan County, Tenn.**, voters received [ballots for the wrong state House district](#) during early voting.
- Thousands of absentee ballots sent to **Gwinnett County, Ga.**, will have to be hand-counted because of a printing error that makes them [impossible for an optical scanner to read](#).
- Absentee ballots sent to voters in **Rensselaer County, N.Y.**, identified the Democratic nominee as "[Barack Osama](#)."

If you encounter one of the snafus listed above, or any other problems at the polls tomorrow, contact us at slate.votingtrouble@gmail.com. ... **5:54 p.m.**

today's business press

Attention Shoppers: Christmas in Jeopardy

By Bernhard Warner and Matthew Yeomans
Friday, November 7, 2008, at 7:02 AM ET

today's papers

Someone's Lying

By Daniel Politi
Friday, November 7, 2008, at 6:46 AM ET

The *New York Times* leads with new revelations that further muddle the picture of how the [war between Georgia and Russia](#) this summer unfolded. The paper got its hands on accounts by independent military observers that suggest Georgia began indiscriminately attacking civilian areas in South Ossetia's capital, virtually assuring a Russian response. The *NYT* takes pains to emphasize that the reports are hardly conclusive, but at the very least they put in doubt Georgia's long-held assertions that it acted largely out of self-defense. The *Washington Post* leads with, and the *Wall Street Journal* banners, a look at the expanding global efforts to fight the economic downturn. Democrats in Washington are moving ahead with plans to try to combat the declining economy through a spending package of as much as \$100 billion that could be [passed this month](#). In Europe, several central banks sharply cut [interest rates](#). Meanwhile, President-elect Barack Obama announced he will be meeting with his economic advisers and will hold his first news

conference today. He plans to meet with President Bush on Monday in a bid to emphasize that they both want a smooth transition in a time of crisis.

USA Today leads with [a new poll](#) finding that two-thirds of Americans believe relations between blacks and whites "will eventually be worked out," which marks a historic high. Around 67 percent of Americans say they feel proud and optimistic after Barack Obama's victory, which is particularly significant considering that 53 percent voted for the Democratic candidate. The *Los Angeles Times* leads locally with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's plan to battle California's rapidly growing [budget deficit](#) by increasing the sales tax and sharply reducing services.

According to the accounts of an international monitoring team working under the mandate of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Georgian artillery rounds and rockets were hardly as limited as the Georgian government claimed, since they fell at a rate of one every 15 to 20 seconds in the separatist capital of Tskhinvali. The monitors say that within the first hour of the bombings, "at least 48 rounds landed in a civilian area," [reports the NYT](#). The monitors also put in doubt Georgia's claim that Georgian-controlled villages in the separatist area were under intense attack by noting that they heard nothing of the sort. The *NYT* went to three of the villages that Georgia said were under heavy fire and couldn't get a consistent picture explaining what exactly happened. But OSCE monitors with extensive military experience insist Georgian villages didn't come under heavy fire from Russian forces. These findings complicate things for the United States because it has relied on the OSCE for years and has frequently praised its professionalism, making it difficult to discount these reports as meaningless.

The growing efforts to fight the economic downturn coincided with the release of more depressing figures, which the *LAT* and *NYT* also front. Retailers had a sharp decrease in sales last month and reported what the *LAT* [describes](#) as the "worst sales figures since at least 1971." The *NYT* highlights that the decline was [widespread](#), "suggesting that customers at all income levels are snapping their wallets shut." The one exception, as was expected, was in deep-discount stores like Wal-Mart.

Everyone is bracing for more bad news in today's unemployment figures, which economists expect will show the country lost 200,000 jobs last month. If the estimates are correct, it would mean the United States has lost about 1 million jobs this year. "It's going to be a very difficult holiday season for the retailers," one expert tells the *LAT*. "I think a lot of them are going to be fighting for their lives." Wall Street, of course, reacted in kind and suffered its second straight day of big losses, marking the biggest two-day percentage loss in the Dow Jones index in [more than 20 years](#).

The International Monetary Fund urged governments to increase spending to stimulate their economies. The fund predicted that the world's "advanced economies" would shrink by a [combined 0.3 percent](#) next year, which would mark the first time they have collectively contracted since the [IMF was founded in 1945](#). Separately, the IMF also estimated that global growth would be a mere 2.2 percent next year, which, as the *WSJ* clearly explains, is "well below the line that the IMF traditionally considers a recession." The fund wouldn't officially utter the R-word, but that seems to be mostly for political reasons.

In Washington, Democrats are working on several plans to spur economic growth. The *WSJ* and *WP* both detail how congressional leaders are working on one stimulus package that could total as much as \$100 billion to be passed this month and another that would be pushed through after Obama takes office, which would include the tax cuts and [could be even larger](#). It's far from clear, though, that Democrats will be able to pass the first plan this month, as the White House opposes several of its key components, including spending on [public-works projects](#).

The *WSJ* has an interesting historical nugget near the end of its piece noting that while the IMF is advocating for stimulus packages around the world, [Japan's experience](#) "tends to spur caution among other nations." In order to combat a 15-year economic decline, Japan lavished money on public-works projects, but it didn't help as much as was hoped, and the country was left with little-used infrastructure.

There was some fresh good news for Obama, who has now officially won North Carolina by a slim margin. There are still 12 electoral votes to be decided, 11 in Missouri, and one in Nebraska. Congressional Democrats also received some good news as another Senate Republican, Gordon Smith of Oregon, conceded yesterday, which means Democrats will control [at least 57 seats in the Senate](#). That is, of course, counting independent Sen. Joe Lieberman, who met with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid yesterday to [discuss his future](#) in the Democratic caucus after his repeated criticisms of Obama while campaigning for Sen. John McCain. No decision has been made, but some think Lieberman's committee chairmanship [would be revoked](#).

In transition news, Rep. Rahm Emanuel was [officially appointed](#) to serve as Obama's chief of staff. Other appointments are likely to come soon. David Axelrod, Obama's campaign strategist, is expected to become a senior White House adviser, and Robert Gibbs, his communications director, is expected to become White House press secretary.

In an interesting tidbit near the end of the *NYT*'s main transition story, the paper says the Obama team is [feeling pressure](#), particularly from Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, "to 'co-own' the bailout program." Paulson has allegedly sought Obama's advice on who should direct the program, in hopes that the same

person can stay on in the new administration. For his part, Obama isn't eager to join hands with Bush in an unpopular bailout package. In a front-page piece, the *WP* notes that some say the reason the Treasury still hasn't officially announced its plan to broaden the range of financial companies that would be eligible for an [infusion of cash](#) from the government, which the *WSJ* detailed earlier this week, is because officials want to make sure Obama agrees. Administration officials say that's simply not true. Still, one thing is clear: The Treasury has reserved some office space for Obama's team, but no one has moved in yet. The *NYT* says some Democrats are pushing Obama "to stay aloof," which apparently was Franklin Roosevelt's strategy before he took over during the Depression.

What has Obama's victory meant for negotiations with Iraqi leaders on the new security agreement? Depends on whom you believe. The *NYT* says that Obama's election has drastically [changed the mood](#) to optimism and that the agreement could be signed as early as the middle of this month. The *WP*, on the other hand, talks to Iraq's chief spokesman and says Iraqi officials appear to be [using Obama's election](#) "to pressure the Bush administration to make last-minute concessions," specifically insisting on a firm withdrawal date for U.S. troops. According to the *NYT*, Iraqi officials used to think that Republicans wouldn't respect any timetable that is included in the agreement but now have more faith that Obama would. Also, Iran appears to be exerting less pressure on Iraqi politicians to reject the agreement, apparently because officials in Tehran are less concerned that an Obama administration would seek regime change in their country. For its part, the *WP* says Iraqis are insisting they need to return to the negotiating table, but U.S. officials insist they've accommodated Iraqi concerns as much as possible in what was described as the "final text" of the agreement.

Feel like crying this morning? If so, head on over to the *WP*, which gives big play to the story of [Eugene Allen](#), a black man who worked at the White House for more than three decades. The *WP*'s Wil Haygood admirably tells Allen's story while also giving a quick history lesson of blacks in the White House. But it's the unexpected tragic ending that hits you right in the gut. There's no way around it: Obama must give Allen VIP tickets to the inauguration.

And if you need a pick-me-up after your eyes have dried, the *LAT*'s [P.J. Huffstutter](#) writes an amusing piece about his experience being a part of Obama's "protective press pool." Huffstutter was on duty for almost 12 hours yesterday and got to see the president-elect a grand total of 71 seconds. In the end, he was rewarded when Obama was gracious enough to give a monosyllabic answer when the reporter asked how one of his meetings went: "Good."

today's papers

The Shape of Things To Come

By Daniel Politi

Thursday, November 6, 2008, at 6:23 AM ET

The [Los Angeles Times](#), [New York Times](#), [Washington Post](#), [USA Today](#), and [Wall Street Journal](#) all lead with President-elect Barack Obama moving full-speed ahead in putting together his White House team. After Tuesday's sweeping victory—349 electoral votes to John McCain's 162, with two states still [too close to call](#)—Obama woke up at home in Chicago, had breakfast with his family, and spent most of the day behind [closed doors](#) having discussions with Vice President-elect Joe Biden, campaign advisers, and the leaders of his transition team. To no one's surprise, he offered the key job of White House [chief of staff](#) to Rep. Rahm Emanuel of Illinois.

Yesterday was a day of jubilation for many, not just in the country but also around the world. There was perhaps no other country outside the United States that celebrated as much as [Kenya](#), where the prime minister declared Thursday a national holiday. Even Republican leaders rushed to [recognize the historic moment](#). "As an African-American, I am especially proud. ... [Y]esterday was obviously an extraordinary step forward," Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said in a surprise appearance at her department's daily briefing. President Bush called Obama's election "uplifting" and vowed that he would do everything possible to make it a smooth transition. "It will be a stirring sight to watch President Obama, his wife, Michelle, and their beautiful girls step through the doors of the White House," [Bush said](#). "I know millions of Americans will be overcome with pride at this inspiring moment that so many have awaited so long."

Emanuel has not said whether he'll take the job as Obama's right-hand man, although the *NYT* says many Democrats [think he'll accept](#). The 48-year-old veteran of the Clinton administration would wield great power in the position, but he has also risen quickly in the House since he first joined its ranks six years ago, and it's hardly a secret that he aspires to become speaker. The announcement raised some eyebrows among Republicans, who were quick to say that the Emanuel pick is evidence that Obama's promise of change was all for show. Emanuel is known as one of the most combative, hard-hitting operatives in Washington and is often praised for his political skills. The *WSJ* says Emanuel and Obama "would be a study in contrasts," but that appears to be the point, since it would allow the president to act as a mediator while his chief of staff [keeps everyone in line](#). "They feel Obama comes off as the nice guy and he would come off as the tough guy," a congressional source tells the *WSJ*.

The *NYT* notes that in seeking out Emanuel and John Podesta, who is one of the leaders of the transition team, Obama has turned to [two members of the Clinton administration](#) who are known for their "no-holds-barred approach to politics." This suggests that "the cool and conciliatory new president is determined to demonstrate toughness from the beginning," says the *NYT*.

After hiring a chief of staff, everyone says Obama would move to make a number of important economic appointments, with a particular focus on who should take on the critical role of [Treasury secretary](#). Two names that everyone mentions as possibilities are Lawrence Summers, who held the post in the Clinton administration, and Timothy Geithner, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Other names being floated around include former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker and former Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin.

While Washington insiders and pundits are focused on trying to figure out who would join the administration, the *NYT* reminds readers to take all this talk with a [large grain of salt](#) since it involves plenty of guesswork. So far, Obama's transition staff is filled with veterans from the Clinton years, which underscores "one of Obama's dilemmas," [as the LAT puts it](#), because he promised change but also obviously wants people familiar with the inner workings of the White House. Obama is apparently determined to have a bipartisan cabinet and might consider appointing a Republican to run the State Department.

Meanwhile, Obama must decide how much to get involved in the most important issue of the day, particularly considering that Bush will host a global economic summit [on Nov. 15](#). Aides say Obama might meet with some foreign leaders then but will take great pains to emphasize that Bush is still the president and that he is determined to avoid stepping on anyone's toes during the [77-day transition](#).

There is still no final number on Tuesday's turnout, but estimates say it was the highest rate in 44 years. According to one estimate, around 133.3 million, or about 62.6 percent [of the electorate](#), cast a ballot this year. In 1964, 62.8 percent of the electorate participated in the election that Democrat Lyndon Johnson won in a landslide.

Although Obama will focus much of his attention in the coming weeks on the economy, he also got a stark reminder of the many challenges that lie ahead in foreign policy. The *Post* devotes a separate front-page piece to the move that almost seemed designed to welcome Obama into the fold as Russian President Dmitri Medvedev vowed that he would place short-range missiles in the country's Western border if the new administration insists on continuing plans to build a [missile defense shield in Europe](#). The missiles would be capable of hitting NATO territory, and Medvedev also said Russia would use "radioelectric equipment" to jam the defense system.

As for Congress, Democrats still don't know the full extent of their majorities. Three Senate races remain too close to call, and a runoff has been scheduled in Georgia. In the House, Democrats picked up 19 seats, and at least [six are still up in the air](#). Democratic leaders vowed to pursue a bold agenda even as they recognize a delicate balancing act will be required to accommodate the interests of the more conservative lawmakers who are from areas of the country that had previously been Republican strongholds. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi will be meeting with leaders of Detroit's Big Three today to discuss an economic relief package. The *WSJ* says Democrats are considering doubling the amount of money they'll make available to the automakers as low-cost loans to [\\$50 billion](#).

Many who were celebrating an Obama victory yesterday suddenly felt the moment wasn't as sweet as it could have been when they checked the news and discovered that California's Proposition 8 was approved. The *LAT* devotes a front-page piece to the measure, which will write a prohibition of same-sex marriages into California's Constitution, and says its proponents managed to win backers by running an effective campaign that warned that children would be taught about [gay marriage in schools](#). The surge in black voters played a significant role in this outcome as they made up 10 percent of the voters and sided with the measure by margins of more than 2-to-1. Latino voters also favored the measure by a small margin. Three lawsuits have been filed asking the California Supreme Court to [overturn the measure](#). The *NYT* fronts a piece looking at how voters in Florida and Arizona also approved measures [prohibiting marriage](#) between two people of the same sex.

In the *LAT*'s op-ed page, [John Corvino](#) writes that no one should see Proposition 8 as more than a temporary delay in the advancement of gay rights. "The path to inclusion is not always direct and the pace of change almost never steady," writes Corvino. "This setback is by no means a final verdict."

After years of decline, print was suddenly hot again yesterday. People actually lined up outside newspaper offices trying to get their hands on the day's [historic edition](#). Papers across the country increased their press runs but could [barely keep up with demand](#). And, of course, some entrepreneurs made a pretty penny. Some paid more than \$100 for a copy of the paper, and there are those who are trying to sell yesterday's edition [for \\$500](#).

today's papers Obama Country

By Daniel Politi

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 6:44 AM ET

The polls were right. Barack Hussein Obama easily cruised to victory last night and made history by becoming the country's first African-American president. The first-term senator from Illinois was elected the 44th president by beating John McCain in the key states that the candidates had spent months battling over, including Ohio, Florida, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, which voted for a Democrat for the first time since 1964. A few states are still too close to call, but a preliminary tally gave Obama 349 electoral votes to McCain's 144, far more than the 270 needed to win the White House. Democrats also won big in the congressional races, even as they appeared to fall short of the dream 60-vote majority in the Senate. In all, Democrats picked up five Senate seats with four key races still undecided and were on the path to pick up as many as 20 House seats.

All the papers mention the historic aspect of Obama's candidacy in their banner headlines. *USA Today* points out that [a mere](#) "four decades ago, when Obama was 4 years old, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act to ensure blacks can vote." The *Los Angeles Times* calls [Obama's victory](#) "a leap in the march toward equality." The *Washington Post* points out that Obama is [the first Democrat](#) since Jimmy Carter to win more than 50 percent of the popular vote. The *Wall Street Journal* notes Obama is the [first northern Democrat](#) to be elected president since John F. Kennedy in 1960. The *New York Times* says [the election](#) amounted to "a national catharsis—a repudiation of a historically unpopular Republican president and his economic and foreign policies, and an embrace of Mr. Obama's call for a change in the direction and the tone of the country."

When Obama strode onto the stage at Chicago's Grant Park in front of tens of thousands of supporters (the *LAT* [says](#) 240,000; the *WP* and *WSJ* [go with](#) 125,000), he acknowledged his accomplishment and continued to espouse the main themes that have [dominated his campaign](#) over the past two years. "If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer," [he said](#). McCain also acknowledged the historic moment in the "gracious" (*WP*) concession speech he gave in Phoenix. "This is an historic election, and I recognize the special significance it has for African-Americans and the special pride that must be theirs tonight," McCain said.

In the end, Obama won every state that the Democrats carried in 2004 and managed to grab several of the swing states that went for Bush last time. How did he do it? Although he lost among white voters, he won more of their support [than John Kerry did in 2004](#). Obama won a majority of women and received huge support from black and Hispanic voters. The Democrat also won among independent and Roman Catholic voters. McCain did poorly among young people, getting around 30 percent of 18-to-29 voters, compared with the 45 percent that Bush won. The exact turnout figures won't be known until all the votes are

counted, but by all accounts a huge number of people participated in the election, and voters often had to wait in line for hours to cast a ballot. The *WSJ* says that all evidence [seems to](#) "point to the biggest voter turnout in the period since women got the vote in 1920."

The *WP*'s [David Broder](#) points out that while history books will rightly focus on Obama's historic victory, the fact that the Democrats managed to strengthen their majorities in Congress "will be almost as significant for the governing of this country." It marks the first time since the early years of Bill Clinton's presidency that Democrats will control both houses of Congress and the White House, "setting the scene for Democrats to push an ambitious agenda from health care to financial regulation to ending the war in Iraq," [says the *WSJ*](#).

Democrat Kay Hagan [managed to beat](#) Sen. Elizabeth Dole in North Carolina, and in New Hampshire, Jeanne Shaheen defeated Sen. John Sununu. In the race for open seats, former Virginia Gov. Mark Warner easily cruised to victory, and Tom Udall picked up a seat in New Mexico while his cousin, Mark Udall, won in Colorado. A little piece of good news for the Republicans could be [found in Kentucky](#), where Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell managed to beat back a strong opponent. The race in Minnesota that pitted Sen. Norm Coleman against Al Franken is still too close to call, and there's also no word yet on whether Sen. Ted Stevens of Alaska managed to hold on to his seat. In the House, Democrats also made strong gains, although it seems they will fall short of the 30 additional seats that [many were predicting](#).

USAT points out that [some analysts](#) "see a turning point in American politics like what occurred in 1980," when Ronald Reagan's victory ushered in a new conservative era. But many also caution that it all depends on how the Democrats govern and it could all end up being "a one-time repudiation of a Republican president" at a time of high economic uncertainty.

The *LAT* fronts the early returns from the measure to write a prohibition of marriage among same-sex couples into [California's Constitution](#). It's still too close to call, but support for the measure is winning, 52 percent to 48 percent.

The *WSJ* and *WP* both front extensive post-mortems that look at how Obama actually won the race. They both start by highlighting how Obama's calm and measured response to the financial crisis helped him, which is hardly news, but then go on to publish some interesting insider tidbits from the campaigns. The *WSJ* points out that McCain's staffers realized they had a problem when they were moving to the general election campaign and in a strategy session five top advisers couldn't reach a consensus on the basic question of [why McCain should be president](#). "Without an overriding rationale, our campaign necessarily turned tactical rather than strategic," one adviser said. "We focused more on why Obama should not be president,

but much less on why McCain should be." The *WP* notes the Obama camp was uniquely prepared for the general election after the hard-fought primaries and goes on to note that while much of the Democratic establishment started freaking out when McCain chose Sarah Palin, Obama's camp [saw it as a gift](#). Not only did the pick undercut McCain's main argument that experience matters, but one of Obama's top advisers knew the Alaska governor better than most since she had run a campaign against Palin two years earlier and the adviser was convinced Palin wouldn't pass the vetting test.

There will be plenty of looking back in the weeks ahead, but now that Obama has been elected, it's up to a leader with almost no executive experience to take on some of the biggest challenges a new president has encountered since Franklin Roosevelt. Suffice it to say, everyone agrees he'll now have little time to rest as he has to quickly begin work on the transition. The *WSJ*, which goes the farthest in exploring Obama's options by even listing his possible Cabinet choices, says that a shadow Treasury Department could be set up [by the end of the week](#). The *NYT* says Obama will name the three leaders of his transition team today and might announce some [top appointees by Friday](#).

Most importantly though, Obama will now have to decide how he will run his administration. As the *LAT* [puts it](#): "Which Barack Obama will dominate as he begins to govern?" During the campaign he espoused twin ideals of setting out to change Washington while also remaining calm and collected during stressful times. Now, he could use his political capital to push legislation through Congress, but that would undoubtedly cause partisan bickering. By the same token, if he emphasizes compromise and bipartisanship, he would risk angering the people who elected him if he's seen as too cautious and slow to make decisions. Ultimately, can Obama "fulfill his promise to govern in a unifying and inclusive way yet also push an ambitious progressive agenda?" [asks the *WP*](#).

The *NYT* talks to Obama advisers [who insist](#) "he would not be passive and would move quickly to demonstrate leadership." Of course, dealing with the economy will be his first priority, but it could be risky for Obama to try to espouse too much power before the inauguration. The *LAT* highlights that Obama is likely to "seek early, high-profile legislative victories with bipartisan support" and leave the more controversial measures [for later](#). That means some of his more ambitious goals, such as health care and energy, would likely be either delayed or broken up into pieces.

The *NYT*'s [Thomas Friedman](#) says the American Civil War officially ended last night. "The struggle for equal rights is far from over, but we start afresh now from a whole new baseline," writes Friedman. "Let every child and every citizen and every new immigrant know that from this day forward everything really is possible in America." In the end, though, there is so

much work to be done that breaking the racial barrier may "turn out to be the least" of the changes an Obama presidency will bring. "The Civil War is over. Let reconstruction begin."

today's papers

Waiting for Tonight

By Daniel Politi

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, at 6:22 AM ET

This is it. After so much buildup, voters will finally head to the polls and decide who will be moving into the White House. [USA Today](#) reminds readers that whatever happens, it will be a [historic election](#) as voters will either elect the first African-American president or the oldest first-term president. The [Washington Post](#) banners a two-story lead detailing how each candidate spent Election Day eve. Barack Obama campaigned in Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia while dealing with news that his ailing maternal grandmother had [died overnight](#). For his part, John McCain went on a seven-state sprint through Florida, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Indiana, New Mexico, Nevada, and Arizona, desperately hoping to [prove all the polls wrong](#).

The [New York Times](#) leads with a look at how much the Longest Presidential Campaign in History "fundamentally upended" the rules for running a [presidential campaign](#). "I think we'll be analyzing this election for years as a seminal, transformative race," said Mark McKinnon, a senior adviser to President Bush's campaigns. Few people have patience for that now though, notes the [Los Angeles Times](#) in its lead spot that points out how anxiety is running rampant among supporters of both parties who [just want it to be over](#) so they can move on with their lives. Under a banner headline, the [Wall Street Journal](#) makes it clear that whoever wins tonight will have little time to rest as he will have to begin working on a number of economic issues [long before settling in to the Oval Office](#).

If the polls are to be believed, there isn't much mystery to who will be crowned as the victor tonight. But that doesn't mean the broadcast and cable networks aren't planning an appropriate sendoff to the Longest Presidential Campaign in History. The [LAT](#) fronts, and the [NYT](#) goes inside with, a look at how networks vowed not to call the race until someone actually reaches the required 270 electoral votes, but there is a (slim) chance that Obama might be declared the winner [before polls close in California](#). And besides, executives made sure to emphasize that their on-air talent won't be shy about using language to indicate which way the race is headed. They contend it would be silly for them to pretend they don't have the same information that any of their viewers could easily find online. [Slate's](#) editor tells the [NYT](#) that he could [foresee calling the race](#) "sometime between 8 and 9" if Obama goes on a winning streak.

"Our readers are not stupid, and we shouldn't engage in a weird Kabuki drama that pretends McCain could win California and thus the presidency," he said.

Everyone—including [Slate's John Dickerson](#)—publishes a guide to watching the returns tonight. The [NYT](#) handily, albeit cornily, divides its guide up into easy-to-follow [quick bites](#) that could serve as a cheat sheet for what to watch out for as the night progresses. Those looking for more detail would do well to check out [USAT's guide](#) that delves deep into a few key states and explains why, for one night at least, you should care about what happens in places like Boone County, Mo. For its part, the [WSJ](#) posts a handy PDF [viewing guide](#), which includes a few key Senate races, that could make you a hit at your election-night party.

Obsession with the election might be rampant, but the world keeps on turning. The [WSJ](#) fronts word that the Treasury Department is expanding its program to purchase stakes in banks and insurers to include a [broad range of financial companies](#). The focus is on companies that might not fit the criteria for eligibility that was outlined by the Treasury but still provide financing to the broader economy and have been hit hard by the credit crisis. This means the government could end up owning a bigger slice of the American financial system than was previously envisioned. But the problem is, where would they draw the line? Many entities have asked for a piece of the \$700 billion pie and any expansion of the program is bound to bring about complaints from those that were left out.

The [NYT](#) goes inside with a look at how the entire process of selecting who gets government money is [shrouded in secrecy](#). A committee of five government officials, with the help of a 40-member staff, reviews the applications and makes a decision based on criteria that have been kept secret. It obviously isn't easy to decide who gets to live, but the whole process is made much more complicated by the fact that decisions need to be made quickly.

The [NYT](#) gets word that a local Afghan police chief and a local government official helped the Taliban carry out the well-coordinated attack on a [remote American outpost](#) in July that killed nine U.S. soldiers. The paper got a look at an internal military review that found evidence of this cooperation and reported that local villagers had repeatedly warned U.S. troops an attack was coming. Both officials were detained after the attack but quickly released and a spokesman for the Afghan Defense Ministry said American officials had never discussed these issues with them. The report doesn't assign blame to any commanders but makes clear that soldiers at the remote outpost were particularly vulnerable, partly because it took so long to settle on a site for the outpost that it gave insurgents plenty of time to organize an attack.

Across the border from Afghanistan, the Pakistani government has been making a habit of loudly complaining about U.S. airstrikes within its borders. But it's all for show, says the *WP*'s [David Ignatius](#). Washington and Pakistan have come to an understanding on the U.S. airstrikes and have even come up with a list of approved targets. Meanwhile, U.S. officials may be happy about the cooperation but "they're still nervous" because it's unclear how long they can keep the ruse up in a country where cooperation with the United States could easily end a political career.

The *WP* goes inside with a look at how President Bush's [plan to protect](#) "two vast areas of the Pacific Ocean" is facing resistance from within his own administration. The first lady is pushing for the expanded protections, but Vice President Cheney and some local officials are speaking up against the plan saying that it would hurt the region's economy. The original plan has already been scaled back and now there's a question of whether Bush will manage to approve any further protections before he leaves office.

The *LAT* points out that the economic slump has hit the oldest profession particularly hard. The women who work in many of [Nevada's legal brothels](#) are having trouble making ends meet, particularly since many of the long-haul truckers that are an important customer base don't have as much disposable income as they used to. Now, the few who do venture inside often eschew any of the pricey extras and try to bargain.

After such a long campaign, the *WP*'s [Robert Kaiser](#) asks an uncomfortable question: Did any of it matter? Were all those ads and countless hours of criss-crossing the country really important in determining tonight's outcome? As far as the general election is concerned, many political scientists believe the outcome was known a few months ago and had little to do with whether Obama ran his campaign well. One professor, Alan Abramowitz has been making predictions every four years since 1952 and they've been eerily accurate (except for 2000, when he predicted Al Gore would win). Back in August, he said Obama would win 54 percent to 45 percent. The final *WP*/ABC poll put Obama ahead by 53-44. Many scholars say journalists overvalue campaigns and don't pay enough attention to what really matters, such as the state of the economy, party identification, and the popularity of the incumbent president. But even if campaigns don't have a real effect on the outcome that's not to say they don't matter. "Saying that campaigns don't matter," one expert tells the *WP*, "is like saying, 'Do we have to have the wedding?' But that's how the families get to know each other."

today's papers

The Final Countdown

By Daniel Politi
Monday, November 3, 2008, at 6:00 AM ET

Take a deep breath, we're almost there. As the candidates race toward the finish line, all the papers lead with the final hours of the Longest Presidential Race in History. *USA Today* and the *Wall Street Journal* lead with new weekend polls that continue to show Barack Obama with a commanding lead. *USAT* gives Obama an 11-percentage-point advantage and says his [lead is widening](#), while the *WSJ* puts the Democrat ahead by 8 percentage points and says his [lead is tightening](#). The *WSJ* poll reports that 6 percent of voters remain undecided, although one-third of them say they're likely to support a third-party candidate. *USAT* notes that at a time when a record-low 13 percent are satisfied with the country's direction, two-thirds say they are more enthusiastic than usual about voting.

The *Washington Post* leads with a look at how the candidates continued to spit out attacks yesterday, which marks a change from the usual pattern of [turning positive](#) before Election Day. The *Los Angeles Times* leads with candidates' last mad dash to try to convince undecided voters by sticking "[to the basics](#)." Obama emphasized his early opposition to the Iraq war and tied his opponent to President Bush, while John McCain focused on taxes and national security and warned supporters about the possibility that Democrats would win control of Congress as well as the White House. The *New York Times* leads with congressional Republicans' [frantic efforts](#) to prevent a Democratic sweep on Tuesday.

The latest polls give some insight into how Obama has been able to hold on to his lead. The *WSJ* points out voters are now just as likely to identify with Obama's [background and values](#) as they are with McCain's, which illustrates how the Democrat has been able to close a significant gap that many predicted would prevent him from sealing the deal with voters. *USAT*'s poll suggests McCain no longer has a lead in [national-security issues](#), and his incessant focus on taxes isn't helping him much with voters, as 48 percent say their taxes would be higher under Obama, while 50 percent say the same thing about McCain.

The *LAT* points out that the last-minute issues emphasized by the candidates appeared to be focused on trying to appeal to [older white women](#), who make up the largest bloc of undecided voters. The long-held practice of ending presidential campaigns on a positive note may just be another tradition that the Longest Presidential Race in History leaves to the history books, [suggests the WP](#). "There is such a small slice of undecided out there, I think both sides are going to finish the campaign really going after them," a Republican strategist said. The Republican Party unleashed robo-calls that used the words of Sen. Hillary Clinton to criticize the Democratic candidate, and a GOP group aired a television advertisement featuring Obama's former pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright. The Obama campaign also got in the game and quickly released a new ad that used Vice President

Cheney's endorsement of the Republican candidate to tie McCain to Bush once again.

The *WP* points out that those looking for a quick guide to which states they should be paying attention to on Tuesday night would do well to follow the candidates' schedules in the [closing days of the campaign](#): Ohio, Florida, Virginia, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Indiana, New Mexico, and Nevada. None of these looms larger than Ohio, a must-win state for McCain where Obama spent all of Sunday. Both the *LAT* and *WP* front dispatches from Ohio and say Obama certainly appears to have the [organizational edge](#) in the state that was [crucial to Bush's victory in 2004](#).

Democrats are doing everything they can to capitalize on the negative feelings about President Bush and the economy in order to go after congressional seats in areas that make up the traditional Republican base, [particularly in the suburbs](#). And Democrats are putting their money where their hopes are. Senate Democrats have spent more than \$67 million in advertising, compared with \$33.7 million by Republicans. Underscoring just how much the GOP is playing defense, House Republicans have spent most of their money trying to protect incumbents and districts where one of their own is retiring. Meanwhile, those worried about what they'll do with themselves after all the votes are counted have reason to hope it might not be all over tomorrow, at least as far as the Senate is concerned, because the Georgia candidates might have to face a runoff if neither gets 50 percent of the vote.

The *WSJ* takes a look at the ground-game operations of each party and says that while Democrats have set up 770 field offices nationwide, Republicans have about 370 [offices across the country](#). This marks a significant change for Democrats, who had often relied on outside groups to lead their ground efforts.

How are the presidential candidates holding up on the home stretch? The *NYT* fronts, and the *LAT* goes inside with, a look at how McCain seems determined to remain in high spirits. He has surrounded himself with close friends and, as the *LAT* highlights, appears intent on returning to the "[happy warrior](#)" image that defined him in the primaries. "He has, by all appearances, decided he will get to Tuesday by having a good time," [notes the NYT](#). Obama, for his part, still remains much harder to read, note the *NYT* and *LAT*. The *LAT* highlights how Obama seemed more upbeat than usual yesterday, but his good cheer may have had as much to do with the fact that his wife and daughters were with him than with [his lead in the polls](#). Most of all, says the *NYT*, Obama just wants the [campaign to be over](#). Both [Obama](#) and [McCain](#) write op-ed pieces in the *WSJ* today that rehash their main arguments for the campaign.

The *NYT*'s [Paul Krugman](#) predicts that if the polls are correct and the Republicans lose big tomorrow, the GOP's base will "become more, not less, extreme." This will be partly due to the

likelihood that many Republican moderates will lose their seats in Congress but also due to the party's base getting ready to see the defeat as a big conspiracy rather than a verdict on the Bush tenure. And as the GOP accelerates its path toward becoming "the party of the unreasonable right, a haven for racists and reactionaries" it will put moderate conservatives in an unenviable dilemma.

On the *WP*'s op-ed page, E.J. Dionne Jr. writes that Obama became a successful candidate by anticipating an opening for his ideas and neatly carving a narrative, which, coupled with a strong organizational structure, allowed him to establish himself as a leader. Although it's still too early to write McCain's obituary, "there seems to be an inexorable quality to Obama's rise this year because he is the first truly 21st-century figure in American politics" [writes Dionne](#). "He is the innovator who has set the standard for the next political era."

today's papers Almost There

By Barron YoungSmith

Sunday, November 2, 2008, at 6:40 AM ET

The *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times* all lead with a final cross-country push by Sens. Barack Obama, D-Ill., and John McCain, R-Ariz., before election night.

Both candidates have returned to their "[core arguments](#)," according to the *WP*: John McCain [implied](#) that Barack Obama doesn't have faith in America while Barack Obama said John McCain is the same as George Bush. (Obama made his case by citing an ill-timed McCain [endorsement](#) from Vice President Cheney. Shoot your candidate in the face much?)

All the papers front state-of-the-race assessments. The *WP* [thinks](#) Obama, and Democrats generally, are poised for a blow-out win. It also fronts a [national poll](#) that says 50 percent of voters are "definitely" planning to vote for Obama. The *LAT* and *NYT* are more circumspect, emphasizing that McCain's electoral options are severely limited.

The *NYT* also provides [dispatches](#) from all the swing states, while the *LAT*—perhaps to [conserve money](#)—fronts a thinnish "[big think](#)" [piece](#) on what the 2008 election will mean for race, ideology, and economics in America. (Spoiler: We don't know yet.)

The *NYT* goes up top with a fantastic [look](#) at how risky, exotic securities were sold to organizations like New York's Metropolitan Transit Authority and even a Wisconsin school board. Desperate to cover rising health care and pension costs,

the employers unknowingly transformed themselves into hedge funds, based on advice from commission-happy investment bankers.

The *WP* goes up top with a [look](#) at the U.N.'s terrorist finance blacklist, which has become increasingly unpopular in Europe because it's thought to deprive people of their due process rights. If countries stop enforcing the blacklist, the U.N. may lose its ability to freeze terrorists' assets.

The *WP* [fronts](#) a look at an upcoming global economic summit and how it will probably fail. In two weeks, world leaders are supposed to hammer out a post-crash regulatory regime to govern international finance. Yet there's little agreement on what to do and perhaps even less political will to follow through.

The *NYT* [fronts](#) a piece on black voters, who are already turning out in record numbers this year. While many have felt alienated from politics in past elections, Obama's candidacy has some feeling like "active participants" in history.

The *NYT* fronts a [look](#) at remaining undecided voters, who make up 4 percent to 7 percent of the electorate. "I tend to be a procrastinator," says one.

All the papers go inside with [news](#) that the Department of Homeland Security has launched an internal investigation into Friday's leak about the immigration status of Barack Obama's aunt. Disclosing the information may have violated federal law and the Immigration and Customs agency's privacy rules.

The *NYT* [fronts](#) a look at a tribal militia that is fighting the Taliban in Pakistan. The Bruner district has armed 15,000 regular citizens to fight off insurgents, hoping to deter the Taliban and keep the heavy-handed Pakistani army from intervening.

The *LAT* fronts [news](#) that North Korea is on the brink of another famine, caused by mismanagement and delayed aid shipments from China and South Korea.

And the *LAT* [goes inside](#) with a look at Israelis' increasing nervousness over Iran. The piece says most Israelis think they will have to unilaterally strike Iran's nuclear facilities during the next few years. As always, there's no guarantee that would work.

today's papers Full-Court Press

By Jesse Stanchak
Saturday, November 1, 2008, at 6:45 AM ET

Going into the final weekend before the election, the [Los Angeles Times leads](#) with the presidential candidates (and their surrogates) making their last dashes across battleground states. The [Wall Street Journal](#) tops its world-wide newsbox with Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., targeting areas that [typically favor Republicans](#), including Republican Sen. John McCain's home state of Arizona, a notion the *LAT* [shares](#).

The [New York Times](#) goes lower with campaign news and instead [leads](#) with worries that faltering consumer spending may give rise to deflation. The [Washington Post leads](#) with a look at how an expanded interpretation of the Constitution's "speech or debate" clause is hampering congressional corruption investigations.

The *LAT* focuses on the efforts of Sens. Obama and McCain to capture heartland swing states that voted for President Bush in 2004, including Ohio, Indiana, and Iowa. The paper depicts a McCain camp scrambling for a comeback while Obama supporters are trying to ward off complacency and avoid any major gaffes between now and the election. Indeed, the *NYT* [writes](#) that many Obama backers, especially those from traditionally "blue" states, are having a hard time believing recent polls that show their candidate ahead. After crushing losses in 2000 and 2004, many Democrats say they're wary of getting their hopes up again, no matter how good the polls look.

The *WP*, meanwhile fronts dueling campaign pieces: [one on McCain](#) volunteers trying to win Pennsylvania and [one on Obama](#) supporters trying to make inroads in heavily conservative southern Virginia. The point of both pieces is the same: Supporters in each camp are trying to flip an area that historically favors the other party. The big difference is that while Obama is projected to carry Virginia (if not its southern counties), McCain continues to poll behind in Pennsylvania. This would mean that Obama's supporters are just priming the ground for future races, whereas McCain backers are looking to turn the tide in a must-win state that seems to be slipping away from them. The paper portrays these two efforts in very different ways. The McCain piece is much shorter and more succinct, and it focuses on the McCain volunteers making their last stand in Pennsylvania. The Obama piece is long on colorful descriptions and focuses more on southern Virginia voters and their reasons for voting for one candidate or the other—or not voting at all.

Earlier this year, economists were worried about spiraling inflation, but the collapse of oil prices, along with shrinking credit and plummeting home values, now have experts warning against deflation instead. The *NYT* says deflation is especially hard for the government to combat, since many of the tools the government uses to fight inflation, like adjusting interest rates, become less effective in a deflationary cycle. Additionally, deflation lowers demand and thus lowers prices, which means lower wages and thus lower demand, creating a self-perpetuating loop that can take years to reverse. The *LAT*'s [analysis](#) of the

situation is a little less dire, saying that most economists are unconvinced that deflation is imminent. Yet the piece still offers a little hypothetical advice to readers who want to prepare for the worst: Avoid taking on new debt and invest in fixed high-yield bonds over stocks.

The *WP* says the "speech or debate" clause was created to protect Congress from interference from frivolous lawsuits, but its increasingly broad interpretation is making it difficult for the Justice Department to pursue corruption charges against several members of Congress. A court decision regarding an investigation targeting Rep. William Jefferson, D-La., expanded the scope of protection under the clause, making many kinds of communications off limits for prosecutors. Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, tried to use the clause to have evidence against him thrown out but has so far been unsuccessful. Stevens was found guilty of lying about accepting favors last week but has vowed to fight on, both in the courtroom and the campaign trail. The *NYT* [says](#) leading Republicans have denounced Stevens and many believe he would be expelled from the Senate even if he were re-elected.

The *WP* and the *WSJ* each front news on the latest attempts to save troubled mortgages and keep people in their homes. The *WSJ* [looks](#) at a plan by JPMorgan Chase & Co. to modify loan terms to prevent foreclosures. The *WP* [argues](#), however, that the private sector is moving too slowly and instead all eyes are on a similar program which would rework mortgages through the IndyMac Federal Bank, which the government recently took over. The *WSJ* [warns](#), however, that the FDIC's program is already running into some difficulties.

The *NYT* [off-leads](#) with a harrowing bit of narrative journalism about Army medics at a forward post in Afghanistan trying to save the life of an Afghan man during a mortar attack.

Working solely from anecdotal evidence, the *NYT* [reports](#) that caterers are anticipating fewer lavish holiday parties this year. The reason for the scaled-back festivities is largely financial, as consumer confidence continues to sag under the weight of Wall Street worries. But the paper writes that some revelers are cutting back not out of cost concerns, but so as not to appear gauche during hard times. Or, at least, that's what some of the story's sources are claiming.

The *WP* and *LAT* both front the death of Studs Terkel, the radio host best known for interviewing everyday people.

The *WSJ* reports that Japan has discovered slacking off, as a growing number of young Japanese professionals are declining promotions and raises in order to keep dull jobs with little responsibility.

A Pulitzer-winning food critic recently raved about the delights of whale meat—much to the horror and disgust of his brother, a prominent marine biologist. The disagreement unfolded rather publicly, as the two men talked it out online. The *LAT* has the [rundown](#) of this deeply amusing fraternal spat, complete with vivid descriptions of some pretty far-out menu items.

twitterbox

Race Is Over. Biden Can Start Talking Again! Everyone Duck.

The latest from *Slate's* Election Day Twitter feed.

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 12:31 AM ET

Want instant commentary from *Slate* writers and editors on election night? Bookmark this page, and follow along as we Twitter all of the results and speculation from Election Day. Keep coming back to read our 20 latest tweets, which will automatically update below. You can also follow us at <http://twitter.com/Slate>, and you can read an explanation of our Twitter project [here](#).

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war stories

A Foreign-Policy Repair Manual

Six priorities for President Obama.

By Fred Kaplan

Wednesday, November 5, 2008, at 12:53 PM ET

"President-elect Barack Obama"—the phrase alone does more to repair the tarnished image of America in the world than any action George W. Bush might ponder taking in his final weeks of power. The very fact of a black president with multinational roots unhinges the terrorists' recruitment poster of a racist, parochial, Muslim-hating United States. It revives Europeans' trans-Atlantic dreams just as their own union seems to be

foundering. It is bound to inspire reformers everywhere who seek to break through their own socio-political barriers. It revivifies America as a beacon of democracy—not through thumping arrogance and brimstone but, more elegantly and potently, by sheer example.

But President Obama will enjoy this gush of hope and favor for six months at most. After that, he'll have to earn it through his actions and policies. Here are a few suggestions:

Announce that America is back and open for diplomacy.

Make a big speech to the U.N. General Assembly laying out your broad goals. This will signal that you value international institutions. Then send your personal delegate—Vice President Joe Biden or some trusted eminence like Colin Powell—to the Middle East to lay the initial groundwork for renewed Israeli-Palestinian talks (even if they go nowhere, the effort might make moderate Arabs more cooperative on other issues); open a line to Syria (offering full ties and other goodies in exchange for splitting from Iran and ceasing support for terrorists); and deliver a message to Iran (not to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad but to the real powers), offering negotiations on all disputes. Reappoint Dennis Ross, or someone like him, as permanent Middle East envoy (a slot shockingly unfilled for the last eight years). These steps alone will give the impression that the United States is once more ready to act like a serious major power.

Get out of Iraq. The Iraqis have done you a favor by insisting that a new Status of Forces Agreement include a timetable for withdrawal. Take the deal. If it turns out they were bluffing and don't really want us to go, demand *dramatic, substantive* progress on political unity, provincial elections, division of oil revenues, and all the other issues on which the Iraqis have yet to budge. Nobody's talking about pulling out *all* U.S. troops (unless, again, the Iraqis kick them out). Use the troops that remain as leverage. Bush had a decent idea when he set "benchmarks" for the Iraqi government to meet. The problem was that he didn't enforce them—he neither rewarded the Iraqis for meeting certain deadlines nor punished them for failing to hit many others. Revive the idea with sticks and carrots. The whole point of the "surge"—and of any continued U.S. military presence—was, and is, to create the conditions for achieving *political* objectives: a stable, self-sustaining, democratic Iraq. Set benchmarks toward that goal. If the Iraqis don't meet them, withdraw another two or three brigades; if they do meet them, keep the brigades there a little longer, if they're wanted, to help solidify the progress. The more targets the Iraqis meet, the more stable the country will become and the less they'll need us in the long run.

Rethink Afghanistan. When Gen. Dan McNeil recently ended his tour as commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, he said his successor would need 400,000 troops (including those of the Afghan National Army) to stabilize the country. That just isn't going to happen. The two or three brigades that we'll probably

soon be redeploying to southern Afghanistan will help commanders perform certain tactical missions without relying too much on air power—i.e., without unavoidably killing civilians and thus alienating the people we're trying to win over. But they won't be enough to "win" the war. The real threat is not the Taliban fighters in Afghanistan; it's the sanctuary and replenishing ground that they have in neighboring Pakistan—and the possibility of chaos or the rise of radical Islamists there. The 1,200-mile-long border cannot be fully secured. Nor can we keep bombing the Taliban across the border without alienating the Pakistani people and weakening their new government. The only way to defeat the Taliban is to make it worth the Pakistanis' while to help—to make them calculate that clamping down is both feasible and in their security interests. So train the Pakistani (as well as the Afghan) army; increase economic aid; and embark on intensive diplomacy to relax tensions between Pakistan and India, so that Pakistan's leaders don't see fighting the Taliban as a diversion from their main threat.

Normalize relations with Russia. This may sound cold, but Russia is too important—on energy, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, peace in the Middle East, nearly everything—for our relations to get warped in a new Cold War over the integrity of South Ossetia. Moscow's aggression should not be blithely tolerated, but it's absurd to respond by, say, admitting Georgia into NATO. First, members are required to have recognized borders, which Georgia lacks. Second, do you—do any Americans—really want to go to war for Tbilisi? (This *is* what security alliances are all about.) Impose economic and diplomatic pressure. But also assure the Russians that we have no intention of further NATO expansion. Tell them we will proceed to deploy missile defenses in the Czech Republic and Poland *if* the system works (a nudge-and-wink signal that we probably will not proceed after all). This is not "appeasement," since we have—or should have—no interest in behaving otherwise. Resume strategic arms talks, and demand in return that Moscow reaffirm the Reagan-era treaty limiting conventional forces in Europe, which Vladimir Putin has been threatening to abrogate. Putin has been riding high these past few years on the vast revenues brought in by high oil prices; the recent plunge and the crash of his stock market might make him more pliant. In short, the time is ripe for a policy of applying pressure where our differences matter and giving way where they don't.

Cut and shift the military budget. Here's a new mantra: What's important is not how much we spend but what we buy. The Pentagon's budget is locked almost entirely in the patterns set by the Cold War struggle with Soviet communism. In a way, Bush did us all a favor by placing "emergency war funds" in budget supplementals—not just money for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan but also for what the Pentagon calls "the longer war on terrorism." The supplemental for fiscal year 2009 amounted to \$172 billion (\$70 billion in new funding and \$102 billion left over from FY 2008). This means that the baseline military

budget for this year—amounting to \$541 billion—has little if anything to do with any of these ongoing wars. Of that sum, \$125 billion goes for personnel costs and is therefore untouchable. But this leaves \$416 billion on the table—a huge sum of money that should not be regarded as holy. Do we really need another new submarine or aircraft carrier, another wing of F-22 or F-35 "stealth" fighter planes, or a new high-tech "future combat system"? That's where much of that \$416 billion is going. It's time for a radical reassessment of the military budget—the first since the end of the Cold War. Put someone like Robert Gates in charge. (He has the forward vision and the universal legitimacy.) In any event, take it out of the Pentagon, where it will be mired in parochial interests and interservice rivalries and back-rubbing. (Isn't it odd that the Army, Navy, and Air Force have been evenly splitting the military budget, within a percentage point or two, every year for the last four decades? Is that the result of national-security needs—or bureaucratic politics?) We don't have the money to perpetuate this charade.

Refine intelligence. Presidents respond to events, many of them unseen; therefore, they require good intelligence. More to the point, they need to know what their intelligence reports really say. The "intelligence community" consists of 16 agencies; sometimes, one or more of them file dissenting footnotes to major points of a report. By the time the report gets boiled down to "executive summaries" and passed up the chain of command, the footnotes get excised. Demand that they be put back in. If they have implications for policy, have them debated before the National Security Council. Pay attention to the source of the dissent. For instance, the October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate concluded that Iraq was reconstituting its nuclear-weapons program. It might have been useful for the NSC to know that one of the two dissents to that view was written by the intelligence branch of the Energy Department—which runs the U.S. nuclear-weapons program. The NIE also asserted that Iraqi unmanned aerial vehicles could deliver biological weapons. The president should at least have been told that the intelligence branch of the U.S. Air Force—which presumably knows something about the subject—disputed this finding. Commission a study of all NIEs of the past decade—specifically of patterns revealing which agencies have been most consistently right and wrong on what topics. The one with the best records should be made the lead agency on all future NIEs on the subject. Those with the worst records should be cleaned out. Otherwise, you'll be gazing at the world through tinted glasses.

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