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My Saks Shopping Spree

a fine whine

Happy Birthday, You Bastard

Under no circumstances will I be attending your stupid birthday dinner.

By John Swansburg

Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at 2:26 PM ET

What has become of the birthday party? I used to love a good birthday get-together. Some other kid's parents are picking up the tab for an afternoon of [bumper bowling](#)? There might be a [Cookie Puss](#) from Carvel? Fire up the Datsun, Mom, we're going to be late!

I'm told that when you're a legitimate grown-up—with a spouse and kids of your own—birthday parties are once again events you look forward to. You leave the munchkins with a sitter and go to the Johnsons' for an evening of cocktails and casserole. Maybe an animated game of [Taboo](#) breaks out. Sounds delightful. But in the moment between earning your college degree and signing your first mortgage, the birthday party transmogrifies into something else. It becomes the birthday dinner.

For me, it happened in my late 20s. As my friends moved from graduate programs and entry-level positions into decent-paying jobs, a birthday meet-up at a dive bar to pound SoCo-and-lime shots started to feel a shade *déclassé*. Yet everyone was still living in small studio or one-bedroom apartments—no place for a proper cocktail party. The compromise: People started celebrating their birthdays by inviting friends out to dinner, typically at a moderately fancy restaurant. The kind of place that frowns on bringing your own candles and Cookie Puss but isn't averse to sticking a sparkler in a *crème brûlée*.

Seems like a nice idea, the birthday dinner. It is not. It is a tedious, wretched affair. It is also an extravagantly expensive one. In these wintry economic times, we need to scale back. I hereby propose that the birthday dinner go the way of the \$4 cup of coffee, the liar's mortgage, and the midsize banking institution.

Consider, for example, the birthday dinner I attended not long ago in honor of [my friend Simon](#). In the past, Simon's birthday parties have been rollicking good times. His 25th, celebrated at a Manhattan club, ended memorably, if abruptly, when Simon was ejected from his own party by a bouncer who'd discovered him taking an indiscreet catnap on the bar. For his 30th, Simon, now a brain surgeon, organized a more civilized affair: dinner for 10 of his closest friends at an upscale Tribeca steakhouse.

Everything that can go wrong at such a dinner did. A maitre d' led us to a giant oval table, where I was seated a country mile from the man of the hour. Could I have hit him with a strenuous toss of a French roll? Yes. But polite conversation was out of the question.

Instead, I found myself wedged between Simon's high-school friends and his college friends. Feeling more of a ken for the high-school side of the table, I tried to orient myself in that direction, but the effort required a socially and anatomically awkward craning of the neck. I was left in a no man's land—on

the fringe of two conversations, an active player in neither. Had we been at a bar, I could have maneuvered my way out of such a quagmire by excusing myself to order another round of sweet, sweet SoCo and lime. Thus escaping, I could have muscled my way over to the guest of honor and given him a good birthday noogie. But mired in the middle of this dinner table, the only way I was going to get Simon's attention was by faking an aneurysm, and I just wasn't feeling up to it.

I busied myself by studying the menu, looking up in time to catch a nefarious glint in the eye of our white-smocked waiter. I understand from friends who've waited tables that serving a large party can have its annoyances: It's hard to get anyone's attention; you've got to extol the virtues of the soup du jour four times over. But a seasoned server knows how to work the situation to his advantage, and this guy proved to be positively *au poivre*.

Given the built-in gratuity for a party of our size, our waiter clearly realized there was nothing to lose by making the hard sell. He was getting 18 percent of whatever he could push on us, so he might as well give it a healthy shove. For an appetizer, he vigorously recommended the *frutti di mare* platter—an item accompanied on the menu by the dreaded "market price" designation. Working each flyleaf of the table separately, he managed to sell us three of these massive, adjustable-rate heaps of shrimp and lobster tail. One would have sufficed.

I can't lay all the blame at the feet of our conniving server, however. As is often the case at birthday dinners, several different tax brackets were represented at the table, with humble grad students and servants of the Fourth Estate alongside deep-pocketed bankers and lawyers. Members of the latter group, accustomed to large, expense-account-financed lunches and dinners, were not going to let a few uneaten crustaceans slow them down. When our waiter returned to take our entrée orders, one of their number reached for the wine list—round of bubbly for the birthday boy! Ouch. It was time to think strategy.

There are three approaches to ordering at a birthday dinner. I actually didn't know that the first approach was possible until this particular outing. Early in the evening, I noticed Simon's friend Justin, a legendarily frugal graduate student, engage our waiter in an extended colloquy. After dinner, I sidled up to Justin to complain about the exorbitant bill, knowing my outrage would fall on sympathetic ears. Instead, he flashed a wicked grin and revealed that he had "seceded from the check, Jefferson Davis-style." That is, having realized things were getting out of hand, he had worked out an understanding with the waiter whereby he would order on a separate tab that would include only his appetizer, entrée, and beverages. It was a brilliant stroke, though it required Justin's unabashed cheapskatedness, which, like his taste in metaphor, is rare indeed.

On to the more subtle approaches. The first is to order as inexpensively as possible, in an attempt to foster a norm of fiscal

conservatism at the table. This strategy is rarely successful. You order a house salad and the chicken and roll the dice that the guy next to you will feel too embarrassed to order an entrée called "steak for two." Such restraint cannot be counted on in a large, salary-diverse group.

The other approach, the one I favor, is to order offensively. Your typical birthday dinner is around 10 guests strong. Given a group of this size, you can safely assume there will not be an itemized accounting of who ordered what come bill-paying time—it requires too much math and is usually adjudged to be not in keeping with the celebratory nature of the event. Armed with this knowledge, the only way to order is with abandon. If I'm going to be subsidizing the sybaritic corporate lawyer at the end of the table (who, I happen to know, wouldn't think of ordering a beer unless it was brewed by a [Trappist monk](#)), you'd better believe he's going to be paying for a tract of my baked Alaska.

I developed this system after too many birthday dinners where I went home poor *and* hungry. This way, at least, you get the food you want. But the victory is pyrrhic. Tradition holds that the birthday boy make a perfunctory swipe at the check before it's whisked from his grasp. In the case of Simon's party, not only was the man of honor off the hook for his portion of the bill, but at the suggestion of a chivalrous spendthrift who I'd have kicked in the shin had the table not been so vast, the group exempted Simon's *girlfriend* as well, since she'd undertaken the arduous task of sending out the Evite. A check that would have been a hardship split 12 ways now was to be [split by 10](#).

Simon is one of my oldest and dearest friends; I like to think I'd do just about anything for him. But sitting here looking at a charge for \$168.51, I find myself wondering how good a friend he really is. \$168.51! Do you know how many [Uno](#)'s individual deep-dish [Spinoccolis](#) that would buy? Seventeen. That's two-plus weeks of dinner.

In a way, though, it is I who owe Simon. The piles of jumbo shrimp floating on seas of melted ice; the untouched beds of creamed spinach; the endless rounds of marked-up Beck's Dark—they flash before me now whenever a birthday dinner invitation comes my way, and I can't bring myself to RSVP yes. The excesses of Simon's dinner were what I needed to find the social gumption to swear off such affairs entirely. Throwing a party for your birthday? I'll gladly attend the festivities. Point me to the bowling shoes and buy me a few frames. Cook me dinner—I'll bring the Taboo. Otherwise, see you next year, pal.

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In addition to paying for his own dinner, Justin did cover a tranche of Simon's meal as well. It should also be noted that he did not eat any of the seafood platters or other communally ordered food. He may be a secessionist, but he is a principled one.

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

books

Emily Post's Secret

How a disastrous marriage drove her to etiquette.

By Laura Shapiro

Wednesday, October 22, 2008, at 6:30 AM ET

Nearly half a century after her death, we finally get to meet the woman who invented American good manners. Or tried to. Nowadays people who suspect their public behavior is making them look boorish don't shudder with embarrassment—they gleefully display the evidence on YouTube. But we weren't always like this, as Laura Claridge's *Emily Post* makes clear. Straight through the Jazz Age, the Depression, World War II, and the early '50s, Emily Post handed down rules of social behavior guaranteed to be authentic insignia of the upper class, and the nation kept begging for more. People loved her gracious air of certitude, whether she was advising on the proper wedding outfit for a second marriage (gray, with a small, matching hat) or how to manage telephone use when six neighbors had to share the same line. ("The rule of courtesy when you find the wire in use, is to hang up for three minutes before signaling. If there is an emergency, you of course say 'Emergency!' in a loud voice, and then 'Our barn is on fire.' ") Like Freud and Betty Crocker, the name "Emily Post" became shorthand for authority itself.

But her charmed perspective on what she called "best society" disintegrated soon after she died in 1960 and not just because the all-gray wedding pretty much fell from favor. Mrs. Post (who would have cringed at being referred to as "Ms." or, worse yet, "Post") often said etiquette had much more to do with "instinctive considerations for the feelings of others" than with using the right fork, and she herself was famous for putting her elbows on the table. But she never cooked a meal and never spent a day without her maid in attendance. She stayed aloof from the suffrage movement, hated the New Deal, couldn't abide Eleanor Roosevelt and her many causes, and lobbied the *Social Register* to banish any mention of a mixed-race laundress who

had married into a prominent family. In 1947, she explained that if you happen to see or hear "something definitely threatening to our government," the correct thing to do was write to the FBI or a local government official. ("Or, if you prefer, you can telephone.") She offered a sample letter: " 'A group called the Junior Revolutionists who meet regularly Monday evenings at 40 X Street is distributing handbills.' " These were not the politics of an authority figure with a message likely to outlive the '60s.

Claridge, whose extensively researched biography is the first major treatment of this legendary figure, would undoubtedly disagree with this assessment, for she takes a far more admiring view of her subject. She sees Emily Post as something of an unsung feminist, an heiress who started out a cosseted creature of the Gilded Age but moved beyond her comfort zone to "buck the system" and promote "genuinely democratic ideals and sympathies." As each new edition of *Etiquette* succeeded the last, she argues, Mrs. Post changed with the times. The chapter called "What Is Best Society?" became "The Growth of Good Taste in America." Another, originally headed "One's Position in the Community," became "Making One's Position in the Community," underscoring her message that behavior rather than birth defined true gentility. She discussed ever-simpler weddings, and dinner parties without servants. Religious traditions other than Episcopalian showed up, as did the "businesswoman," who always received Mrs. Post's full support. When Rosie the Riveter made her appearance on a *Saturday Evening Post* cover in 1943, Claridge writes, "It was as if Emily Post's intuitive version of the capable, modern woman had come to life."

"Capable," for sure. Mrs. Post racked up truly startling accomplishments—along with her best-selling guide, *Etiquette* (1922), she wrote six novels, scads of journalism, and a 500-page book on architecture; had a long career in radio; designed her own high-fashion clothes; endorsed everything from cigarettes to gingerbread; and built a 15-story apartment house that still stands at the corner of Madison Avenue and 79th Street in Manhattan. She lived in 9B, and her friends filled the rest of the building.

But "modern"? Not the Emily Post I found in these pages. Listen to the rapture in her voice as she evoked a debutante at her coming-out ball in the first edition of *Etiquette*: "It is your evening, and you are a sort of little princess! There is music, and there are lights, and there are flowers everywhere ... all for you! Up the wide staircase come throngs of fashionables ... on purpose to bow to you!" During her own debutante year, Emily Price had only one ambition: to stage a glorious wedding and ascend to her place in New York society, a "sort of little princess" forever. She did attain that place and become American royalty, but her marriage at 19 was a disaster. Edwin Post had little interest in his wife apart from her money and social position, and he didn't bother to keep his mistresses secret.

Society, running as it did on formulas she knew perfectly, kept her afloat, and she clung to it.

A powerfully conservative outlook on the structures governing everyday relationships—husband and wife, master and servant, upper class and everyone else—seems to have settled in. She wouldn't hear of divorce and insisted on maintaining the appearance of a perfectly happy married woman. Night after night, she dressed up and went to meet Edwin at the train (they were living in the posh enclave of Tuxedo Park), only to return home alone with all the dignity she could display. Eventually she was dragged into a tawdry lawsuit around his adultery and forced to divorce him.

Claridge emphasizes the excruciating public humiliation and notes, "She never forgave him." But more tellingly, she seems never to have stopped being his wife. Or at least being *a* wife. She remained firmly opposed to divorce, never had another romantic relationship, and insisted on putting herself forward as an expert on successful marriage. In an article called "On the Care of Husbands," which ran in *Life* three years after the divorce, she openly ridiculed those misguided women who paid more attention to winning the vote than to making sure their husbands were comfortable and content. She had been stripped of the identity, but she was determined to keep playing the role.

And the flawless performance of roles is a pretty good definition of etiquette. Mrs. Post said over and over that "character" mattered far more than "trivialities of deportment" when it came to correct manners. Yet she kept faith with traditional social hierarchies as if her life depended on them, which it probably did. She was so companionable with her maid, for instance, that they used to go to the movies together, arm in arm, then out for ice cream. But at dinnertime, Hilda ate in the servants' quarters, and Mrs. Post sat at the dining table alone.

For the most part, her writing style in *Etiquette* was charming and self-assured. But whenever she touched on the proper behavior of husbands and wives, an electric charge seems to jangle the prose. Of the thousands of instructions detailed in *Etiquette*, the one she singled out and underscored as "the most important rule in this book" wasn't about weddings or funerals, it was about the public face of wifedom—how a married woman must sign a letter. The rule was "Mary Jones," with the addition of "(Mrs. John Jones)" if the recipient was not a personal friend. This directive, she said, "cannot be too strongly emphasized." She was similarly unyielding on the subject of the honeymoon—the groom always, always paid for the trip, even if he made \$10 a week and the bride commanded a fortune. Back home, they could freely live on her wealth, but in their first appearance as husband and wife, Mrs. Post insisted they display the traditional financial hierarchy.

As for marriages that ended nastily, like her own—these merited language as close to venomous as she permitted herself. "The

man who publicly besmirches his wife's name, besmirches still more his own, and proves that he is not, was not, and never will be, a gentleman," she wrote—rhetoric that probably packed more of a thunderbolt in 1922 than it does today. More unsettling now is to see the rage she directed at wives who were caught up in headline-making divorces and, unlike Post, agreed to talk to reporters. "One cannot too strongly censure the unspeakable vulgarity," she wrote icily.

Mrs. Post died right around the time when even her most recently updated rules were starting to show their age. ("French fried potatoes must be eaten with a fork.") But it's not pronouncements like these that make her a china shepherdess among the great women of the last century. It's her politics that blinkered commitment to hierarchy that is the antithesis of feminism. Many women of her class looked their husbands straight in the eye; Mrs. Post wouldn't have dreamed of trying. In her worldview, even a purely symbolic husband like Edwin bestowed honor and dignity upon his wife, the way marrying royalty elevated a commoner. So, she clung to the title, and she shored up a crumbling social structure with all her might. In 1950, she was ranked the second most powerful woman in America, after Eleanor Roosevelt. Luckily, it was E.R.'s legacy that lasted.

books

Minds in the Toilet

There's a sewage crisis, so hold your nose and think hard.

By Johann Hari

Monday, October 20, 2008, at 6:39 AM ET

Every day, you handle the deadliest substance on earth. It is a weapon of mass destruction festering beneath your fingernails. In the past 10 years, it has killed more people than all the wars since Adolf Hitler rolled into one; in the next four hours, it will kill the equivalent of two jumbo jets full of kids. It is not anthrax or plutonium or uranium. Its name is shit—and we are in the middle of a shit storm. In the West, our ways of discreetly whisking this weapon away are in danger of breaking down, and one-quarter of humanity hasn't ever used a functioning toilet yet.

The story of civilization has been the story of separating you from your waste. British investigative journalist Rose George's stunning—and nauseating—new book opens by explaining that a single gram of feces can contain "ten million viruses, one million bacteria, one thousand parasite cysts, and one hundred worm eggs." Accidentally ingesting this cocktail causes 80 percent of all the sickness on earth.

I once had a small taste of the problem. A few years ago, I was trudging up a hill in Caracas, Venezuela—through a vast barrio cobbled together from tin and mud and leftover plastic—when I saw a plastic bag filled with feces hurtling toward me. It splattered all over my chest and into my mouth. This wasn't an attack on a gringo intruder. In many of the slums that scar South America, there are no sewers, so the only way to dispose of your excrement is to squat over a bag and throw. It's called the "helicopter toilet."

Today, 2.6 billion people live like this: "Four in ten people have no access to any latrine, toilet, bucket or box. Nothing," George explains. In an epic work of reportage—taking her from the sewers of London to the shores of Africa to the bowels of China—George investigates the slow road away from this shit-smear existence.

Her journey opens by tramping down at midnight into the place where that road began—the sewers of London. This city beneath the city can be deadly: Stinking clouds of hydrogen sulphide—the "sewer gas" that forms when sewage decomposes—will suffocate you if you get caught in them. Before these tunnels were built, London had "on-site sanitation." This is a polite way of saying people shat in a covered-up, set-aside space, and their feces were collected and sold to farmers as manure. But in the early 19th century, London's population rapidly doubled, and the city's buildup of excrement became unsustainable. The cost of having your private cesspool emptied spiked to a shilling, twice the average workers' daily wage. So, people took to emptying their cesspools into the Thames, which soon ran brown. By 1848 cholera outbreaks were killing 14,000 people a year, and then came the "Great Stink" of 1858. London reeked so badly people were vomiting in the streets. The drapes of the House of Commons were soaked with chloride in a (failed) attempt to disguise the stench.

At last, the order came to find a better way—and one of Rose George's heroes entered history. Joseph Bazalgette was the chief engineer of the Metropolitan Board of Works, and along with Hamburg's municipality, he pioneered the great life-saving urban sewers of our time. "His sewers have saved more lives than any other public works," George notes with pride.

But there is a catch. Much as we want to flush and forget, the excrement does not disappear. Ninety percent of the world's sewage ends up untreated in oceans, rivers, and lakes. The costs of Joseph Bazalgette's invention—at the other end of the pipe—are now becoming inescapable. Much of our sewage is pumped, barely treated, into the oceans, where vast dead zones are emerging, killed by our germs. The rest infests water closer to home. For example, in 1993, an outbreak of shit-borne cryptosporidium in Milwaukee killed 400 people and made 400,000 sick. It turned out the city was pumping its "treated" sewage—actually treated for only some toxins, not others—into

Lake Michigan and then slurping its drinking water out the other end.

In her search for answers to what to do with our swill, George lyrically dives into the toilet bowl, sloshing about like Gene Kelly singin' in the rain. "Of all the people of the world, the Chinese are probably most at home with their excrement," she explains. They defecate openly, chatting away with their friends in toilets with no dividers. Perhaps for this reason, the Chinese have been more creative than anyone else with their crap. Since the 1930s, they have been turning it into electricity.

More than 15 million rural Chinese homes have been provided with "biogas": a large, oxygenless digester into which they empty their toilet pans. The organic matter ferments there and belches out a gas that can then be converted into electricity; the gas also makes stoves go. It may make us retch, but it saves Chinese women from the backbreaking labor of cutting down firewood, and they love it. Is this our future? Alas, its potential spread is limited: If you don't add ample animal feces, too, the machines don't run for long.

Is there a way to safely use shit as fertilizer instead? Some U.S. firms thought so when they began to market "biosolids"—the gunk that is left over after sewage has been treated. But in 1975 the chief of the Environmental Protection Agency's Technology Board of the Hazardous Waste Division reached a horror-film conclusion. Transforming waste into fertilizer is "the most efficient means—short of eating the sludge—of injecting toxic substances directly into the human body." Almost all European countries have now banned it.

Meanwhile, the question of where to put the sewage becomes even more urgent. Our Western system of sanitation uses vast amounts of two increasingly precious resources, energy and water. It has become a cliché to say the wars of the future will be fought over water, due to global warming and a swelling population—but it is true. When water is scarce and costly, our Western model of washing away our waste ceases to make sense. George summarizes our current methods tartly: "You take clean drinking water, throw filth into it, and then spend millions to clean it again." One cubic meter of wastewater can pollute 10 cubic meters of water—and in a warming world battling for water supplies, that will soon become a ratio we can't afford. Our method is strikingly energy-intensive, too: A sewage plant uses up to 11.5 watts of energy per head, requiring an entire coal-fired power station to run just four sewage treatment facilities.

So, we need a safe alternative to plopping and peeing into water, but where is it? George talks to environmentalists who "see a future where instead of controlling pollution after it happens, we prevent it in the first place, by some sort of source separation." This eco-sewage has two prongs. First, we have to change our toilets—and our sewers—so they have two streams: one for urine and another for excrement. Although it's counterintuitive,

urine actually contaminates sewer water much more severely than feces do. If it ran into a separate system, we would slash water use by an extraordinary 80 percent. The second prong is harder to imagine. As in pre-sewer London, we would defecate into a tank, and our shit would sit there waiting for collection.

Feces take a strange and irrational physical journey because they take a strange and irrational journey through our minds. But if we are going to deal with the coming shit crises—or solve the one killing kids in the developing world today—we need to overcome an aversion that can seem hard-wired into us by our evolution and intensified by culture. The most encouraging revelation of George's book is that even the aspects of defecating that seem eternal and unchangeable are actually recent innovations. In Japan 60 years ago, everybody squatted communally over a dry pit. Today, nobody does: In private, they use techno-toilets that wash and dry your anus while simultaneously playing music and heating the seat. (Think of it as the iToilet or Toilet 3.0.)

Toilet culture can change, and fast. Neither of my parents had a toilet in the house when they were children and thought the idea was vaguely disgusting. (Defecating? Next to the kitchen?) Another toilet-tide shift may happen in my lifetime. Will the drying up of water supplies—and a sewage system with nowhere left to spew its waste—force us to regress to earlier, dirtier worlds? Or will we begin a transition to greener options before the system breaks down and begins to spew our filth back at us?

It's a sign of how superb George's book is that I am now bubbling with questions about the future of feces. *The Big Necessity* belongs in a rare handful of studies that take a subject that seems fixed and familiar and taboo and makes us understand it is historically contingent and dazzlingly intriguing. Jessica Mitford did it with her classic study *The American Way of Death*; Michel Foucault did it with *Madness and Civilization*. Rose George has produced their equal: a gleaming toilet manifesto for humankind. It could end with an oddly rousing cry, borrowed from another manifesto long ago: Shitters of the world, unite! You have nothing but your diarrhea and your cholera and your dying oceans to lose.

bushisms

Bushism of the Day

By Jacob Weisberg

Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at 10:27 AM ET

"This thaw—took a while to thaw, it's going to take a while to unthaw."—Alexandria, La., Oct. 20, 2008

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

T.R.'s "[New Nationalism](#)" speech of 1910. Either that, or McCain would have to quit [calling Barack Obama a socialist](#).

T.R. justified progressive taxation straightforwardly as a matter of equality. In his 1907 State of the Union address, Roosevelt [said](#):

Our aim is to recognize what Lincoln pointed out: The fact that there are some respects in which men are obviously not equal; but also to insist that there should be an equality of self-respect and of mutual respect, an equality of rights before the law, *and at least an approximate equality in the conditions under which each man obtains the chance to show the stuff that is in him when compared to his fellows* [italics mine].

Obama is constrained by a very different political climate to justify his sole proposed tax hike—on *incomes above \$250,000*—by stating its benefit to commerce. Here's his "spread the wealth around" comment in context (for a more complete transcription, click [here](#)):

I do believe that for folks like me, who have worked hard but, frankly, have also been lucky, I don't mind paying just a little bit more than the waitress who I just met over there who, things are slow, and she can barely make the rent. My attitude is that if the economy's good for folks from the bottom up, it's going to be good for everybody. If you've got a plumbing business, you're going to be better off if you've got a whole bunch of customers who can afford to hire you. And right now, everybody's so pinched that business is bad for everybody. And I think when you spread the wealth around it's good for everybody.

In a radio address on Oct. 18, McCain [said](#) that to the "straight-talking," "plainspoken" Wurzelbacher, words like "spread the wealth around"

sounded a lot like socialism. And a lot of Americans are thinking along those same lines. ... At least in Europe, the Socialist leaders who so admire my opponent are up front about their objectives. They use real numbers and honest language. And we should demand equal candor from Senator Obama.

In an Oct. 22 speech in Manchester, N.H., McCain [expostulated further](#):

chatterbox

McCain's Hero: More Socialist Than Obama!

McCain can call Obama a socialist or he can call Teddy Roosevelt his hero. He can't do both.

By Timothy Noah

Thursday, October 23, 2008, at 2:11 PM ET

Imagine that instead of telling Joe "the Plumber" Wurzelbacher that "when you spread the wealth around it's good for everybody," Barack Obama had said the following:

We grudge no man a fortune in civil life if it is honorably obtained and well used. It is not even enough that it should have been gained without doing damage to the community. We should permit it to be gained only so long as the gaining represents benefit to the community. ... The really big fortune, the swollen fortune, by the mere fact of its size, acquires qualities which differentiate it in kind as well as in degree from what is possessed by men of relatively small means. Therefore, I believe in a graduated income tax on big fortunes, and ... a graduated inheritance tax on big fortunes, properly safeguarded against evasion, and increasing rapidly in amount with the size of the estate.

The *New York Post's* Page One would blare: "OBAMA: I'LL SEIZE 'SWOLLEN FORTUNES'!" Bill Kristol would demand to know, in his *New York Times* column, what godly powers enabled Obama to discern precisely whose wealth—David Geffen's? George Soros?—would "benefit the community." On Fox News, Bill O'Reilly would start to say something, then sputter, turn purple, and keel over backward in a grand mal seizure.

John McCain, meanwhile, would have to stop saying that [Teddy Roosevelt is his hero](#), because the passage quoted above is from

Joe and guys like him will earn the wealth. Barack and politicians like him will spread it. Joe didn't really like that idea, and neither did a lot of other folks who believe that their earnings are their own. After all, before government can redistribute wealth, it has to confiscate wealth from those who earned it. And whatever the right word is for that way of thinking, the redistribution of wealth is the last thing America needs right now. In these tough economic times, we don't need government "spreading the wealth"—we need policies that create wealth and spread opportunity.

When T.R. spoke of "swollen fortunes" and "[malefactors of great wealth](#)," socialism was a genuine force in American politics, perceived by many to pose a serious threat to the social order. When T.R. first called for a "graduated income tax" in his 1907 State of the Union, he was proposing a measure that the Supreme Court had ruled [unconstitutional](#). Indeed, the federal income tax struck down by the Court wasn't even "graduated," or progressive; it was a flat-rate tax. Today, McCain demagogically attacks Obama's purported "socialism" knowing that socialism is a dead letter in the United States. He feigns shock at progressive taxation ("confiscate wealth") nearly a century after the states ratified the [16th Amendment](#), enabling Congress to enact a progressive income tax, and nearly a decade after *he himself scolded* a town-hall questioner on MSNBC's *Hardball* who cried "socialism" about the rich having to pay a greater percentage of their income in taxes. "Here's what I really believe," McCain said. "When you are—reach a certain level of comfort, there's nothing wrong with paying somewhat more."

In his book *The Great Tax Wars*, Steven Weisman, formerly of the *New York Times*, [writes](#) that T.R.'s previous experience as police commissioner of New York City made him worry "about anarchy arising from gross economic inequality." Today, the income gap between the top 0.01 percent of families in the United States and the bottom 90 percent is [greater](#) than it was in T.R.'s day. The last time it was anywhere *near* so great was in 1929. The top marginal income-tax rate, meanwhile, is near its historic low in the late 1920s. Those of you seeking a cause to the current financial meltdown may draw your own conclusions. (For more on taxes and historic patterns of inequality in the United States, click [here](#).)

T.R., of course, was no socialist. Indeed, his purpose was largely to prevent socialists from coming to power. But the trust buster got *called* a socialist a lot more often than Obama ever will. He [writes](#) in his autobiography:

Because of things I have done on behalf of justice to the workingman, I have often been called a Socialist. Usually I have not taken the trouble even to notice the epithet. ...

Moreover, I know that many American Socialists are high-minded and honorable citizens, who in reality are merely radical social reformers. They are opposed to the brutalities and industrial injustices which we see everywhere about us.

T.R. then goes on to outline his strong differences "with the Marxian Socialists" and their belief in class warfare and the inevitable demise of capitalism. [Later](#), he returns to his earlier theme:

Many of the men who call themselves socialists today are in reality merely radical social reformers, with whom on many points good citizens can and ought to work in hearty general agreement, and whom in many practical matters of government good citizens can well afford to follow.

There were, however, [limits](#) to T.R.'s tolerance. "I have always maintained," he concluded, "that our worst revolutionaries today are those reactionaries who do not see and will not admit there is any need for change."

chatterbox

Christopher Buckley, Repeat Apostate

Why his vote for Barack Obama shouldn't surprise us.

By Timothy Noah

Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at 2:11 PM ET

There's been some grumbling on the right about the media fuss over Christopher Buckley's recent [endorsement](#) of Barack Obama, a Democrat. I [noted](#) in an earlier column that the only child of William F. Buckley (WFB, in *National Review*-speak) had never been a "movement" conservative and that while he had *leaned* conservative in the past, his vocation was humor writer and *littérateur* rather than political partisan. Even so, CTB's parentage made him a person of some symbolic significance to a conservative movement that, its [cavils against Joe Wilson](#) notwithstanding, quietly embraces nepotism as a practical affirmation of family values. (See Bush, George W.) Moreover, CTB owns one-seventh of the *National Review* and sits on the magazine's board. CTB's public declaration consequently provoked an [outcry](#) among conservative *National Review* readers—the quantity of e-mails received remains a topic of [some dispute](#)—and CTB himself later stirred the pot further by [confiding](#) to the *New York Times* that while he continued to experience profound grief over WFB's death ("I miss him every day"), the loss had also been "ironically liberating. ... I can now write about things I was not terribly comfortable writing about."

The *Times* reporter, Sheryl Gay Stolberg, filled in the blank: "Like the Obama endorsement, although the younger Mr. Buckley is not certain his father would disapprove."

Actually, CTB knows significantly more than the *Times* let on about whether WFB would disapprove of his Obama endorsement. I know this because in the October 2006 *Washington Monthly*—an iconoclastic but reliably left-of-center political journal—CTB effectively endorsed the 2008 Democratic presidential nominee, sight unseen. Read carefully the [following passage](#):

"The trouble with our times," Paul Valéry said, "is that the future is not what it used to be."

This glum *aperçu* has been much with me as we move into the home stretch of the 2006 mid-term elections and shimmy into the starting gates of the 2008 presidential campaign. With heavy heart, as a once-proud—indeed, staunch—Republican, I here admit, behind enemy lines, to the guilty hope that my party loses; *on both occasions* [italics mine].

No matter who the next GOP presidential nominee turned out to be, CTB wanted that nominee to lose. Given that U.S. politics is dominated by two major parties, this amounted to an endorsement of the next Democratic presidential nominee. CTB's endorsement of Barack Obama is, therefore, a formality. WFB was very much alive in 2006. The *Washington Monthly*, where I'm a contributing editor, has a regrettably small circulation and sometimes casts its [pearls](#) before an insufficiently attentive herd. But if WFB had been at all inclined to care whether CTB was rooting for the Democrats, surely he would have found out.

In the passage I quoted above, CTB further stated his hope that the Republicans would lose the congressional midterm elections, which they did. And there was more:

I voted for George W. Bush in 2000. In 2004, I could not bring myself to pull the same lever again. Neither could I bring myself to vote for John Kerry, who, for all his strengths, credentials, and talent, seems very much less than the sum of his parts. So, I wrote in a vote for George Herbert Walker Bush, for whom I worked as a speechwriter from 1981 to '83. I wish he'd won.

CTB hasn't pulled the lever for a Republican presidential nominee in *nearly a decade*. In that sense, conservative commentators are right to downplay the news value of his Obama endorsement. Instead, we should give CTB credit for

jumping this sinking ship earlier than [Colin Powell](#), [Ken Adelman](#), [Paul O'Neill](#), [William Donaldson](#), [Douglas Kmiec](#), [David Friedman](#) (son of Milton and Rose), [Julie Nixon Eisenhower](#), and other Obama converts whom the GOP can shrug off less easily.

corrections

Corrections

Friday, October 24, 2008, at 7:02 AM ET

In the Oct. 17 "[Explainer](#)," Christopher Beam incorrectly described the process of scrapping corporate taxes and taxing shareholders instead as "dividend imputation."

*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, Bad Therapy Edition

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

By Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and Julia Turner
Wednesday, October 22, 2008, at 11:08 AM ET

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

Listen to Culture Gabfest No. 18 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 the Nobel Prize in literature's snub of American writers, Tina Fey's pitch-perfect imitation of Gov. Sarah Palin, and the current lack of interest in the recent trial of O.J. Simpson.

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](#).

The Culture Gabfest weekly endorsements:

Dana's pick: David Foster Wallace's collection [Consider the Lobster: And Other Essays](#).

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](#).

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

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

Sept. 24, 2008

Listen to Culture Gabfest No. 17 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 the cultural impact of the financial meltdown, the death of author David Foster Wallace, and the latest Microsoft ads from that lovable comedy duo Bill Gates and Jerry Seinfeld.

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.

culturebox

Black Presidents

A pop-cultural survey.

By Troy Patterson

Friday, October 24, 2008, at 10:26 AM ET

The first movie to imagine a black president of the United States at any length was Joseph Sargent's satirical drama *The Man* in 1972. There, Douglass Dilman, president pro tempore of the Senate, happens into the Oval Office after the president and the speaker of the House die in a ceiling collapse. Unavailable on DVD, *The Man* is now a rarity, and yet it clearly forecasts the screen existences of subsequent black presidents.

James Earl Jones uses his commanding, paternal, universally presentable voice in the title role—a harbinger of baritones to come. Notably, the job of adapting Irving Wallace's novel went to *Twilight Zone* creator Rod Serling. Black presidents have most often existed in science-fiction scenarios, lending a futuristic tint to the proceedings. Next summer, Danny Glover will play one President Wilson in *2012*, Roland Emmerich's forthcoming special-effects spectacular.

What might any of this mean for Barack Obama? Beats me. But the next two weeks will see much talk and many pixels devoted to race and his candidacy, and in a nation drunk on entertainment, the legacy of his fictional forebears has to count for something. Herewith, a scan of the most prominent black presidents in American pop culture and a stab at understanding their significance.

24 (2001-Present)

Actors: Dennis Haysbert, D.B. Woodside

Presidents of the United States: David Palmer, Wayne Palmer

Tellingly, the first black actor cast as the president on Fox's action series was most famous as the voice of an insurance company. We were in good hands with David Palmer and his race-neutral Allstate baritone, and his looks—mainstream manliness shaded brown—radiated dependability. The same can't be said of the black president who succeeded him on the show. David's brother Wayne—24 is, of course, energetically ludicrous, so don't bother about the plot twists that preceded his swearing in—has a shaved head and a jazzman's goatee altogether too slick for the West Wing. The actor playing Wayne, D.B. Woodside, looks like NBA point guard Gary Payton—and perhaps not for nothing. Is there anything to the fact that Fox's online profiles for both characters mention their athletic prowess? Wayne Palmer went to Stanford on a baseball scholarship, and David was a basketball star at Georgetown. It's as if they've vaulted into politics from a more familiar field for African-American heroes. Whatever—they're tough on terrorism.

Deep Impact (1998)

Actor: Morgan Freeman

POTUS: Tom Beck

Not to be confused with the same year's *Armageddon*, about astronauts nuking an asteroid on a collision course with the Earth, *Deep Impact* is about nuking a comet on a collision course with the Earth. It's also about an MSNBC reporter so darling, as played by Téa Leoni, that the president gives her something of a scoop about the comet-nuking mission. Freeman looks and sounds conventionally presidential in the way that only a Visa pitchman can (cf. Dennis Haybert and his underwriter's reliability). The actor shades his quiet righteousness—that *Bruce Almighty*-style rigor—with just a smidgen of *Driving Miss Daisy* deference. There's no subtextual reason for Beck to be black—beyond patting America on its broadly inclusive back, maybe, or signaling an [EEO](#) solidarity with Leoni's girl reporter.

The Fifth Element (1997)

Actor: Tommy "Tiny" Lister

POTUS: President Lindberg

Luc Besson's wiggly fantasia tells the story of a planet representing pure evil on a collision course with the Earth in the 23rd century. Instead of nukes, our weapon against it is Milla Jovovich's bandage-attired supernatural sylph, and one President Lindberg oversees her deployment. (Technically, Lindberg leads an entity called the "United Federation," which is headquartered in New York City, but the geopolitics of blockbusters rule him in as our commander in chief.) Among its many bits of delirium, *The Fifth Element* presents a quasi-ironic festival of retrograde racial images, with *Variety*'s review noting that Chris Tucker's mincing sidekick "[sounds like Butterfly McQueen on speed](#)." As played by Lister—a 300-pounder best known for playing a larcenous thug in *Friday*—Lindberg is not a suitable role model. Too "angry." Too "hostile." Too much "bestial grunting." That

said, his menacing glares somehow suggest he'd stand firm against lobbyists.

Head of State (2003)

Actor: Chris Rock

POTUS: Mays Gilliam

In the only film on this list that does not qualify as fantasy or science fiction, a presidential candidate dies in a plane crash. (Shades, here, of *The Man*.) Party bosses, believing that defeat is certain, select a small-time D.C. alderman to head their ticket and take a fall so that an insider can cruise to victory four years later. Jokes predicated on the friction between urban culture and Beltway manners ensue in this slightly—very slightly—underrated comedy. Gilliam, played by Chris Rock, of course lacks Obama's detachment and reserve. Rather, his style combines the hard-line populism of John Edwards with the idealism of Jimmy Stewart's Jefferson Smith and the ghetto fabulousness of Warren Beatty's Jay Billington Bulworth.

Idiocracy (2006)

Actor: Terry Crews

POTUS: Dwayne Camacho

Mike Judge's sci-fi satire unfolds in the 26th century in a United States whose degraded citizens habitually deaden themselves with video games and fast food. (The movie is a cult classic, rather than a popular favorite, because its absurdism hits too close to home.) Luke Wilson—playing the "most average" soldier in the Army of 2005—awakes from Rip Van Winkle hibernation to find that he's the smartest guy in the country and soon joins the Cabinet of President Camacho, who entered the political arena via the wrestling arena. While Camacho's skin color is much really less of an issue than, say, the fact that he commands respect at the State of the Union by firing an automatic rifle at the ceiling, his processed hair and street idiom do lend an extra outlandish to the apocalyptic portrait. Do you want to have a beer with him? Yes, you could perhaps share a case, but as his full name is Dwayne Elizondo Mountain Dew Herbert Camacho, you might prefer to bond over two liters of acid-green soda pop.

day to day

The Maverick Wears Escada

Thursday, October 23, 2008, at 4:35 PM ET

Thursday, Oct. 23, 2008

XX Factor: Who Requested Sarah Palin's \$150,000 Makeover?

News broke Wednesday that Sarah Palin's campaign-trail

wardrobe cost almost \$150,000. "[XX Factor](#)" bloggers [Nina Rastogi and Melinda Henneberger](#) talk about whether Palin should be blamed for this. [Listen](#) to the segment.

Wednesday, Oct. 22, 2008

Politics: When Mavericks Disagree

They call themselves a team of mavericks. And lately John McCain and Sarah Palin are living up to the name by disagreeing with each other. Alex Cohen talks to John Dickerson about the issues the Republican candidates are butting heads on. [Listen](#) to the segment.

What's Up, Doc?: Prozac Isn't the Same in a Kid's Body

What happens when children are treated with medicines tested only on adults? They can suffer bad side effects, according to a new study on the "off-label" use of drugs that have been specifically approved for adults. Dr. Sydney Spiesel explains the study's findings to Alex Chadwick. [Listen](#) to the segment.

dear prudence

I Hate Me, I Really Hate Me

Antidepressants don't ease my self-loathing. What can I do?

Thursday, October 23, 2008, at 6:51 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'm in my early 30s and the married mother of two young children. I have a good job, and my husband and I get along well. My problem lies within myself. I suffer from something I can only describe as "self-loathing." It started as a teenager (with cutting my arms, drinking, smoking, running with the wrong people). Now I try to keep it all neatly tucked away in my psyche. I've been to therapists and take antidepressants, but this lingering self-hate always surfaces. My symptoms cause me to withdraw, hit myself with hangers, and say and think the most horrible thoughts about myself. Even with my accomplishments, I don't think much of myself. I'm not suicidal, but I frequently entertain thoughts of cutting my arms and legs or having someone else beat me until I'm black and blue, as though I deserve punishment for being who I am. I compare myself to others nonstop and sometimes withdraw for days if I meet someone I envy. It's awful! In addition to antidepressants, I've resorted to taking the painkiller Tramadol daily, as it tends to lift my mood and help with these feelings of inadequacy. I do not want to pass this on to my kids, whom I love more than anything. Why in the world won't this stop?

—Wish I Liked Myself

Dear Wish,

Through some combination of genes and upbringing, you were given this painful thought disorder. And look at how remarkably you've dealt with it. You have a happy marriage, a good career, and a loving relationship with your children. Many people who were handed easy-going genes and happy childhoods have not been able to pull off that trifecta. Also impressive is your self-insight and ability to convey what it feels like to be overtaken by these terrible thoughts. It sounds as if you know you should be proud of where you have come in life, but that is not much help when demons descend. You say you've been to therapists, but it is essential that you have the right kind of therapy. One pitfall to some therapies is that they lead to rumination about the sources of one's troubles—a major drawback if a patient's primary symptom is destructive, ruminative thoughts. So look into [dialectical behavior therapy](#). It seeks to relieve patients' suffering, in particular those prone to self-injury, by leading them to both accept and change themselves. Also check out [The Mindful Way Through Depression: Freeing Yourself From Chronic Unhappiness](#). Depression may not be your primary problem, but this book and CD will give you techniques to shortcut your thought process when you feel like your brain has started chewing evil cud. Although you are dealing with a sense of self-hatred harsher than most, be assured that you are not alone. In [The Happiness Hypothesis](#) psychologist Jonathan Haidt writes that the development of human self-awareness endowed us with "a personal tormenter. ... We all now live amid a whirlpool of inner chatter, much of which is negative." Finally, you must talk to your physician and therapist about your use of [Tramadol](#). It is a painkiller with some possible psychiatric uses. But you don't want to be your own psychopharmacologist; that's the road to more long-term pain.

—Prudie

[Dear Prudence Video: Abusive Girlfriend](#)

Dear Prudie,

I am a military wife, and my husband recently deployed to Iraq. We have been married for two years and dated long distance for a while, so I am handling this separation very well. But I do have a problem. How do I deal with people who tell me they know "exactly" what I'm going through because their boyfriend is away at college or their spouse is in training for a job and won't be home for a few weeks or months? My husband will be gone for a year, and in that time I will get to see him in person once. I spend my days worried about his safety because of the job he is doing. Trust me, there is no comparison between this and your boyfriend being gone for work or school. I have several friends who are military wives, and they are often told the same thing. How should we respond to the clueless?

—Left Behind

Dear Left,

These must be the same people who visit amputees and say, "I know exactly what you're going through. When my foot falls asleep, it's almost like it's not there!" It's too bad that some people don't understand that the opposite of expressing empathy is trying to equate their own minor experiences with your major ones. What they should be doing is checking in with you to see how you are and gauging whether you need a shoulder to cry on or an evening of distraction—or both. But accept that however insensate they seem, most of these people are trying to comfort you in their bumbling way. With situations like these, you always have the choice to simply disengage—nod at the stupidity and change the subject. But since you and other military wives hear this over and over, you could also try to shut down this misguided line of sympathy by saying, "I'm really proud my husband is serving our country, but believe me there are many nights when I wish he were just away at college or getting job training somewhere safe."

—Prudie

Dear Prudence,

I am the mother of a 4-year-old boy. His father and I both work full time, so he attends an all-day child care program at a nonprofit facility near our home. My husband was not pleased with the way teachers were communicating with us regarding our child's day, so he asked the teachers to write notes in a journal we could read. The other day, I went to pick him up and read that he had misbehaved that day, didn't listen to the teachers, and had a hard time following directions. I finished reading the entry and saw that he was watching a video with the rest of the class. So I wrote back that he should not be rewarded with TV if he does not behave. The director (who had written the last message in the book) came over to tell me how distracting my son was that day. I asked my son to apologize for his behavior, which he did, although I am aware that he is 4 and doesn't really know the meaning of saying "I'm sorry." The director responded with, "Well, that's not good enough. I don't accept your apology." I wanted to flip out right there but held my tongue. What is the best way to handle this situation?

—Preschool Parent

Dear Preschool,

I think the best way is to start asking around for recommendations of really good preschools because I wouldn't send my child back to that one. I'm concerned about what you've said about yours: the lack of communication with parents, the video-watching, and a director who *won't accept the apology of a 4-year-old boy!* There seem to be a lot of expectations being laid on his tiny shoulders and not enough understanding. But I think you, too, need to adjust your thinking about how a 4-year-old should behave. Consider how long and exhausting your workday feels—your son is in school even longer than you're at work, and apparently he's expected to be on his best behavior all

those hours he's away from you. Young children have bad days and melt-downs, and just because he's had a rough time does not mean he should be singled out for punishment. Buy the classic child-rearing guide *Between Parent and Child* by Haim Ginott for help figuring out what's going on inside your son and techniques for being an emotionally tuned-in parent. And, perhaps, while you're looking for new preschools, you and your husband can explore whether you two can possibly stagger your hours at work so you can spend more time with your little one, which surely is what all of you want more than anything.

—Prudie

Dear Prudence,

I am a bridesmaid in a wedding that is a few weeks away. The bride is my oldest friend in the world. Our families are close, and we grew up together. She was a bridesmaid in my wedding, too. Recently, I was at her bachelorette party, and several of us slept over at the bride and groom's apartment. Eventually, the only two people awake were me and the groom. We were playing drinking games and having fun when he suddenly made a pass at me. I stopped him, and after saying no, I tried to distract him by changing the subject. I thought that maybe he'd had a slight lapse of judgment, seeing as we were both under the influence. However, he kept making passes at me, going so far as to ask why I thought it would be wrong, even though I am married and he will be soon. Finally, he backed off and fell asleep. I left the next morning without saying anything to my friend. My husband is furious and thinks I should say something, but I know that if our situations were reversed, I would never believe that my husband would do such a thing. I feel that I should keep this to myself since nothing happened. What should I do?

—Nervous Bridesmaid

Dear Nervous,
Something happened, but probably not enough to cancel a wedding over. So if you were to tell, it would put a veil of distrust, regret, and anger over the day, and likely ruin your friendship. I'm generally in favor of letting someone know they're about to embark on a disastrous union. In this case, the groom sounds like no prize, but in the absence of any other evidence that this is a pattern, it could be that this was a one-time lapse prompted by the contemplation of a lifetime of monogamy and too many martinis. So keep it to yourself, and keep away from late-night drinking games with men other than your husband.

—Prudie

dialogues
Getting Bush Right

Debating *W.*: Deposing Saddam vs. going to war.
By Oliver Stone, Ron Suskind, Jacob Weisberg, and Bob Woodward
Friday, October 24, 2008, at 11:16 AM ET

From: Ron Suskind
To: Oliver Stone, Jacob Weisberg, and Bob Woodward
Subject: Debating *W.*, the Man and the Movie
Posted Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at 10:35 AM ET

Dear Oliver, Jacob, and Bob,

So, it begins—the first, cinematic rough draft of the Bush presidency: *W.* is now, as they say, at a movie theater near you. This is a rarity; as far as I can tell, there have been only two major feature films about a president (one on FDR and Cliff Robertson in *PT-109*) to fill the big screen during the term of the presidents who were their subjects. To this point, the first rough draft of history for this tumultuous period has, in large measure, been a pile of books. I've written three; Bob, you've written four; Jacob, you have one; and Seymour Hersh, Jane Mayer, Tom Ricks, and many others have made seminal, bound contributions. The Bush Library. It will grow. There will be many more volumes and plenty more movies.

And, Oliver—if I may call you that—you have my admiration for relying on the Bush Library rather than indulging in supposition and dark fantasy. For a first cut, *W.* is an ardent, earnest, improvisationally fascinating effort that gives some narrative shape to this era's Shakespearean saga. Still, as someone who has read the key books (much less written a few), I found watching *W.* to be a strange, disembodied experience, two hours in a Cuisinart.

Things are sometimes mixed up—people say more or less what they really said, but in a different place. Yearlong Oval Office debates get boiled into a moment of heated exchange. Imagined yet plausible events stand alongside actual, often historic occurrences. But it's Hollywood. This is part of a conventional cinematic squeeze and squish, composting life into a progression of scenes, episodes, and incidents that leads to something.

The question is where. That's where matters get thornier, where questions of causation intrude about what intent or circumstances drive action. On balance, I thought the movie was a sound representation of the visible, widely known forces at play. Based on my reporting and that of others, I felt that Dick Cheney, Colin Powell, and Donald Rumsfeld were eminently recognizable and that their positions were clearly, if briefly, articulated. The plot and dialogue revealed the basic nature of

the characters—a real feat. You managed to reintroduce some of the world's most famous people to the audience.

This is one of the great values of this type of movie: Notable, often tendentious public figures can be freed from caricature. I think that happens here, especially with Bush (played by Josh Brolin), Cheney (Richard Dreyfuss), and Powell (Jeffrey Wright). These are skilled actors, and they manage to make all three quite human and multidimensional. In fact, in the case of Bush and Cheney, many viewers may find themselves trying to resist the on-screen charms of this duo. I found this to be true in real life as well: Many people who've worked for and around both men say that Bush can be warm and charming and that Cheney, while frightening, is an oddly alluring, intelligent presence.

Yet I found one key—maybe *the* key—relationship to be exaggerated. The evidence, as it is now assembled, doesn't show "Junior" to be engaged in such a battle with "Poppy." Hell, if Bush 41 showed as much angry fortitude as he does in James Cromwell's impersonation, he probably would have won re-election in 1992. Bush the Elder's manhood is definitely not in a blind trust. Beyond that, in terms of dramatic coherence, I found it hard to believe that the loveless father-son tension, as portrayed in the movie, would lead to 43's vengeful outrage over Saddam Hussein's attempt to kill 41. (Besides, there are plenty of foiled assassination attempts on presidents; sort of comes with the job.) While this may have been overplayed, the missing actor in the life of *W*. was 9/11, along with a real disquisition about how, or whether, the catastrophic event changed Junior.

All of these questions, many unanswered, flow into the movie's central drama and denouement: the cause for war. What got us into Iraq? Why are we there? Did Bush know, or at least suspect, that there may not be WMD? Did the beast of Iraq spring, fully formed, from Bush's brain, from his Oedipal architecture? Did President Bush take this nation to war under false pretenses?

I realize, of course, that this question is in a sense unanswerable. The difficulty you face, Oliver, is one we all face. Five-plus years into this war—a war, most certainly, of choice—the reasons we invaded Iraq remain largely shrouded in classified files, lost conversations, carefully guarded secrets. Like the rest of us—from the most seasoned reporters to the tourists walking alongside the ornate iron fence on Pennsylvania Avenue—you had to make use of the prevailing best guesses.

That's why this movie—vivid, raucous, reality-based, well-acted—is a first cinematic rough draft. One of the movie's most jarring scenes, a real keeper in terms of the crisp dialogue and acting and gravity, is the moment Bush is told there are no WMD. He feels as if he's been conned, misled. He rages against his senior advisers. They look away. Rumsfeld takes a "screw you" bite of pecan pie.

Someday, with the arrival of new disclosures and fresh evidence, someone will rewrite this scene. Because Bush was not so much a victim of circumstances and birth order—or of bad advice from ambitious advisers—as he seems in *W*. He knew more than he's letting on. He made choices of his own free will. And in the fullness of time, he'll be held responsible for his actions, as history eventually demands of all presidents.

From: Jacob Weisberg

To: Oliver Stone, Ron Suskind, and Bob Woodward

Subject: Fathers, Sons, and Presidents

Posted Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at 12:27 PM ET

Dear Oliver, Ron, and Bob,

Thanks to the three of you for joining in the discussion. *W*. arrives at what looks like the end of an era—not just of a disastrous eight-year presidency but arguably of the conservative ascendancy that began in 1980. How the Bush family, which once typified pre-Reagan Republicanism, came to play such a pivotal role in this period is a central part of the story. If we want to understand recent history, we need to understand this unreflective family in a way its members will probably never understand themselves.

Oliver, you'll be glad to hear that I disagree with Ron about your treatment of the father-son relationship. To me, the evidence does show George W. to be engaged in an epic battle with his dad. That Oedipal struggle is at the very heart of his presidency's failure. The son came to define so much of himself—his personality, his religion, his decision-making—in opposition to his father. More important, 43 developed his substantive view of the world by rejecting his father's moderate, diplomatic realism. Seeing his father as a failed president (while at the same time wanting to avenge him), W thought the path to success on issue after issue was to reject 41's choices in favor of 40's. You've lost some nuance along the way, but I think you depict the contours of this vexed relationship accurately.

As promised, I won't waste your time complaining about small inaccuracies and changes made for dramatic effect. I do want to challenge you, however, on two places where your version of events is simply at odds with what we know to be true. The first is your basic interpretation of the Iraq war. A crucial scene in the film takes place in the White House situation room. The key players are all there (including Karl Rove, who would not have been). Colin Powell makes his case against the invasion to no avail. Then, Dick Cheney, played by Richard Dreyfuss, stands in front of an electronic map and delivers a lecture.

America's natural resources are being used up, Cheney says, and most of the world's oil and gas is right here in the Middle East. To remain rich and powerful, we have to exploit Iraq's huge untapped reserves. When challenged on the issue of exit strategy, he replies (if I've got this right—I was taking notes in the dark): "There is no exit strategy. We stay." Once the United States owns Iraq, Cheney declares, we'll be in strategic position to control Iran—"the mother lode." As the map lights up with red dots indicating American bases, he goes on: "Control Iran, control Eurasia, control the world. Empire—real empire. Nobody will fuck with us again!"

Oliver, if you'd played the film as a *Dr. Strangelove*-style farce, you might have gotten away with this. The scene is one "mwa-ha-ha" cackle from Dreyfuss away from satire. But we're meant to take this seriously. Do you really think Cheney persuaded Bush to go to war so we could get Iraq's oil and then Iran's? And if so, why do you think that?

Another case in point: The film depicts a meeting between George W. and his dad during the 1988 presidential campaign. The son pops the famous Willie Horton ad into the VCR and tells his father that "Karl" says this could win you the election. That's strong stuff, the elder Bush responds. Just make sure no one can connect it to the campaign. George W. says not to worry, they're going to run it through an independent expenditure committee. "Good work, son," the dad says. "You're earning your spurs."

Great scene, except that no one has ever suggested that George W. had anything to do with the Willie Horton ad, no one has ever proved that George H.W. approved it, and Karl Rove had nothing to do with Bush's 1988 campaign at all. If father and son conspired in the way you depict, they would have been guilty of a federal crime, namely evading contribution limits by coordinating with an outside group. I can't prove that this didn't happen. But as far as I know, you have no basis for thinking that it did.

Oliver, I know that you don't want to be thought of as a conspiracy theorist. But these are conspiracy theories with no evidence to support them. So, why did you put them in your movie?

From: Bob Woodward
To: Oliver Stone, Ron Suskind, and Jacob Weisberg
Subject: Bush *Was* the Decider

Posted Wednesday, October 22, 2008, at 10:33 AM ET

Oliver, Ron, and Jacob,

Ron, I'm struck that you feel we don't have a general understanding of the cause of the Iraq war. You write, "The reasons we invaded Iraq remain largely shrouded in classified files, lost conversations, carefully guarded secrets." While significant new information may one day come out, I strongly disagree. I believe there is already an expansive record in the Bush library, and the work that has been done on the Iraq war answers this question.

The foremost cause, in Bush's mind, was 9/11. It set an atmosphere of "We are in peril, we need to do something." Bush believed Iraq was a threat. The second was, I believe, his conviction that Iraq did have weapons of mass destruction. Recall that the House and Senate voted on a resolution to give the president support and authority to use the U.S. military in Iraq as he deemed "appropriate and necessary." The atmosphere at the time was very much "We are threatened, there is trouble. Saddam Hussein is a threat." Too many officials and people believed this. Third, the war plan that was presented to President Bush in a dozen or more briefings, and subsequently outlined in several books, shows that it was thought the invasion would be comparatively easy and that it got easier as the war plan was refined. Fourth, there was an undeniable momentum to war at the time. Fifth, in Oliver's movie and in many of the books, the portrait of Bush is that of "the Impatient Man." When some intelligence suggested that the chief U.N. weapons inspector, Hans Blix, was not being fully forthcoming, Bush ordered war.

The military was ready, and the invasion looked like it was going to be easy. Congress and the public supported it. And the press, very much including myself, was not inquisitive enough to dig deeper into the allegations of weapons of mass destruction.

While there certainly may be some substantial revelations yet to come, the idea that this is basically unanswerable, I think, is wrong. In *Plan of Attack*, I quote from a top-secret memo of Aug. 14, 2002, called "Iraq: Goals, Objectives and Strategy." One of its stated purposes was to "minimize disruption in international oil markets." Oil was put on the table as one of the reasons for war, and I think this adds to the background noise. Ron, you say of Bush, "He knew more than he's letting on." I think there's truth to that, but I also believe he let on quite a bit. To those of us who dug in the vineyards of the Bush administration, the basic causes of the war in Iraq are there.

You also write that Bush "made choices of his own free will." I think that's exactly right. He was heavily influenced by Cheney and a number of others, but the decisions were his. As he said to me, "I believe we have a duty to free people," to liberate people. Many have said this is something that was concocted after weapons of mass destruction failed to surface. But I watched him jump in his chair when he said it, and I think it is a deep and genuine conviction on his part. Certainly many would disagree with it, but I think this conviction was one of his primary drivers. I doubt very much that there was some mysterious,

Oedipal force at work or that there is a secret reason that remains carefully guarded. The drivers in all of this are not really shrouded.

My caveat, obviously, is you don't know what you don't know.

Jacob, you make note of the scene in *W.* where Bush and his advisers debate whether to go to war. In it, the Colin Powell character makes his case against the invasion. The problem is, as best I can tell, no such meeting ever took place. The president never called the National Security Council and the top advisers together to have a real knock-down, drag-out, come-to-Jesus meeting. It gives Powell more credit than he deserves. This is the broad meeting that Bush *should* have had to hash it out among his advisers. Powell's plea to the president in August 2002, which he recently affirmed, was that the administration needed to look at the consequences of war, but he never argued openly to the president that he should not invade Iraq.

You also make the point that Cheney's comments in this mythical gathering of Bush's war Cabinet did not occur. The idea of "empire," which certainly may have resided in the minds of some, including Cheney, was to my knowledge never really put on the table. The idea that the real issue was Iran, again, may have been in their minds, but there is no record of this discussion at that time. Additionally, I think you have a good point about the pinning of the Willie Horton ad from the 1988 campaign on George W. Bush. I've seen no evidence that this was the case.

At the same time, there is an overall sense or feel in the movie that gets a number of things correct. Bush's notorious casualness and inattention to detail are on full display. The movie conveys his disengagement, his odd and frequent sense of being removed.

I think one of the best scenes in the movie is when Bush makes it clear to Cheney that he's the boss—that Cheney can push and argue and have his say, but Bush is the boss. That's why I say (and I think Bart Gellman agrees with this in *Angler*, his book on Cheney) that the vice president was incredibly important, powerful, and persuasive, but that President Bush made these decisions on his own. He did so, as Ron said, "of his own free will."

The issue for history in the coming years and decades will be further examination of how Bush exercised that free will. I don't think he felt the constraints of his father's legacy, or even Cheney's influence or Powell's distance or Rumsfeld's attitude of "I'm in charge of the military." Again, I think Ron has hit on it: It's a question of the president's free will. In the end, the movie shows that.

I think the bending and distorting of history were not necessary for this film to make its point, but it does show that the Iraq war was and is George W. Bush's.

From: Ron Suskind
To: Oliver Stone, Jacob Weisberg, and Bob Woodward
Subject: Getting Bush—and His Dad—Right
Posted Wednesday, October 22, 2008, at 1:37 PM ET

Just so there's not a lot of hubbub over not very much, let me reiterate what I said about the father-son relationship. I thought it was somewhat overplayed and exaggerated in the movie. I didn't say that there was nothing to it. Clearly, it has been a defining relationship for 43, both as a president and a man, as I've reported—and it has been a central feature in Junior's impulse to "make things personal" as a way of organizing a complex world. I thought the relationship was more nuanced than the movie indicated, and was overstated as the driving force in Bush's architecture, especially in terms of Iraq. In the first few years of his presidency, in fact, Bush was actually feeling somewhat liberated from his long, uneven relationship with 41, making it less of a causal force in his march to war.

From: Oliver Stone
To: Bob Woodward, Ron Suskind, and Jacob Weisberg
Subject: Viewing Bush With Compassion
Posted Wednesday, October 22, 2008, at 6:23 PM ET

First, it's truly an honor for me to join this discussion with three men who have done so much in cracking the code of secrecy around the Bush administration. You have done this nation a great service, ironically following in the footsteps of Bob and his colleague, Carl Bernstein, in the tormenting of Richard Nixon. Stanley Weiser, the screenwriter for *W.*, and I could not have produced a defensible script for this film as recently as one or two years ago without the investigative work of you three, as well as that of James Risen, David Corn, Michael Isikoff, Jane Mayer, Barton Gellman, Thomas Ricks, Frank Rich, Michael Gordon, Bernard Trainer, Larry Everest, and Sy Hersh among several others, who have partially pulled back the curtain on this administration's actions over the past seven years—and I'm certain more is yet to come.

Our purpose was a dramatization. As you know, these quotes and speeches are strung over years and numerous meetings. As dramatists we simplify and condense, yet I don't think we crossed the line of the spirit of what happened. By example, in illustrating Ron's 1 Percent Doctrine, we hope you understand why we included it in a lunch scene, wherein the theory is

illustrated through a piece of lettuce in a bologna sandwich. Drama requires a concrete representation of the abstract.

As dramatists, we're shaping a pattern that we see repeating itself in this W's presidency. In my opinion, you could almost describe the dialogue of these eight years as a loop in the sense that the body language, the understanding, the dialogue remains very much the same. The stimulus changes; whether it's the economic debacle or the Iraq war, it doesn't seem to matter to Bush in the way he responds to these situations. His speeches are remarkably similar, as is his delivery of them. So basically we have to make our patterns dramatic and economic. And in the film we are only dealing with the first three years of the presidency.

And in presenting an immense public figure like W—or Nixon, for that matter—we felt that it was essential that the film empathize (though not sympathize) with the subject at the center. I have strong negative personal feelings about this man. But as a dramatist, I consider it professional to remove my feelings, to allow the audience to live through him and see him as human.

In not showing 9/11—as Ron points out—I'd say that to that end, we felt 9/11 was an event that most of the viewers would have experienced and know about intimately. In fact, it was the subject of my last film, *World Trade Center*, which was about the harrowing events of that day. Our film, *W.*, opens a month or so later with a discussion of the "axis of evil" speech, underlining the broader context of the need for revenge after 9/11. Bush, in this scene, is now an authoritative figure who has found his identity as a "war president"; in many scenes that follow, we try to show how he, Rove, Cheney, Rumsfeld, and others politicized the 9/11 attack to erode many of our freedoms and to settle personal scores—which, in the end, is W's worst sin, in my book.

As for the role of his father, I think the most eloquent discussion of this lies in Jacob's book *The Bush Tragedy*. There are many anecdotes and quotes of this strong attachment between father and son. This is further argued in the book *First Son*, by Bill Minutaglio, a respected Texas journalist whose work provided for us a crucial record of his earlier years. Bob, you touched on this as well in *State of Denial*, quoting Scowcroft: "George W. couldn't decide whether he was going to rebel against his father or try to beat him at his own game. Now, he had tried at the game, and it was a disaster." In summation of this idea, I think Jacob truly hit on one of the most original aspects of this story—in fact, the film doesn't really resemble another political film that I know of, and the many journalists that I've talked to in the last few weeks have never really mentioned another film, which is rare.

So there is an original mixing of mythologies in this, involving (as Jacob points out) the prodigal son becoming the respectable son in Act 2. But not really. He turns out to be, in the third act of

his life, an Icarus figure from Greek mythology, whose wings were melted by the sun when he tried to fly higher than his father.

The issue of the 11-minute-long scene of the meeting in the "situation room" is a very interesting one to me, and we should probably discuss this in a future post. Yes, the scene is entirely invented, as I am sure there is no way that these principals could have assembled in one room and so clearly summed up their points of view. But, I think the dialogue fairly represents the point of view of Cheney (geopolitical domination), Rumsfeld (draining the swamp, shaking up the Middle East, re-establishing the Pentagon's dominance after the Afghan war), and Powell (objections to the war). Bob, if I remember correctly, mentioned that there was some shouting behind closed doors between Powell and his group and Cheney and his group. I agree that we made Powell probably stronger than he was, but in the end, we remained accurate to his capitulation. We see him as the "good soldier," who all his life prepared for this moment of standing up for a principle, yet, in the end, he folded. The right thing Powell could have done was resign, as Cyrus Vance did, as secretary of state before the war.

Not to belabor this too much right now, but Cheney's advocacy of an energy policy that focused on the Middle East, coupled with his arguments for pre-emptive war, are well-known. In a speech in 1999 at the Institute of Petroleum, he argued that, "By 2010 we will need on the order of an additional 50 million barrels a day. So where is this oil going to come from? ... While many regions of the world offer great oil opportunities, the Middle East, with two-thirds of the world's oil and the lowest cost, is still where the prize ultimately is." Certainly we can agree that questions about energy, security, and regional stability were a prominent part of the discussion leading up to the war. But we went further and imagined a complete geopolitical strategy for Eurasia, where 80 percent of the world's energy resources lie, to ensure, in Cheney's mind, the survival of the United States. This is viewed as an outgrowth of his thinking developed in the Project for the New American Century.

Finally, to Jacob's point about the 1988 presidential election and the critical role W played in his father's campaign: He was the go-to guy on the campaign for outside groups, including evangelical organizations. One such organization, the National Security Political Action Committee, produced the Willie Horton ad. It's simply inconceivable to me to think that W, who proved in his campaign to be a shrewd political operative, did not know about it before it was aired. We do connect dots here, but it's consistent with a central element of W's personality: the need to be tough as nails and resolute in all fights—even when wrong, and especially during political contests. He learned this lesson the hard way after losing an early congressional race in Texas, which we also explore in the film.

While we attempted to paint a human portrait of George W. Bush, I firmly believe that history will not spare this man. His record of playing the fiddle while Rome burned will speak for itself. But I believe our film offers, ironically to me, a strange compassion for W, who is so hard to like. By trying to achieve compassion rather than condemnation, I do hope that we can open our thinking and understanding to the great price we have paid for allowing him to be our leader for the last eight years. Compassion for the man, yes, but a greater compassion for our country. And maybe some long-forgotten humility from all of us. Whether our leaders understand it or not, there is great strength in humility.

From: Jacob Weisberg
To: Oliver Stone, Bob Woodward, and Ron Suskind
Subject: Why Did Bush Go to War?
Posted Thursday, October 23, 2008, at 10:11 AM ET

Dear Ron, Bob, and Oliver:

Before I respond to Oliver, I'd like to take up Bob's assertion that we know why Bush went to war in Iraq. Bob, thanks more than anything to your four books, we do know an amazing amount about the circumstances. But I'm with Ron in thinking that basic mysteries about the decision remain. Among the questions I'd like to have answers to:

- On what date did Bush make the decision?
- Where was he when he made the decision?
- Who else was in the room?
- What did he think his reason was at the time?

In explaining why you think Bush went to war, you mention a number of different reasons, which aren't mutually exclusive:

- 1) 9/11 created an atmosphere of peril.
- 2) Bush believed Saddam had WMD.
- 3) He thought the war would be easy.
- 4) There was a lot of momentum toward war.
- 5) Bush was impatient with the U.N. inspections.
- 6) He thinks America has a duty to liberate oppressed peoples.

Members of Bush's war council, including Wolfowitz, Cheney, Rice, and Rumsfeld, had additional reasons that may have influenced him as well. Among them:

- 7) They thought Saddam was helping al-Qaida.
- 8) They thought Saddam had supported terrorism against the United States.
- 9) To stop Saddam's violations of human rights.

- 10) To show American power and resolve.
- 11) To catalyze democratic change in the Middle East.
- 12) To prove we could win wars with better technology and fewer troops.
- 13) Enough with this creep already.

Others have proposed possible personal and unconscious reasons that pushed Bush toward war:

- 14) To protect his father and his family.
- 15) To get revenge on his father's enemy.
- 16) To fix his father's mistake in leaving Saddam in power.
- 17) To fix Clinton's mistake of letting the problem fester.
- 18) To prove himself a strong and consequential leader.

Oliver's film suggests a few more possible reasons.

- 19) To secure access to Iraqi oil.
- 20) To set the stage for an assault on Iran.
- 21) To create a new American empire.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. And it's likely that Bush's decision was made for some combination of these reasons (or at least of the first 18 of them). It's also possible that the conclusion was overdetermined—that Bush just thought, "There are so many good reasons for getting rid of Saddam, I don't need to decide exactly why we're doing it."

Bush's rationales have shifted over time. Unless he keeps a secret diary, I seriously doubt he could give an accurate answer to the question himself. As Rumsfeld might put it, the issue of why Bush went to war is a known unknown.

From: Bob Woodward
Subject: Why Bush Went to War: It's in My Book
Posted Thursday, October 23, 2008, at 11:36 AM ET

That's a good list of reasons, and as with most human decisions, a series of events, attitudes, and personalities converged to lead Bush to his decision. I still don't think there is a basic mystery. I hate to say this, but read Pages 253 to 274 of *Plan of Attack*. That was my best effort from all kinds of sources, notes, documents, calendars, and interviews with the key players, including Bush. I don't think there was a single moment when he made the decision, but there was an evolution, and it's in those 21 pages. Needless to say, much went before that, but I think that period from Christmas 2002 to Jan. 13, 2003, was critical.

Whether it was the making of the decision or the crystallizing of it, most of the answers to your questions are there. Some day we may learn more, but I haven't seen anything that adds to or changes that record.

From: Jacob Weisberg
To: Oliver Stone, Bob Woodward, and Ron Suskind
Subject: I Read Your Book—and I Still Have Questions
Posted Thursday, October 23, 2008, at 12:08 PM ET

Those pages are heavily underlined in my copy of *Plan of Attack*. To me, they suggest some kind of crystallization or point of no return in the war planning. But I think some significant evidence points to Bush making his decision to depose Saddam much earlier, in late June or early July 2002.

On July 7, Condi Rice told Richard Haass, the director of policy planning at the State Department, that the decision had already been made. Colin Powell confirmed this to Haass. On July 23, Richard Dearlove, the head of British intelligence, returned from a trip to Washington and told Tony Blair that Bush had already decided to depose Saddam. (The minutes of that briefing have come to be known as the Downing Street Memo.) In his Aug. 26 speech to the VFW, Dick Cheney laid out his case against Iraq in a way that you describe, in *Plan of Attack*, as "just short of a declaration of war." (For anyone interested, the argument that the decision took place in the summer of 2002 is on pages 197 to 207 of [my book](#).) This issue has big implications. If I'm correct, it means that the back-and-forth over U.N. authorization, the argument about inspections, the congressional debate, and the public debate about whether to go to war were all largely a charade from Bush's point of view.

So, Bob, with all due respect to your amazing reporting, you haven't yet persuaded me that we really know the when and the where of the decision, let alone the how and the why.

From: Ron Suskind
To: Oliver Stone, Bob Woodward, and Jacob Weisberg
Subject: Has Angry Oliver Gone Soft?
Posted Friday, October 24, 2008, at 10:24 AM ET

Oliver, Bob, and Jacob,

Let me dive in between two of our most able interlocutors—Jacob and Bob—about the remaining mysteries of the march to

war. As I've said repeatedly, history's early drafts of this era are formed by many diverse contributions. We journalists are all part of a team, as I see it—competitive, surely, among ourselves, but more pointedly, we are aligned against the evolving cults of message-discipline and secrecy. In other words, we're all in this together.

Bob, clearly, has sat in what journalists generally consider "access heaven" in his unmatched colloquies with Bush. You have witnessed Bush jumping out of his chair to make a point, and many other moments from your interviews provide some signature scenes of this period. But, I wonder, Bob, if you think, looking back, that access to Bush has not been as valuable—hour for hour—as it has been with other presidents whom you've interviewed. I think it's fair to say that Bush and his team don't believe that truthful public disclosure and dialogue are among their central obligations. Other presidents have railed against the troublemakers in the press, but they felt, often reluctantly, that letting the American people know their mind—the good-enough reasons that drive action—was part of their job description. Frankly, I think the best book of your quartet is *State of Denial*—the one for which, I gather, you were not given access to Bush. But that's a rare occurrence. (The last president you wrote about who wouldn't grant an audience was Nixon, and, of course, you and Carl notched a few historic bell-ringers back then.)

By the way, Oliver, I thought it was a fascinating twist that you placed many of the quotes from Bob's interviews into Bush's mouth during press conferences. In past presidencies, many of the chief executive's most pertinent utterances have come during press conferences. Maybe it will be that way again in the future—a more effective, sunlit (or spot-lit) version of public dialogue, to my mind.

But in terms of the reasons for war, the decision to invade, the selling of the war—and specifically (to mangle that signature phrase) what leaders knew and when they knew it—I think that despite Bob's ardent efforts, there will be many more disclosures and clarifications in the years to come. Just in my last book, *The Way of the World*, I came across fresh, detailed accounts of battles from January 2002, when senior officials of the Defense Department and CIA were instructed by the White House to begin a one-year, logistical planning process for the invasion. At that point, it was not a matter of if. It was, in essence, a 12-month ticking clock for the execution of an approved policy. What's more, in the spring of 2002, the White House told senior intelligence officials that WMD would be the lead justification for the invasion. The response from intelligence officials, especially those with expertise on Iraq, was that using WMDs as justification for war was a perilous gambit—advice that the White House ignored.

Mind you, this is just one example, a glimpse of the continent that remains in shadows, despite the tireless efforts of journalists

with official access (like Bob) or without it (like me and many others). At day's end, many of the self-correcting features of our system of governance—congressional oversight, a strong judiciary, a robust press—failed in this era. Even a special effort like the Silberman-Robb Commission, slated to dig into the megascandal of pre-war intelligence and the selling of a war of choice, was halted at the gates of the White House. That's like investigating a murder without ever going to the scene of the crime or questioning those with motive or intent. It is, to my mind, an American tragedy that this administration will leave the stage with a host of basic questions left unanswered—questions that you, Jacob, ever thorough, outline nicely.

But, Oliver, what left me feeling a touch of ennui at the movie's conclusion is how this played out cinematically—not in spite of your use of available sources but, maybe (ironically), because of it. Bush comes off largely as a victim of circumstances, a man overwhelmed and overmatched. How could there not be WMD? Why is this war turning into a debacle? Who's responsible?

I don't buy it. Never have. Here, on balance, you and I agree, Bob. It's a matter of Bush exercising free will. It's his war. He's responsible. What qualities in W's architecture drove events? It was his preternatural faith in the power of confidence. He felt that believing in something with absolute certainty (even if it's willed rather than earned) is the key to victory, the spine of leadership. And once victory is won, no one will ask inconvenient questions about how it was achieved. The Bush view, then, is win first and win big—and if there's a mess, we'll clean it up later. And, someday, the winners will write history. It's the gambler's philosophy, a model that rests on pure nerve, a familiar two-step in the nation's history and culture, and one you see so often of late in public and private spheres in America. Eventually, complex reality will make itself felt.

It is, of course, easy to judge, swiftly and harshly. For a writer or filmmaker, that is often the path to diminished outcomes. Listen, Oliver, I was quite moved by your entry, by how the effort to feel compassion for Bush has widened your sensibilities, spurring an appreciation—as, clearly, you hope the movie will—that "there is great strength in humility." I hear you. But I'm sure some readers, and viewers of *W.*, are asking themselves, "Is this progress, or has angry Oliver gone soft?"

From: Bob Woodward
To: Oliver Stone, Ron Suskind, and Jacob Weisberg
Subject: Deposing Saddam vs. Going to War

Posted Friday, October 24, 2008, at 11:16 AM ET

Jacob, yes, I have read and underlined many portions of *your* book. Here is the problem, as I see it—and this is based on

extensive conversations, many at the time in 2002, with those directly involved:

It is crucial to make the distinction between 1) a decision to "depose" Saddam and 2) the decision to go to war to do it. First, the Rice-Haas conversation, as best I can tell, was really about the decision to get rid of Saddam, not necessarily to go to war. Recall that Powell, with Bush's blessing, launched a rather active diplomatic effort at the United Nations that lived for months. In fact, in news coverage, the unanimous 15-0 U.N. Security Council resolution in November was depicted as a big victory for Powell and diplomacy. In addition, the October 2002 congressional resolutions supporting a war were viewed as tools designed to give more weight to the diplomatic track.

Second, detailed reporting on the so-called Downing Street memo shows that Richard Dearlove insisted that the minutes were not accurate at the time, and within a week they were redone to reflect what he maintained he had said to Blair at the briefing. It is much less dramatic and conclusive than the Downing Street version. I have never been able to get a copy of the redone minutes, but numerous people directly involved say they show less-sweeping conclusions.

Nonetheless, it is clear that Bush did not think diplomacy would work, and there are elements of a Japanese Kabuki dance in all of this. But I don't think he had decided finally on war at that time. As he has said, in August 2002, he had not yet seen a war plan that he thought would work. Yet he was pointing toward war, and there was an inescapable momentum toward war.

The Rice-Haass conversation and the Dearlove briefing (as allegedly corrected), however, don't really support the conclusion that there was some charade or that Bush had made a final, secret decision on war. That charade came later, in January 2003, when he had decided yet publicly insisted that he had not. Historians will be able to pick through the various records someday and, I hope, answer these questions in a more definitive way.

dispatches

Swing-State Rednecks

What Murtha and Obama get wrong about race and class in western Pennsylvania.

By Dennis B. Roddy

Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at 7:09 PM ET

PITTSBURGH—When John P. Murtha, a Democratic silverback from a nearby stretch of Appalachia, called western Pennsylvania a "[racist area](#)," everybody seemed outraged, but no

one was surprised. The truth or falsity of his remark factored into almost no one's assessment—there was just horror that somebody said it at all. Trying to mend fences, Murtha later told a TV station that the area is vastly better than in years past. A scant five or 10 years ago, he said, it was "[really redneck](#)."

As the howls of outrage bounced off the hillsides, my mind turned back to the last day of November 1976, when I sat with some colleagues at the Old Keg bar on Main Street in Portage, Pa., in Cambria County. Then and now, it was the heart of the 12th Congressional District—the one Murtha had represented for nearly three years. Another 31 lay ahead of him and, behind him, an ageless history of race, immigration, ethnic identity, and class that had framed the place.

Word had just reached us that [Godfrey Cambridge](#), the pioneering black actor, had dropped dead on the set of his latest film.

"Godfrey Cambridge died," one of us marveled.

The bartender didn't pause.

"Another nigger died," he said.

What was extraordinary was how ordinary that remark was. This guy wore it on his sleeve. And his lips. And his heart. In this town, he fit in.

All I could muster was a joke to point out the venality of what had just crossed his lips.

"Uh, yeah, Mike. How many is that this year?"

He glared back as my colleagues laughed. I had to wonder, though, if this wasn't a man who kept count that way. Before anyone ventures that this was a lone bigot, stuck in a lonely corner of a world that changed too much around him, keep in mind that Mike ran for school board in the next election. His wife, who knew my feelings about race, rushed up with his pamphlet and tried to soothe things over with humor.

"Vote for a bigot," she laughed. She went on to assure me that Mike was not, in his core, a bad man. I don't doubt that. He could be kind—gracious, even—and did not tolerate fighting or obscenity on the premises. He was a man of his place, and his place was this beery stretch of western Pennsylvania, Jack Murtha country.

So when Murtha spoke of western Pennsylvania as a "racist area," he was painting with a broad brush. But he was also covering a lot of places that needed the paint.

My career in reporting has coincided with Murtha's tenure in Congress, and all of it has been centered in the western half of Pennsylvania. In those years in Cambria, I attended municipal meetings at which "nigger" would sometimes be used with such insouciance by the locals that a man had to wonder whether they didn't use that word in their prayers. At a meeting of the Penn Cambria School Board, a member, livid over the leak of a document, demanded of me, "So who's the nigger in the wood pile?"

"Aw, Marie," I groaned.

Well, she said, that's just the way she is. I threatened to report it, but my editors forbade the word on the pages of my paper. Aside from that, my wife warned me that it would probably get Marie more votes at the next election.

At a borough council meeting in the nearby town of Cresson, Pa., a town employee, discussing the location of a water main leak, suggested it might be somewhere around Angelo Manufacturing at the time a big employer and then the largest maker of Afro hair picks.

"You know," he smiled broadly, "the nigger comb factory." Then he repeated it, just to make sure everyone had heard him.

High and low, from hill to valley in this stretch of the Alleghenies, such talk resonated through my childhood and well into adulthood. I don't hear this kind of talk as frequently these days, but I have no doubt a scary portion of the population is still seized by the underlying prejudice. Its expression has become forbidden, but I'm white enough to know the code, and the code is widespread enough for me to recognize it many places.

What is harder to spot is the curious backspin that informs Obama's troubles with the people in Pennsylvania's West. Murtha tried to explain it in his impolitic remarks, then his clumsy amendments to them. But the attempt was lost in the uproar over the term "racist."

Here's what he said:

There's no question western Pennsylvania's a racist area. When I say racist area, you know, the older people are hesitant—they're slow in seeing change, real change. It's better, though, than it was two or three months ago. Two or three months ago it was bad.

I had a World War II veterans rally, this was maybe three or four months ago, they're all telling me, "I'm not voting for Obama." They're all Democrats. I've got a heavily

Democrat district. I don't hear that now. I think the economic situation's changed that.

He was speaking of older voters, whose beliefs are informed by the immigrant experience. Johnstown, Murtha's home, once had a vibrant Ku Klux Klan. I know this because they burned crosses on the hillside above my mother's home in the 1920s, and they were not objecting to the presence of black people—the same black people the mayor of Johnstown ordered to leave town in 1923.

The Klan was upset with Catholic immigrants—my mom's people.

Survival and support in this maelstrom of immigration at the front end of the 20th century meant sticking to your own. The Irish stayed with the Irish. The Slavs with the Slavs. The Italians not only with other Italians, but with the Italians from their own provinces. The Catholic church in which I was baptized sits directly beside another Catholic church. One was for the Irish, the other for the Germans.

Getting past this would take time—and a capacity first to move out of the ethnic enclaves. I am 54, and my generation is probably the first in town to begin marrying in appreciable numbers outside of its ethnic group. Our young people are remarkably without prejudice.

But in Jack Murtha's district as elsewhere, ethnicity also informs class, and class issues often dictate how we miss the point about race and what to do about it.

George H.W. Bush, the Bush everyone now praises for competence to avoid confusing him with his son, was content to allow the Willie Horton ads to run on his behalf. His campaign manager, Lee Atwater, promised he would make Willie Horton the Democratic running mate that year. Only a willing fool could think that those ads were simply about crime, especially given that Willie Horton committed his while on a furlough program passed by a Republican predecessor to Democratic Gov. Michael Dukakis.

One of the interesting sidelights of the 1988 contest was a story that mentioned what were viewed as quirky contradictions in the elder Bush. A writer noted that Bush had opposed the 1964 Civil Rights Act yet once asked a party guest to leave his house for telling a racist joke.

Presumably, the message was that Bush was more complex a character than we'd been led to think. For a Cambria County boy, raised around liberals who loved guns and working-class steelworkers who just hated it when their children married out of their ethnic group, much less racial category, there was no mystery.

Bush had ejected his guest not for being a racist but for being déclassé. Such conduct was embarrassing and inappropriate in the way that one doesn't go to a dinner party and brag about his sexual conquests. Such talk is for the locker room, not the boardroom.

There is no way of adequately stressing how much class plays a role in this sort of thing, especially in a region in which blue-collar workers are a remnant of days as lost as the smokestacks that were torn down in the Monongahela and Conemaugh valleys two decades ago. The people who remain to speak with yesterday's voice are yesterday's blue-collar workers. In western Pennsylvania, there are a lot of them. The region has one of the highest average ages in the nation. They hold to the old ways, not only on race but on guns and abortion.

Barack Obama has offended them on two levels, and they do not always overlap.

There are those voters here, in numbers no longer easy to measure simply by walking among them, who cannot find it in themselves to vote for a man of color. The empiricist in me says they are antique remnants of their parents' ethnic isolation. They are unreachable, but their children and grandchildren inherited only their DNA, not their politics. To understand how apolitical this racism is, consider that, much like the Republicans of the Old South, the GOP here has tended to offer more opportunities to run and participate to African-Americans than have the Democrats, who have been slow to put up black candidates for statewide office. The Republicans ran Lynn Swann, a Hall of Fame receiver for the Steelers, for governor.

The other group is, well—it's me and people like me: people who grew up in staunchly liberal, even quasi-socialist households in which nobody doubted that Sunday was for church and the first day of deer season was a day off school and nobody's sister had an abortion. These were cultural as well as religious values in the 12th District. Liberals not only owned guns but sometimes used them to redistribute the wealth. During mineworker strikes dating to the 1920s, the occasional gunshot fired from a wooded hill was not the work of a right-wing gunman. That was labor metal flying at you.

When Obama made his remarks about bitter Pennsylvanians clinging to guns and religion, many of us saw it as a Harvard man giving us the high hat. It spoke to issues of class and a sense that the man who had been entrusted the tattered banner of the working middle class somehow thought us incapable of deciding our own destinies.

Possibly, our religion clings to us. Certainly those of us who practice the religions of our parents do so because it is part of our identities—not so much something we have chosen to retain as something that has chosen to retain us. We simply chose to remain. Our guns are not a solace. They are a testimony to our

distrust of the ruling classes. We just wish someone would read us correctly at some point and not do it in the voice of an adult reading a children's story.

I do not know whether the person who finally decodes western Pennsylvania will become president. I'm pretty sure that whoever does it will be able to run the country.

election scorecard

Staying Strong

Obama maintains an edge in swing states.

Thursday, October 23, 2008, at 12:16 PM ET

explainer

What's "Street Money"?

Or "walking-around money"? Or "get-out-the-vote money"?

By Christopher Beam

Thursday, October 23, 2008, at 5:28 PM ET

Philadelphia Democrats are anxious that the Obama campaign won't be handing out "street money" for the general election. "[Honestly, they'd be crazy not to do it](#)," said one ward leader. What's street money, and who gets it?

It's cash that's given to help get people to the polls. The money can go toward perks like coffee and doughnuts for door knockers, gas for volunteers to chauffeur elderly voters, or pocket money for kids who distribute fliers and sample ballots on Election Day. Also known as "walking-around money" or "get-out-the-vote money," it's most common in poor areas of Philadelphia; Chicago; Newark, N.J.; Baltimore; Los Angeles; and other big cities. Both parties use street money, but it's more common among Democrats, who tend to be better represented in the areas that rely on it.

Some street money comes from party fundraisers, like the Philadelphia Democratic Party's biannual Jefferson-Jackson dinner. But most of it comes directly from the candidates. Everyone from the presidential nominee to congressmen and state representatives are expected to chip in. (The top of the ticket usually contributes the most.) In Philadelphia, the candidate sends a check to the chairman of the city's Democratic Party, who then divides the money up among the 69 ward leaders, who in turn divvy up their cash among the 50 or so committee people in each ward. In 2004, John Kerry [spent](#) hundreds of thousands of dollars on Philadelphia street money,

and ward leaders received checks for as much as \$8,000. Individual volunteers can generally expect anywhere from \$10 to \$200, depending on the location and the type of work they're doing.

The practice is legal everywhere—it's [protected](#) by the First Amendment—but some states have tougher restrictions than others. In Philadelphia, committee people can hand out cash for any reason, as long as they're not paying someone for their vote. (The U.S. Code [prohibits](#) vote purchasing.) In New Jersey, campaign officials have to pay the workers in checks and their names, addresses, and amounts paid must be submitted to the Election Law Enforcement Commission. Presidential campaigns are always required to report the money to the Federal Elections Commission.

Street money has its detractors, but most politicians accept it as a reality. During the primaries, Hillary Clinton's campaign [gave](#) \$38,000 to an Ohio state legislator, who distributed the money to "get-out-the-vote" workers in Cleveland, plus tens of thousands of dollars to people in Houston and other Texas towns near the Mexican border. Obama did not provide street money then but might change his mind for the general election. In 2000, Jon Corzine paid volunteers \$75 each to increase turnout for his Senate campaign. Walter Mondale [described](#) showing up to a Philadelphia Democratic committee meeting in 1980, only to have someone stand up and demand, "Where's the money?"

Abuses do occur. In Kentucky, a practice called "[vote hauling](#)"—paying people to drive sympathetic voters to the polls—often translates into vote buying. Street money can also be used to *suppress* votes. In 1993, Republican operative Ed Rollins [bragged](#) to reporters that he had given half a million dollars in "walking-around money" to black ministers and Democratic activists in New Jersey, and in return they persuaded voters to stay home. (When the Justice Department launched an investigation, Rollins said he had been lying.)

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

Explainer thanks Tracy Campbell of the University of Kentucky, Philadelphia ward leader Greg Paulmier, and Al Spivey, chief of staff to Philadelphia Councilman Curtis Jones.

explainer

Hey, That's My Lunar Uranium!

Can India claim natural resources on the moon?

By Jacob Leibenluft

Wednesday, October 22, 2008, at 6:19 PM ET

India [launched an unmanned lunar orbiter](#) Wednesday morning, marking the nation's first mission to the moon. The orbiter will, among other tasks, attempt to identify possible uranium deposits on the moon. Can India claim whatever uranium it finds up there?

No. The [Outer Space Treaty](#)—which was signed in 1967 and has been ratified by almost every country with a space program—is very clear that "outer space, including the moon and other celestial bodies, is not subject to national appropriation." (That's why the American flag [placed on the moon](#) by Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong was a [symbolic gesture](#) rather than an effort to claim the moon as U.S. territory.) So even if the mission—which is being conducted with the cooperation of NASA and other national space agencies—manages to find some uranium deposits, no country would be able to claim ownership. For that matter, it's [highly questionable](#) whether there are any property rights at all in space. As for those deeds for lunar land you can [buy online](#), the [legal consensus](#) suggests they'll never hold up in court.

If a country—or a private company—were to try opening a mine on the moon, it would be stepping onto uncertain legal ground. The Outer Space Treaty is silent on the question of extracting natural resources in space, and legal experts differ over what language mandating "free access" to all areas of space might mean for mining. Likewise, the treaty prohibits "harmful contamination," and this restriction might cause thorny legal issues if extensive mining operations were thought to raise environmental concerns.

Another international agreement, the so-called [Moon Treaty](#), which was adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in 1979, is a good deal clearer. It states that "the moon and its natural resources are the common heritage of mankind" and specifies that those resources should only be exploited under the oversight of a new international regime. But the Moon Treaty was never accepted by any of the traditional space powers, like the United States or Russia. India is among the 17 countries that have signed the Moon Treaty, but it never fully ratified the agreement.

Some space-law experts contend that there may be a precedent for mining: Both the Americans and the Soviets took moon rocks back to Earth, and no one objected. More probably, any attempts to extract uranium or the potential energy source [helium-3](#) would spur a new round of international talks. In that case, countries might look to agreements surrounding the high seas or Antarctica for guidance. In the case of Antarctica, rules on land use are determined by the few dozen nations that have signed onto a special [Antarctic Treaty](#). In the 1990s, those countries agreed to ban mining on the continent [until at least 2048](#). By contrast, the [International Seabed Authority](#) was set up in 1994 to administer claims by companies seeking to mine in deep-sea areas that lie hundreds of miles offshore; the United

States, however, hasn't ratified the Law of the Sea Treaty that would make it part of that organization.

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

Explainer thanks Joanne Gabrynowicz of the University of Mississippi, Henry Hertzfeld of the George Washington University, and Rosanna Sattler of Posternak Blankstein & Lund LLP.

explainer

And Down the Stretch They Come ...

Why do polls always tighten right before an election?

By Brian Palmer

Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at 6:09 PM ET

With the election just two weeks away, [some polls show the gap closing](#) between Sens. John McCain and Barack Obama. That fits with the conventional wisdom that presidential elections [tend to tighten up](#) in the days before an election. Is end-game narrowing in the polls a real phenomenon?

Yes. In 10 of the 15 presidential elections from 1944- 2000, the candidate who was leading in the polls on Labor Day saw his margin shrink by the time of the final poll. (This includes Thomas Dewey, who managed to [lose to Harry Truman](#) in 1948 despite never trailing in the polls.) If you average together all 15 of those contests, the Labor Day spread was cut in half by Election Day—although the early leader won the popular vote in every case except Dewey-Truman. In other words, while last-minute poll tightening is far from death and taxes, it is a real phenomenon.

Researchers offer differing explanations for why this might happen. While some point to [buyer's remorse](#) or [cold feet](#), there is no statistical evidence to support these claims. Others point to the decreasing margins, as well as a reduced variation among end-game polls, to suggest that voters are drifting back toward their initial biases and preferences. In this model, voters are more likely to think independently in August than in November. If a candidate makes a newsworthy gaffe in August, a large number of uncommitted or weakly committed voters move to his opponent, resulting in a surge in the polls. But months of appeals from the candidates to underlying voter allegiances has a real effect: When a voter's inner Democrat or Republican is awakened, they come home to their party's candidate. So the same gaffe in November would sway substantially fewer voters than it did before, and tightening poll margins reflect the number of committed partisans on either side.

Another theory attributes poll tightening to simple mathematics. Let's say that 10 percent of each candidate's supporters decided to switch sides in the final weeks of the campaign. That same percentage would reflect a larger exodus from the candidate who started with more voters—leading to a tightening of the race. Similarly, if undecided voters broke evenly in the final days, they'd add proportionally more support to the losing candidate—and again the poll margin would narrow. But few observers believe this can account for all of the observed tightening.

A related phenomenon is that the final poll, on average, overstates the actual margin of victory. From 1944-2000, the final polls predicted a margin 2.2 percent larger than the eventual outcome in the national vote. Given the short period between the final poll and the election, this is not likely the result of changing voter preferences. Rather, many believe that voters hesitate to declare their support for a losing candidate to a pollster, a tendency known as the "[spiral of silence](#)."

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

Explainer thanks Robert S. Erikson of Columbia University, Scott Keeter of the Pew Research Center, and Christopher Wlezien of Temple University.

explainer

Loin-Girding 101

Joe Biden wants you to gird your loins. Here's how to do it.
By Juliet Lapidus
Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at 6:01 PM ET

At a Seattle fundraiser on Sunday, Democratic vice-presidential nominee [Joe Biden warned supporters](#) that, if elected, Barack Obama will be tested by "an international crisis" early on in his first term. He also [advised the crowd](#) to "gird your loins," since the tasks ahead for the next president will be "like cleaning the [Augean stables](#), man." What's the best way to follow Biden's advice?

With a belt. *To gird* means to bind or encircle, and *loins* refers to the area between your hips and ribs. (Note: In this case, *loins* does not refer to the genitals, as with Nabokov's "light of my life, [fire of my loins](#).") So, "to gird your loins" means, literally, to wrap a belt around your waist so that your clothes don't flop around. The phrase stems from the Bible and is scattered throughout both the Old and New Testaments—composed during notoriously floppy sartorial eras. When Elijah "girded up his loins" ([1 Kings 18:46](#)), he was probably wearing a knee-length robe. It's likely that he fastened a cord tightly around his waist, then shortened his garment by pulling it up and letting it

flounce over the belt. Or he might have taken the hem of his robe and tucked it into his belt, creating a makeshift pouch or pocket.

Romans prepping for a fight also needed to gird their loins. Especially if he needed to ride a horse, a Roman might have gathered up the skirtlike portion of his outfit, passed it through his legs, and fastened the whole mess with a girdle (a leather belt, basically, also used to hold tools or weapons).

Biden, of course, was advising his supporters to gird their loins in the figurative sense—that is, to brace themselves for a test of mental or emotional endurance. He was perhaps unintentionally echoing the apostle Peter, who recommended "girding up the loins of your mind ... and [setting] your hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" ([1 Peter 1:13](#)). Also, Paul, who in the Epistle to the Ephesians, mentions "having your loins girt about with truth" ([Ephesians 6:14](#)).

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

Explainer thanks Larissa Bonfante of New York University and Judith Lynn Sebesta of the University of South Dakota.

explainer

The Purell Defense

Can hand sanitizers really affect your blood-alcohol level?
By Nina Shen Rastogi
Monday, October 20, 2008, at 6:54 PM ET

Rep. Vito Fossella of New York was convicted in a Virginia court on Friday on charges of drunken driving. A second hearing will be held to determine whether Fossella's blood-alcohol content at the time of his arrest was above 0.15, which would require a five-day jail term. A defense expert [claimed that Fossella had used Purell](#) several times on the day he was arrested and that the ethanol in the hand sanitizer affected his blood-alcohol reading later that night. Can hand sanitizer applied to the skin really affect a breath alcohol test?

Probably not. A [2006 study](#) among Australian health care workers tested this very question. Twenty workers applied Avangard—a hand sanitizer with 70 percent ethanol (compared with Purell's [62 percent](#))—30 times during one hour, mimicking the usage in intensive-care units. One to two minutes after the final exposure, six of the workers did show a slight bump in breath-ethanol levels—between 0.001 percent and 0.0025 percent, about the same effect as one-tenth of a beer on an average-size male. Ten to 13 minutes after the final application,

however, all the health care workers' breath-ethanol levels had returned to zero. In Fossella's case, a period of several hours separated his Purell usage and his breathalyzer test: He claimed to have used the hand sanitizer during the afternoon of April 30 and wasn't pulled over until just after midnight.

It's also very unlikely that alcohol would have remained on Fossella's hands and thus affected the [Intoxilyzer 5000](#)'s analysis. Except for the trace amounts that get absorbed by the skin, the ethanol in the sanitizer would have dissipated once the liquid itself evaporated.

[Drinking Purell](#) is another story entirely, however. At 62 percent ethanol or roughly 120 proof, the sanitizer is about as alcoholic as some stronger kinds of [rums and whiskeys](#). But even so, Fossella would have had to have drunk enough Purell to make himself sick in order for traces of it to remain in his blood around midnight.

In recent years, defense attorneys have questioned the reliability of breath-alcohol analyzers themselves. Some have claimed, for example, that [fluctuations in voltage levels](#) can affect readings. In Tuscon, Ariz., breath tests in more than 100 cases involving the Intoxilyzer 8000 were thrown out this year because the machine's manufacturer, Kentucky-based CMI, [would not release the Intoxilyzer's software source code](#). Last month, [CMI settled with the Minnesota Department of Public Safety](#) and agreed to release the code for the Intoxilyzer 5000 model after the department filed a federal lawsuit to obtain it.

Bonus Explainer: Can putting too much Purell on your skin get you drunk? Maybe. There have been cases of small children becoming intoxicated after prolonged skin exposure to alcohol—a [2-year-old girl](#) in Germany lost consciousness after ethanol-soaked bandages were applied to damaged skin and left overnight. (Her blood-alcohol level reached a [whopping 0.8](#).) A [similar case in Italy](#) involved a 1-month-old who developed "unexplained lethargy" after having had alcohol-soaked gauze pads applied to her umbilical stump for several days. Adult cases are extremely rare, but during the SARS epidemic, a 45-year-old Taiwanese woman died after soaking in a 40 percent ethanol bath for 12 hours in the hopes that it would rid her of the infection.

Explainer thanks Bruce Goldberger of the University of Florida, Bruce Jackson of MassBay Community College, and Stefan Rose of Florida International University. Explainer thanks reader Karen W. Ramsey for asking the question.

fighting words
Speak Up!

Stop covering Palin until she gives a press conference.

By Christopher Hitchens

Monday, October 20, 2008, at 11:07 AM ET

The new line of the day, taken by many conservative intellectuals, is that criticism of Gov. Sarah Palin is essentially a blend of snobbery and sexism. This, I presume, is intended as a sort of strike against the considerable number of conservative commentators, from [David Frum](#) to [Christopher Buckley](#), who have openly said that the woman is not qualified to be vice president. There is, of course, also the question of whether she is qualified to be governor of Alaska. [Writing about her](#) when she was first put forward by Sen. John McCain, I rather feebly took the line that one should give her the benefit of the doubt and not be condescending, but it does now begin to look as if most of what she claimed for herself, from the "bridge to nowhere" to the "[troopergate](#)" business, was very questionable at best, and much of what her critics said was essentially true.

The emphasis on experience is in many ways the wrong one (rather as it has been when directed at Sen. Barack Obama). The problem with Gov. Palin is not that she lacks experience. It's that she quite plainly lacks intellectual curiosity. It is not snobbish to harbor grave doubts about somebody who seems uninterested in reading for pleasure or recreation and whose only interest in her local public library is sniffing round its shelves for books that ought to be removed for expressing impure ideas.

Nor is it snobbish, let alone sexist, to express doubts about someone who, as late as March 2007, could [tell Alaska Business Monthly](#), "I've been so focused on state government, I haven't really focused much on the war in Iraq. I heard on the news about the new deployments, and while I support our president, Condoleezza Rice and the administration, I want to know that we have an exit plan in place." This statement deserves to be called mindless, because, first, it is made up of stale and received and overheard bits and bobs from everyday media babble and, second, because you cannot really coherently say that you support both the administration and an "exit plan." The same vaguely cunning wish to have everything both ways is to be found in her suggestion that both evolution and creationism be taught in our schools. In one way, this seems fair enough—if the [Scopes trial](#) is taught in history class, then the views of William Jennings Bryan and those of Clarence Darrow and H.L. Mencken must necessarily be given equal time. But that is not the same as saying that classes in biology or geology be diluted by instruction in what is laughably called "intelligent design." It would be like giving equal time to alchemy and astrology. "You know, don't be afraid of information," as she so winningly phrased it in a gubernatorial debate. "Healthy debate is so important, and it's so valuable in our schools. I am a proponent of teaching both."

I would like to ask her whether by this she means that creationism ought to be given equal time in *science* classes. And I have a follow-up: How many years old does the Republican nominee for the vice presidency of the United States believe the Earth to be? There are several other questions I would like to ask her, as, no doubt, would you. Lots of luck with that, because it seems that the Grand Old Party intends to go all the way to Election Day without exposing the No. 2 person on its ticket—the person who would become chief executive if President John McCain succumbed to illness—to a press conference. I have been as fair as possible in quoting Gov. Palin. I have used only sentences from her that make some sort of grammatical sense. It would have been easy enough—and relevant enough—to cite answers that she gave to [Charlie Gibson](#) and [Katie Couric](#) that appeared to be uttered in no known language.

At numerous rallies where the atmosphere has been, shall we say, a little uncivil, Gov. Palin has accused Sen. Obama of accusing our forces in Afghanistan of simply bombing villages. Only a moment's work is required to discover that the words *complained of* were never uttered in that form and that they occurred in a speech that stressed the need for more ground troops as opposed to more airstrikes (a recommendation, by the way, that begins to look more sapient each week, at least in respect of the airstrikes). Again, I have a question: Did Palin know that she was telling a lie? Or did her handlers simply assume that she would read anything that was put in front of her, however mendacious? And which would be worse? And when will she issue the needful retraction? There seems no way of putting her in a forum where these points could be raised. So, continued media coverage of her appearances is no better than lending a megaphone to a demagogue, the better to amplify her propaganda.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., an honorable man with a high place in the McCain campaign, when asked about Palin's failure to do so much as a *Meet the Press* appearance, [told the Washington Post](#): "We're asking the American people to pick the next president and vice president, and we do not expect the American people to do so—"Trust me"—blindly. She will have to do what's expected of people in this business. . . . In countries where that does not happen, I do not want to live." That highly admirable statement was made Sept. 2. Something of McCain's own reputation for honesty and honor is now involved in keeping Sen. Graham's implied promise. If it is not kept, then why should the press and the networks continue to cover a candidate who could, for all we know, be [Angela Lansbury](#)?

first mates ... or for Worse

Why American politicians have such rotten marriages.

By Melinda Henneberger
Thursday, October 23, 2008, at 6:15 PM ET

Rep. Tim Mahoney seems to have lost track of how many affairs he's had: "[You're asking me over a lifetime?](#)" Trick question, I guess, for the Florida Democrat, who ran on "[faith, family and personal responsibility](#)" two years ago, replacing underage House page hound [Mark Foley](#). One mistress who does stick in Mahoney's mind is the county official whom he helped get FEMA money to remove hurricane debris from [gated communities](#) near Palm Beach. Another is the girlfriend he put on the government payroll then [let go](#) when she broke up with him. "The only person that matters is guess who? Me," he told the woman, who took the hush money but also hung on to an audio [tape](#) of him firing her in a rage.

"[No marriage is perfect](#)," Mahoney told reporters right before his wife [filed for divorce](#). But is no political marriage even authentically imperfect? Has the woman whose husband is hoping to succeed Mahoney—oh yes, once again touting "[traditional family values](#)"—sure she's thought this thing through? And when is the public going to figure out what it expects from political marriages? How long are we going to keep insisting that political couples tell us lies and then punishing them for doing so?

A year ago, as I set out to write about political marriages for *Slate's* [First Mates](#) series, I would have sworn that I was already fairly illusion-free; I covered [Monica Lewinsky](#), for heaven's sake, and never met a potential first spouse who didn't need a hug. I also thought my goals not only attainable but rather modest, [promising](#) only that "in full knowledge of the fact that every marriage is its own exotic ecosystem—a planet only imperfectly understood even by its own two natives—this series will examine the marriages of the top-tier presidential candidates and explore what these partnerships suggest about what kind of president each would be." Since then, however, I've concluded that political marriages are even harder to keep real than I thought—to the point that for a lot of these spouses, denial is not so much a diagnosis as a job description.

This was most obvious when I began looking at the marriage of John and Cindy McCain; these two lead such separate lives that in the end, I couldn't even bring myself to write about them, because there is barely a "them" to write about. Though their marriage launched his political career, I'm not convinced their current connection says much of anything about either his campaign or how he would govern. When he's asked about her, he can never think what to say. ("She's [really blossomed](#)," he told me in 2000, as if she were a post-adolescent who'd just gotten her braces off instead of a fully capable grown woman.) When she told me a couple of months ago, in an [interview](#) for *Reader's Digest*, that they never argued, ever, I thought that was either the silliest fib or the saddest thing I'd ever heard a wife

who seemed to love her husband admit about their interaction. The entire picture she presented was like that—so airbrushed with industrial-strength shellac that I hoped she was lying to me instead of to herself. For a gorgeous heiress with a powerful husband who might be moving into the White House, she inspires more pity than you might expect, and less envy, even among her husband's harshest hometown critics. In that, too, she is uncomfortably like her role model, Princess Diana—tense, thin, happiest on a mission, all dressed up and no one to dance with. So many political marriages seem to wind up resembling old-fashioned royal alliances that I'm sure she's not alone in relating to the late "people's princess."

Maybe the stats on political marriages are no worse than for civilians: The [Obamas](#) and the [Huckabees](#) seem well-suited, after all. The [Clintons](#) can work it out on their own time at this point, or not—and it really is [none of our business](#) now, whee! But many political marriages seem to be a kind of fraud, perpetrated on both the public and on the couple themselves. It's hard not to feel that the commoditizing of [John](#) and [Elizabeth](#) Edwards' marriage contributed to its [combustion](#). Though they're not divorcing, Elizabeth has suggested that if she were in better health, they might be: "I'm in a fairly unique set of circumstances," as a woman with incurable cancer, she [told](#) a health reporter recently, "where the decisions I make are based entirely on what is the best thing for my children." A year ago, polls showed the public felt it was the Edwardses who had the strongest marriage of any of the presidential candidate couples. (And did I listen to my appellate lawyer friend who argued against that rosy view from the get-go? "He's a *plaintiff's* lawyer; enough said!" is how my friend put it.) Noooo—though I had no problem quoting their friend who said they had "the storybook life and the storybook marriage," right up until the day their son Wade died. (And, oh God, did John Edwards really tell me that ["there is not a lot of faking going on"](#)? Did Elizabeth really say, even when she knew better, that "you could expect a high degree of candor from him" in the White House? Incredibly, yes and yes.) Now, what she [says](#) is that she is involved in the "ongoing process of finding your feet again, retelling your story to yourself. You thought you were living in one novel, and it turns out you were living in another."

While what I am left wondering is whether this sad chapter is going to change the way we write about political families. There's no reason to think candidates and their clans are any more dysfunctional now than in John F. Kennedy's day or Franklin Roosevelt's. But our connection to political couples changed the day they moved into our living rooms, via television. And it has only grown more intense in the decades since then, as a result of the permanent campaign, 24/7 cable, the blogosphere, and perhaps most of all, the personalization of politics—and our curious and narcissistic insistence that our candidates of choice at least seem to be able relate to us, seem to have families *just like ours*. When of course, they can't and don't.

The sad fact is that no matter what a good guy or gal you are, running the country (oh, and raising money, raising money, and raising money) doesn't really leave a lot of time for hands-on parenting or partnerships, so we shouldn't expect political families to be like ours. What I propose is that we stop forcing them to present these phony tableaux, that they be allowed to stop selling themselves as Husbands and Wives, Dads and Moms of the Year. The Obamas, I believe, have made a step in the right direction by refusing to set themselves up as the perfect couple—he by writing very honestly about times in their marriage when they were barely speaking, and she by telling us over and over that putting people on pedestals is always dangerous, for all concerned.

Until we get over our destructive and even cruel insistence on judging politicians by their marriages, it's a shame we can't tweak the rules just a bit, so that it's gay people who can get married and politicians who can't. (And gay politicians? Only if they promise not to run on family values.)

foreigners

Why Do Terrorists Love To Strike Around Elections?

And what can we expect in the coming weeks?

By Daniel Benjamin

Wednesday, October 22, 2008, at 2:25 PM ET

According to the "prediction market" of Rasmussen polls, Barack Obama has an 87 percent chance of winning the presidential election. That's a pretty high number, but if there were a prediction market in which people who've worked in counterterrorism would bet on the likelihood that we'll soon be hearing from Osama Bin Laden, the number would almost certainly be even higher.

A surprise could be of the proverbial [October variety](#), or it could come sometime after the election—perhaps within the six months that Joe Biden [said](#) would produce a major test of a President Obama. The record clearly shows that jihadists see the run-up to an election and the months just afterward as an opportune time to act.

Everyone remembers the Bin Laden [video](#) that was released days before the 2004 presidential election and the [Madrid train-station bombings](#) that occurred 72 hours before Spain's national elections in March of that year. When the conservative government of José María Aznar mistakenly attributed the attacks to Basque separatists, the public punished his party, which was felt to be pretending that its unpopular support for the war in Iraq had nothing to do with the attacks. The socialists, led

by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, had been trailing in the polls, but after the government's blunder, they thumped the conservatives by a five-point margin.

Those are only the best-known jihadist interventions. Alongside them should be added the first bombing of the World Trade Center on Feb. 26, 1993, a little more than a month after Bill Clinton took office, and the attack on the *USS Cole* on Oct. 12, 2000, three weeks before that year's Bush-Gore matchup. Last year, radicals attempted multiple car bombings in London and Glasgow, Scotland, three days after Gordon Brown's June 27 installation as Britain's prime minister. And let's not forget the murder of Benazir Bhutto while she was campaigning in Pakistan or the September 2004 bombing of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia, which preceded the Australian elections by a month.

What makes elections and transitions so attractive to terrorists? After the October 2004 Bin Laden video was released, I wrote [here](#) about jihadists' need to leave their fingerprints on big events. These are the seam moments, the points of inflection in history, and the terrorists want to demonstrate that they are central players in determining outcomes. They especially want to show their Muslim audience that they are having a powerful impact on the world stage and are the global actors they claim to be. Do they try to tilt events to help preferred candidates or parties? There isn't much evidence to support that—and the terrorists seem to have some regard for the law of unintended consequences, so I don't think they believe they can act with sufficient precision to ensure, for example, a victory for McCain or Obama. (The outcome of the 2004 Spanish election was a freak event; no one could have predicted that Aznar's government would have botched its reaction to the bombings.)

That said, jihadist ideology does suggest that even though they despise all U.S. leaders, they know which leader would be better for their cause. There is a thick vein of Leninist thinking running through radical Islamism—Sayyid Qutb explicitly advocated the creation of a revolutionary vanguard of true believers. Another inheritance from Lenin was the notion that a hard-line enemy was better for mobilizing supporters than one who played down animus.

An appreciation for that kind of thinking underlies the argument Joseph Nye [made](#) in the *Financial Times* recently about why al-Qaida would prefer a belligerent McCain to an Obama who has spoken of improving America's standing in the Muslim world and who "would do wonders to restore the soft power that the Bush administration has squandered over the past eight years. That is why Mr Obama is such a threat to Mr bin Laden." Nye accepts the conventional wisdom that anything that turns the discussion to terrorism helps McCain, so in his view, al-Qaida has an extra incentive to act.

He may be right, though another possibility is that anything that reminds voters that Bin Laden is still out there might hurt the heir apparent to a Republican administration that hasn't caught the world's foremost fugitive. It's also worth noting that terrorism is nothing like the [concern](#) it was for voters in 2004, when, as Paul Freedman [pointed out](#), it was probably the decisive issue in George W. Bush's victory over John Kerry. Of course, that could change. But today it would certainly take a lot more than video of the berobed Saudi to do the trick. (There remains a question about whether that tape made any difference in 2004—Kerry believed it did, but the number crunchers at Pew [disputed](#) that.) My Brookings Institution colleague and former CIA officer Bruce Riedel makes the interesting [suggestion](#) that we may be treated to one of the as-yet-unreleased martyrdom tapes of one of the Sept. 11 attackers. Ghoulish though that would be, it probably wouldn't change many votes.

A video is the most likely piece of electioneering we will see from al-Qaida, but there are two other types of surprise that ought to be considered. The first, of course, is the reverse surprise. While McCain has objected to Obama talking about attacking Pakistani targets, that is precisely what the U.S. military has been doing for months now with helicopter gunship and Predator drone strikes on targets in the tribal areas. There is no reason to think that the United States has gotten the tip it's been awaiting for the last seven years, but we also shouldn't be surprised that so much of the firepower has been focused on the northern regions of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, such as Bajaur, where Bin Laden was thought to be hiding. No doubt Bush would like nothing better than to finally settle that score—according to intelligence sources, there was a major push four years ago as well. Something tells me that the Saudi has figured this out, too.

The last possibility is the one really worth worrying about: a genuine terrorist attack, here or abroad, now or anytime after the election. It is purely speculative to suggest that the odds of an attack are increasing. Al-Qaida and other jihadists seem to be happily occupied, principally with destabilizing Pakistan and eroding security in Afghanistan. But a big trap has opened up, and one has to imagine that the terrorists will want to spring it. In short, there would be a high premium for them to carry out a significant attack soon, because in an election season, or in the early days of a new administration, there would be irresistible political pressure to carry out an obliterating retaliation. The target for that strike would be the terrorists' safe haven in the FATA, and the result would be exactly the kind of widespread Muslim rage at the United States that the terrorists crave. Few today question that Osama Bin Laden ordered the 9/11 attacks because he wanted to draw the United States into a draining war in Afghanistan. To Bin Laden's surprise, the quagmire scenario didn't materialize there, but in Iraq.

With Pakistan already on the verge of a breakdown and anti-Americanism there sky-high, the attraction of igniting a chain of

events like this must be tremendous for the jihadists. I'm not suggesting that we shouldn't strike back if a major attack occurs; great nations don't leave their dead unanswered, though it should go without saying that it's as vital as ever to be discriminate when using force. Still, if the bomber gets through this time, the consequences are likely to be devastating.

foreigners

Bringing Down the House

These days, it's terrifyingly easy to destabilize an entire nation.

By Anne Applebaum

Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at 10:26 AM ET

Imagine the following scenario: In a medium-sized European country—call it Country X—the bank regulators hold an ordinary meeting. These being extraordinary times, the regulators discuss the health of various banks, including the country's largest—call it Bank Y—which is owned by an even larger Italian financial group. Last spring, Bank Y, which is perfectly healthy, transferred a large amount of money to its now somewhat-less-healthy Italian parent. Since this was nothing unusual, the regulators drop the subject and move on.

On the following day, that conversation is reported in a marginal, far-right newspaper in somewhat different terms: "\$1 billion transferred to Italy! Country X's hard-earned money going abroad!" Within hours, as if on cue, everyone starts selling shares in Bank Y, whose stock price plunges. So does the rest of Country X's smallish stock market. So does Country X's currency. Within a few more hours, Country X is calling for an international bailout, the International Monetary Fund is on the phone, and the government is wobbling.

Except for that final sentence—there was no international bailout or IMF call, and the government is fine—that is a brief description of something that really happened last week to one of Poland's largest banks. A real meeting, followed by an unsubstantiated rumor in a dodgy newspaper, and a bunch of nervous investors started selling. Shares in the bank collapsed by the largest margin in its history; for one ugly day, they dragged down the rest of the Polish stock market and currency, as well.

As I say, the story ended there. But it could have gone further, and, indeed, in several other countries it already has. A month ago, in the first round of this crisis, panicky rumors brought down banks. Now, with trillions of nervous dollars sloshing around the international markets, panicky rumors are bringing down countries.

The case of [Iceland](#), which in recent weeks has nationalized its three major banks, shut its stock exchange, and halted trading in its currency, is by now well-known. Less well-known is the speed with which the Icelandic disease is now spreading. Consider Hungary, once the destination of choice for investors who wanted an East European head office with a 19th-century façade and a pastry shop next door: The currency is in free fall and so is the stock market, flummoxing those previously well-fed investors. (One of them [told](#) a Hungarian financial Web site, "I haven't got a clue as to when and how this would end, I'm just staring into empty space.") Or take Ukraine, where the governor of the central bank declared his banking system "normal and reliable" on Monday of last week. By Tuesday, Ukraine had desperately [requested](#) "systemic support" from the IMF.

So far, most of these crises have been explained away. The banks of Iceland had debts larger than Iceland's GDP; Hungary's finances were long mismanaged; and Ukraine, where the president just called for the third election in as many years, is badly governed. But the speed with which some of these defaults are happening, coupled with the paranoia naturally inherent in the political culture of small countries, has led many to suspect political manipulation.

To put it differently: If you *wanted* to destabilize a country, wouldn't this be an excellent time to do it? If Country X's stock market can crash following the publication of a single article in an obscure newspaper, think what might happen if someone conducted a systematic campaign against Country X! And if you can imagine this, so can others.

All governments have enemies, internal and external, or at least opponents who do not wish them well: the political opposition, the country next door, the former imperial power. For some, the temptation to bring down the government, destabilize the country, and thus create political chaos will always be there. Even when there hasn't been political meddling, some people will suspect it anyway. Here, then, is a prediction: Political instability will follow economic instability like night follows day. Iceland is no longer alone. Serbia, the Baltic states, Kazakhstan, Indonesia, South Korea, and Argentina are [all in financial trouble](#); so, too, are Russia and Brazil.

And here's a final, unpleasant thought: [Pakistan](#). This is a country with 25 percent inflation and a currency in free fall, a country with a jihadist insurgency on its Afghan border, permanent hostility on its Indian border, nuclear weapons, and a tradition of street demonstrations in response to suspicious newspaper articles. Last week, angry investors pelted the Karachi exchange with stones. Dozens of people, with all kinds of agendas, have an interest in using financial markets to destabilize Pakistan, and Afghanistan along with it. Eventually, one of them will.

gabfest

The Emperor's New Clothes Gabfest

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

By Emily Bazelon, John Dickerson, and David Plotz

Friday, October 24, 2008, at 11:17 AM ET

Listen to the Gabfest for Oct. 24 by clicking the arrow on the audio player below:

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

Emily Bazelon, David Plotz, and special guest Michael Newman talk politics. This week, the latest from the presidential campaign trail, a vice-presidential candidate's wardrobe, and a supersecret topic.

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

David discusses how [the wheels seem to be coming off](#) the McCain campaign. The Republican candidate can't seem to keep one theme going for more than a few days, and his running mate, Sarah Palin, has [publicly disagreed with McCain](#) several times over the past few weeks.

This phenomenon is the subject of [a story](#) by Robert Draper in this Sunday's *New York Times Magazine*.

Joe Biden apparently [stuck his foot in his mouth](#) this week.

Liza Mundy has an interesting piece in *Slate* about how difficult it was to [write a biography](#) of Michelle Obama because the Obama campaign controls information about the candidate and his family so tightly.

The Republican Party has spent [\\$150,000 on clothes](#) for Sarah Palin, according to published reports, sparking controversy. Cindy McCain reportedly [wore an outfit](#) worth approximately \$300,000 at the Republican convention and faced very little criticism for it.

Emily chatters about [a new law in Oklahoma](#) that requires doctors to provide ultrasounds for any woman inquiring about an abortion.

Michael discusses the recently concluded [Nike Women's Marathon](#) in San Francisco. The race has sparked controversy

[because of an unusual occurrence](#)—one woman crossed the finish line first, while another had the fastest time.

David wonders why so many Republican men wear [Van Dykes](#).

The e-mail address for the Political Gabfest is gabfest@slate.com. (E-mail may be quoted by name unless the writer stipulates otherwise.)

Posted on Oct. 17 by Dale Willman at 11:20 p.m.

Oct. 17, 2008

Listen to the Gabfest for Oct. 17 by clicking the arrow on the audio player below:

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

John Dickerson, David Plotz, Emily Bazelon, and Hanna Rosin talk politics. On the agenda this week: the last presidential debate, where it leaves the presidential race in general, and why Andrew Sullivan blogs.

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

[Joe the Plumber](#) takes over the political scene after Wednesday's debate on Long Island, N.Y. But it turns out that [Joe isn't all that he seems](#).

John disagrees with the others when he says that Obama did the best in the debate, especially when he walked through both his [tax](#) and [health care](#) plans.

David says it was sheer genius when Obama talked about whom he associates with during the debate.

John asks the group whether the race is over, with Obama the winner. David says McCain could do something spectacular to salvage a win, but otherwise the election will go to Obama. Hanna, meanwhile, says the race will be much closer than the [polls](#) currently indicate.

The four discuss Obama's strength in the race, shown by the fact that he is pushing deep into what was once considered Republican territory.

They discuss [Andrew Sullivan's recent piece](#) in the *Atlantic*, where he talks about his experiences as a blogger.

Emily chatters about a group of [Uighur](#) Chinese dissidents [being held](#) at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, by American troops.

Hanna talks about the TV show *Project Runway*.

John brings up [Malcolm Gladwell's piece](#) in *The New Yorker*; David finds Gladwell's thesis to be bogus.

David does not chatter because he's working on the launch of *Slate's* redesigned Web site, scheduled for Monday.

Posted on Oct. 17 by Dale Willman at 4 p.m.

Oct. 10, 2008

Listen to the Gabfest for Oct. 10 by clicking the arrow on the audio player below:

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

David Plotz, Emily Bazelon, and Bill Smee talk politics. This week, the world economy is in meltdown, the presidential campaign trail is getting very nasty, and Oliver Stone prepares to tell us all about a certain lame-duck president in *W*.

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

The initial discussion focuses on the continuing world economic meltdown. Bill talks about a column by the *New York Times'* [Nicholas Kristof](#), in which [he compares the United States' actions today to those of Japan](#) during its last economic crisis in the early 1990s.

David praises a piece on [National Public Radio](#) by [Adam Davidson](#) that explains [why banks are reluctant](#) to loan to one another right now.

Emily, meanwhile, mentions the recent move by the British government to [partially nationalize banks](#) there in response to the economic crisis, and compares that with the U.S. response.

One question during all the economic turmoil is: [Where is President Bush?](#) While the markets collapse, the president seems unusually silent.

David talks about Barack Obama's temperament as outlined in [a profile of the candidate](#) in *The New Yorker* in 2007. He characterizes Obama's temperament as oceanic, and he compares that with [John McCain's wild behavior](#).

Despite Obama pulling away slightly in both national and state polling, as George Packer writes in an article about Ohio in *The New Yorker*, [it is possible to become overconfident](#).

John Dickerson may have missed today's show, but he writes this week about [the angry tone on display](#) at a recent McCain rally in Wisconsin.

The trio critiques the newly released [Oliver Stone](#) movie, [W](#).

Bill backs out of offering any cocktail chatter, saying he is boycotting the cocktail scene this weekend in sympathy with the plummeting stock market. He says he will instead stay home drinking canned beer while watching [baseball playoffs](#) rather than sipping a cocktail.

Emily chatters about an ABC News story earlier this week about how workers at the National Security Agency may have been [spying on Americans](#).

David explains how he's been swamped with e-mails from a conservative Christian group complaining about a *Slate* column by Tom Perrotta, in which he talks about vice-presidential candidate [Sarah Palin's sex appeal](#) to some Americans.

Posted on Oct. 10 by Dale Willman at 5:04 p.m.

Oct. 3, 2008

Listen to the Oct. 3 Gabfest by clicking the arrow on the audio player below:

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

John Dickerson, David Plotz, and special guest Hanna Rosin discuss the Joe Biden/Sarah Palin debate, where things stand in the presidential race overall, and the financial bailout bill. (Note: The show was recorded shortly before the House of Representatives passed the bill.)

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

Here's [John's take](#) on the Biden/Palin showdown.

The [post-debate polling](#) (even Fox's) suggests Biden won. The [ratings](#) were good, too.

Here's a [link](#) to the strange college debate video Hanna mentions in her chatter.

Posted by Andy Bowers on Oct. 3 at 4:46 p.m.

green room

Date Local

The case against long-distance relationships.

By Barron YoungSmith

Wednesday, October 22, 2008, at 12:04 PM ET

You're sitting in the airport terminal, rolling your copy of the *Economist* into a sweaty tube and waiting to see a significant other who lives far away. You're excited. You're aroused. But there's something else, a nagging feeling that gurgles in your stomach and won't go away. Is it pangs of guilt? It should be: The planet is about to suffer for your love.

Perversely, we live in a world where the sustainability consultant in San Francisco is willing to fly in an exotic boyfriend every month from Washington, D.C. All day, she helps companies "green their supply chains" and "internalize core social costs," yet that eco-savvy seems to vanish at night, when she e-mails: *Come visit!!!* You might say she's willing to be a [locavore](#) but not a locasexual.

Consider what happens when these two fly to see each other once a month. Since greenhouse gases [emitted from high-altitude airplanes](#) are thought to have [several times the impact](#) of ground transport, a carbon offset company would pin their romantic travels with the equivalent of [35 metric tons](#) of CO₂ each year. If that responsibility were divided evenly between the two, our sustainability consultant's lifestyle would be about six times worse for the environment than that of the average gas-guzzling American—and up to 10 times worse than that of the average San Franciscan. (Indeed, for her, breaking up would be about [10 times better for the environment](#) than going vegetarian.)

Or let's say she finagles a transfer to New York, so she can be within driving distance of her sweetie. Now the happy couple can see each other every couple of weeks—while their long, solo trips down I-95 spit out an extra 3.6 metric tons of CO₂ every year.

What's the aggregate impact of all this travel? The Census [tells us](#) there are about 100 million single people in America over the age of 17. We don't know how many of those folks are in long-distance relationships, but the [available research](#) suggests that at least a quarter of all college students are dating out of town. Since the rate is going to be much lower among the general population, we'll make a conservative estimate of 1 in 15 for all single adults. That gives us around 6.7 million unmarried Americans in long-distance relationships. Add in the 3.4 million

married people who told the Census that they live separately but aren't "separated," and our total rises to more than 10 million individuals—or 5 million LDRs.

If all of these people made like our two-career couple and drove the distance from D.C. to New York City every two weeks, they would produce a total of about 18 million metric tons of CO₂ a year. For comparison, 6.9 million metric tons would be added to the atmosphere if we suddenly eliminated [all the public transportation](#) in the United States. Eighteen million metric tons of CO₂ is a third of what a national [renewable energy standard](#) (PDF) would save over 10 years—or 60 percent of the yearly emissions saved by "[moderate adoption](#)" of hybrid vehicles. And if even a small percentage of those relationships were bi-coastal—or even New York-Chicago or Los Angeles-Denver—the total would grow even more astronomical. Love lifts us up where we belong, as they say, but it does so at a steep price to the planet.

The same type of environmental logic has already been applied to our eating habits. The [Local Food](#) movement encourages us to cut CO₂ emissions by calculating food miles—the distance a meal travels from production to the dinner table—and eating only what's produced within a 100-mile radius. Isn't it time for a Date Local movement, too? Let's start thinking about "sex miles": Just *how far* was this person shipped to hook up with you? And *how many times* more efficient would it be to date someone within a 100-mile radius? If the movement spread globally, mirroring either the decentralized development of Local Food co-ops or the manifesto-and-chapter model that built up to the [Slow Food movement's mega-confab](#) this summer, its environmental benefits could multiply many times.

A robust Date Local movement wouldn't just help the environment. Like other forms of economic localization, the decision to swear off Orbitz romance creates important spinoff benefits. For one, it makes people less anti-social. By spending all their free time out of town or staring at a webcam—that is, in their apartments or airline cabins, rather than in parks, bowling alleys, and pubs—long-distance lovers erode civic commitment and social support networks. They have fewer chances to meet new people. And they make their cities more stratified by inflating an über-class bubble of jet-set shut-ins who are—understandably, given their lifestyle—more worried about conditions at O'Hare than things going on outside their front door.

What's more, out-of-town daters have less sex than local couples—and long stretches of abstinence between visits could lead to [negative health outcomes](#) and thus higher health care costs. Distance also magnifies the impact of negative feelings like longing and suspicion; according to one study, intercity lovers are [more likely to be depressed](#) (PDF) and less likely to share resources or take care of each other when sick. And they spend money on travel that they might otherwise save and

invest—leaving them vulnerable to economic shocks and wearing away their future standard of living. Every one of these demons could be banished by simply dating local.

Of course, like many eco-conscious attempts to instill social virtue, this proposal runs the risk of killing romance. Many a true human thrill—the high-octane cheeseburger! the long shower! the Chevy Suburban!—has been deflated by green evangelists out to render the personal political. And, in a way, long-distance dating is romantic precisely *because* it expends so much in the way of resources and effort. It's less exciting to date someone based on your shared love of canvas shopping bags than it is to pine for a partner who wants to meet in Arizona.

No, our Date Local movement won't be overbearing. It shouldn't try to break up every cross-country love odyssey. Instead, it will discourage this special type of conspicuous consumption at the margins, nudging people toward the realization that breaking up is in their own, and enlightened, economic self-interest.

For example, with fuel prices likely to [whipsaw upward](#) for the foreseeable future, many people currently in LDRs will end up questioning whether they want to keep timing their liaisons to coincide with oil underconsumption troughs—or whether it's better to call it splits. (The coming [death](#) of lucrative, globalized post-college jobs may force similar reconsiderations.) Date Local could educate them about the environmental and social benefits of breaking up and nudge them in the right direction. And the group would be there to cushion the brokenhearted by imparting newly minted locasexuals with a sense of noble self-sacrifice—not to mention a pool of cute, like-minded enviros who happen to live in the neighborhood.

So let's give it a try. Date Local's message is a simple one, in the best traditions of liberal reform. All you have to do is date here. Date now. Date sustainably. And if you absolutely have to date long-distance, do it via Amtrak.

hot document

Obama Through British Eyes

Great Britain's Washington ambassador sizes up Obama for his prime minister.

By Bonnie Goldstein

Monday, October 20, 2008, at 4:36 PM ET

From: Bonnie Goldstein

Posted Monday, October 20, 2008, at 4:36 PM ET

In July, a few days before Barack Obama [paid a visit to](#) British Prime Minister Gordon Brown in concluding his seven-nation

tour of Europe and the Middle East, the [PM](#) received a [six-page diplomatic briefing](#) on "Obama's political makeup" from [Sir Nigel Sheinwald](#), the British Ambassador to Washington (see excerpts below and on the following page).

"[D]espite his blue-collar upbringing," Sir Nigel advised Brown, "Obama does betray a highly educated and upper middle class mindset." Sir Nigel further observed that "Obama is cool. He looks cool, tall, slim ... and maybe aloof, insensitive." Obama, he wrote, "is tough and competitive. This is of course the Chicago school." (Presumably he was referring to the rough-and-tumble of Chicago's ward politics, *not* to the rough-and-tumble of the University of Chicago's [neoclassical economics](#), with which the phrase is more typically associated.) Sir Nigel expressed some skepticism about "how sincere [Obama's] post-partisanship is, and how successful his attempts to reach across the aisle would be, given his mixed record in the Senate."

Should Brown and Obama find themselves with any spare time, Britain's U.S. ambassador alerted his PM that Obama "loves basketball and poker."

Sir Nigel warned that his briefing "contains sensitive judgements [sic]" and urged the PM to "protect the contents carefully" (below). It was leaked to the London [Telegraph](#) earlier this month.

Please send ideas for Hot Document to documents@slate.com.

Posted Monday, October 20, 2008, at 4:36 PM ET

human nature

The Mind-BlackBerry Problem

Hey, you! Cell-phone zombie! Get off the road!

By William Saletan

Thursday, October 23, 2008, at 4:37 PM ET

Last month, 25 people died and 130 were injured in a [train crash](#)

near Los Angeles. The cause, apparently, was a cell phone. In three hours of work before the crash, one of the engineers received 28 text messages and sent 29 more. He sent his last message [22 seconds](#) before impact, just after passing a [signal](#) that would have alerted him to the disaster ahead.

Scientists call this phenomenon "[cognitive capture](#)" or "[inattention blindness](#)." The mind, captured by the world inside the phone, becomes blind to the world outside it. Millions of people move among us in this half-absent state. Mentally, they're living in another world. It's like the [Rapture](#), except that they've left their bodies behind.

You see them everywhere. The woman alone in the grocery store, a bud in her ear, having an animated conversation with a wall of canned soup. The driver who drifts into your lane while counseling an invisible client. The jogger crossing four lanes of traffic, lost in her iPod. The dad who ignores his kids, living in his BlackBerry the way an alcoholic lives in a bottle.

In many ways, mobile phones are wonderful. Children can reach parents far away. Dissidents in dictatorships can get news and [organize](#). Farmers in undeveloped countries can [transact business](#). Through the phone, you can escape the confines of your environment.

The problem is that physically, you're still living in that environment. Like other creatures, you've evolved to function in the natural world, one setting at a time. Nature has never tested a species's ability to function in two worlds at once.

Now that test is underway. [Half the world's people](#) have mobile phones. [Eighty-four percent](#) of Americans have them. In this country, more than [2 billion](#) text messages are exchanged per day. Wireless and entertainment companies are bringing [television](#) to handheld screens. Already, 40 million Americans use phones or other handheld devices to access the [Internet](#), 27 million use them to watch [video](#), and 19 million use them to download [games](#). The world inside the phone becomes more vivid and engaging every day. It wants your ears, eyes, thumbs—all of you.

That might be OK if you were standing still. But mobile devices have a habit of moving. In a survey this year by Nationwide Mutual Insurance, [81 percent](#) of Americans admitted to talking on a cell phone while driving. Since 2001, in New York alone, more than [1 million](#) tickets have been issued for holding phones at the wheel. In California, the rate is about [7,000 tickets per month](#). And that's just the people who get caught.

So how is this multitasking experiment going? Not so well. In the Nationwide survey, [45 percent](#) of Americans said they've been hit or nearly hit by a driver on a cell phone. Studies show that the more tasks you dump on drivers—listening, evaluating,

answering questions—[the worse they perform](#). They [drift off course, miss cues, overlook hazards, and react slowly](#). In brain scans, you can see the [shift of blood flow](#) from spatial-management to language-processing areas. It's the picture of a mind being sucked from one world into another.

Our performance on the two-worlds test, like all evolutionary experiments, can be measured in death. The Federal Railroad Administration reports seven cell-phone-related railway accidents in the last three years, [five of them fatal](#). In [California](#), [Michigan](#), and [Texas](#), police reports document annual cell-phone-related road accidents exceeding 1,000 per state. Six years ago, when only half of all Americans had cell phones, the [Harvard Center for Risk Analysis](#) linked them to [2,600 driving fatalities](#) and 330,000 injuries per year. And that was before the texting boom.

Today, we're so enslaved to mobile devices that we rely on them even to translate the physical world. Misled by with Global Positioning System devices, people are driving cars into [rivers](#), [trees](#), and [sand piles](#). Twice this year in Bedford Hills, N.Y., drivers have caused train crashes by steering onto the track because their GPS [mistook it](#) for a road. [Warning signs, pavement markings, and reflective train-signal masts](#) failed to stop them. They trusted the dashboard, not the windshield.

If we don't want this two-worlds experiment to be regulated nature's way—by killing people—then we'd better regulate it ourselves. Here are a few proposed rules of the road. Multitasking is a glorious gift. We can't ban it, nor should we. Want to phone your spouse or your office while walking? Fine. The only life at stake is yours. Want to turn on your car radio or music player? Fine. Listening is [easier than talking](#), and you can mentally or physically shut it off when necessary. Want to chat with your passenger? Fine again. Studies indicate that passenger conversations are less distracting than phone calls, apparently because you're sharing and often referring to [the same environment](#).

The real danger comes from being mentally sucked out of your world while operating thousands of pounds of metal at high speed. Only [five states](#) prohibit driving while holding a phone, and if you're an adult with a hands-free phone, no legislator is even [proposing](#) to mess with you. That has to change, because research shows that even with a hands-free device, talking on a phone can impair driving skills [more than intoxication does](#). If you need to talk to your spouse or boss, go right ahead—but first, pull over. You're free to visit the other world. Just don't leave your car moving in this one.

jurisprudence Required Viewing

Oklahoma's gallingly paternalistic ultrasound law.

By Emily Bazelon

Wednesday, October 22, 2008, at 6:30 AM ET

For many pregnant women, ultrasounds are like candy—there can't be too many of those grainy black-and-white images of the fetus napping or kicking in the womb. But if you're pregnant and don't want to be and are considering an abortion, an ultrasound image could be an object of dread. It might force you to think about the fetus as having a separate identity or as the baby it could become.

Dread is the emotion pro-life groups look to instill when they push states to pass laws that make an ultrasound part of the abortion procedure. It should also be said that women may, in fact, react otherwise: They could shrug off the ultrasound as a matter of indifference or even greet it with relief, because an image taken during the first trimester may look much more like a blinking light, or a newt, than a baby. I've never seen a study measuring how many women feel what, but abortion opponents believe that if women see the physical evidence of their pregnancy on the screen, at least some of them will decide not to end it.

Accordingly, 14 states have passed abortion-related ultrasound laws. Some of these statutes merely instruct clinics to offer an ultrasound to each abortion patient. Since many clinics do this anyway to help determine the week of the pregnancy, these laws don't intrude all that much on the doctor-patient relationship. And as [William Saletan has pointed out in *Slate*](#), it's hard to argue that women deciding whether to have an abortion should be shielded from accurate scientific information, which is what ultrasounds are, after all.

But what if a woman doesn't want an ultrasound, and there's no pressing clinical reason for her to have it? Four states—Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Oklahoma—have taken the galling step of requiring her to have one regardless of need. They recently passed laws that go beyond offering ultrasounds to mandating them. Oklahoma's new statute dictates that either the doctor performing the abortion or a "certified technician working in conjunction" with that doctor do the ultrasound, "provide a simultaneous explanation of what the ultrasound is depicting," and also "display the ultrasound images so that the pregnant woman may view them." The law goes so far as to specify the doctor's script: The physician must describe the heartbeat and the presence of internal organs, fingers, and toes. The patient then has to certify in writing that the doctor or technician duly did all of this before the abortion. She can avert her eyes from the screen, the statute allows. Maybe the legislators should have also thought to mention putting her hands over her ears.

The Oklahoma law, scheduled to go into effect on Nov. 1, has other objectionable provisions. Its confusing rules about medical abortions (drugs) would force the clinic bringing suit to stop offering that procedure entirely, says Stephanie Toti, a lawyer for the Center for Reproductive Rights, a public-interest law group that [challenged the statute in court](#) earlier this month on behalf of one of the state's abortion providers. Forty percent of the women who come to the clinic choose medical abortions, but the law talks about administering the drugs and follow-up care in a way that doesn't jibe with standard practice, so doctors would be stuck practicing medicine in a way that doesn't make sense to them. The law would also prevent women from recovering damages from any obstetrician-gynecologist whose "act or omission contributed to the mother's not having obtained an abortion"—in other words, women cannot bring suit against a doctor who failed to tell her about a detected birth defect.

This means the law is forcing one kind of information upon women, via ultrasound, while preventing them from successfully suing a doctor who withholds other, possibly more salient information from them, as [CRR points out](#). And this, finally, is what makes Oklahoma's law stand at the top of the [heap of paternalism](#) that Justice Anthony Kennedy started climbing two years ago, in his opinion in [Gonzales v. Carhart](#), the decision that banned one method of late-term abortion.

Kennedy injected into that case the constitutionally novel idea that because some women come to regret their abortions, the court could substitute its judgment for their doctors' by sparing them from a procedure that women would reject as too gruesome if they only knew the details. In Kennedy's opinion, the solution wasn't to give women more information, as Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg pointed out in dissent. It was to take away one form of abortion entirely. Under the new Oklahoma law, by contrast, doctors are prevailed upon to show and tell about the fetus whether or not women want to see and hear. But the state-knows-best impulse remains the same: Women can't define consent for themselves; they need lawmakers and judges to do that for them and to protect them from their abortion providers.

In this sense, the Oklahoma abortion law is like a [South Dakota statute](#) that requires doctors to give patients who come for an abortion a mandatory written statement telling them that an abortion includes "increased risk of suicide ideation and suicide," even though there's no good evidence of such a risk. Both laws leave doctors with an ethical quandary. They can either risk criminal prosecution by breaking the law or follow it and either (in Oklahoma) do an ultrasound against a patient's will or (in South Dakota) read a state-mandated script for which there's no solid medical backing.

For pro-life advocates, the dilemma for doctors is all gravy. If the laws make abortion providers feel like they can't in good conscience perform abortions in light of the statutory straitjacket, maybe already beleaguered state clinics will have to

close their doors. Oklahoma currently has only three abortion clinics. South Dakota has one. Also bedeviling the clinics are the time periods set for doctors to carry out the legislature's instructions. The ultrasound must occur at least an hour before the abortion in Oklahoma, and the South Dakota script must be read to a woman at least two hours beforehand. These waiting periods thus mean that clinics must eat into one of their scarcest resources: a doctor's time.

Since the Supreme Court's 1992 decision in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, the test for whether a state abortion regulation can withstand constitutional scrutiny has been whether it imposes an "undue burden" on a woman seeking the procedure. When you think about the time, cost, and doctor-patient interference, Oklahoma's statute should be an easy call. Then again, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 8th Circuit swept such concerns aside and allowed [South Dakota's law to go into effect last summer](#), lifting a federal district court's preliminary injunction. ('Tis the season for state action on the abortion front: Colorado and South Dakota each have a referendum on the ballot that abortion opponents are campaigning for. [South Dakota's](#) would prohibit abortion except in the case of rape and incest or to protect a woman's health. [Colorado's](#) would define a "person" to "include any human being from the moment of fertilization.")

The Center for Reproductive Rights is worried enough about an outcome like the one in the 8th Circuit that it based its challenge to the Oklahoma ultrasound statute entirely on state constitutional law. That means no federal court can review the state courts' decisions (because those courts get to interpret their own constitutions). This was a tough decision, Toti says, but Oklahoma's Constitution has been interpreted in the past to give stronger free-speech and due-process protections than the federal Constitution. And so it seemed like a better bet when it comes to the showdown over what constitutes an undue burden or an infringement on a doctor's free speech right. At least with this U.S. Supreme Court.

jurisprudence

Bush's Final Illusion

The president's agreement with Iraq bypasses Congress. Again.
By Bruce Ackerman and Oona A. Hathaway
Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at 4:25 PM ET

President Bush and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki have reached an agreement governing American military forces in Iraq. But under the Iraqi Constitution, parliament has to approve the deal, and major political parties are already demanding changes. With the threat of an Iraqi parliamentary veto monopolizing the headlines, it is easy to forget that Bush is proposing to shut Congress entirely out of the process. He is

claiming the unilateral right to commit the country to his agreement.

This claim has no constitutional merit, [as we've explained previously](#). It is particularly problematic when Americans will soon be choosing between two presidential candidates who have taken positions that are at odds with the Bush agreement. In claiming unilateral authority, a discredited administration is trying to secure its legacy by striking at the very heart of the democratic process—and, ironically, making the Iraqi government look more democratic than our own.

President Bush defends his action by pointing to "status of forces" agreements that a long line of American presidents have unilaterally negotiated with close to 100 countries around the world. These involve a host of day-to-day [matters like](#) delivery of supplies to the troops, which are well within the president's exclusive power as commander in chief. But the present initiative goes far beyond anything in these previous agreements.

For starters, the Bush proposal undermines the constitutional powers of the next president as commander in chief. It subjects American military operations to "the approval of the Iraqi government," giving operational control to "joint mobile operations command centers" supervised by a joint American-Iraqi committee. American commanders in the field will retain their power to act without advance Iraqi approval only in cases of self-defense. While American troops have been placed under foreign control in peacekeeping operations, this has occurred only under treaties approved by the Senate. No American president has ever before claimed the unilateral power to bargain away the military power of his successors.

The proposed agreement also submits thousands of private military contractors to Iraqi courts in the event that they are charged with a crime. This provision points to a serious problem. Many of these contractors are now beyond the jurisdiction of both American and Iraqi courts. Operating within a no-law zone, they can victimize Iraqi civilians with impunity. We should definitely bring this abuse to an end, but Congress should be involved in devising an appropriate solution. These contractors have no direct relationship to the military. They are working for the State Department and other federal agencies. It is up to Congress, not the president, to decide whether the embryonic Iraqi court system is up to the task of holding the contractors to account or whether American laws should instead be given extraterritorial force.

If allowed to stand, these remarkable actions will serve as precedents for more presidential abuses in the decades ahead. But over the short term, the agreement's three-year schedule for the withdrawal of American combat troops will be more important. Barack Obama has insisted on a 16-month timetable, and John McCain has rejected all such limitations. Ignoring both of these positions, the Bush agreement charts its own course. It

commits the United States to a timetable for withdrawing troops from cities, towns, and villages in Iraq by June 30, 2009, with final withdrawal by Dec. 31, 2011. The agreement also requires a full year's notice before either party may withdraw, another purported effort to control the next president's conduct of foreign policy.

Worse yet, the text governing early withdrawal of troops is a muddle. Since the Bush administration hasn't made its agreement generally available to the public, we are relying on an [English translation](#) from Arabic kindly provided to us by Raed Jarrar, a consultant to the American Friends Service Committee. It provides that "U.S. forces may withdraw by dates that are before the dates in the agreed timetable if either of the two sides should so request." But this creates a tension with another provision that makes any change in the June 2009 deadline "subject to both sides' approval." Confusion is compounded by a third clause stipulating that both sides must approve of any extension of the final December 2011 deadline. Putting all these provisos together, it appears that the Americans can "request" a change in the timetables, but that both sides must agree to it.

Only one thing is clear. The agreement is intended to make it harder for a potential Obama administration to carry through on its pledge to end combat operations within 16 months, not three years. This is hardly a move the Democratic majority in Congress would approve, precisely why the administration is refusing to recognize lawmakers' constitutional prerogatives.

Congress is presently out of session, with senators and representatives back in their districts for the election. It is especially anti-democratic for President Bush to announce a unilateral deal at a moment when Congress isn't in a position to protest immediately the usurpation of its authority.

When Congress returns, it should demand that the president submit the agreement to it for formal approval. This won't delay the final deal. Given the broad resistance to the agreement in Iraq, its parliament won't be in a position to ratify the agreement until next year anyway. Both Bush and Maliki recognize this. That's why their deal lays the groundwork for a temporary extension of the U.N. mandate that currently authorizes the American military occupation of Iraq.

This mandate, however, is presently scheduled to expire at the end of the year. Bush and Maliki should request six additional months from the Security Council. And then the president should follow up by submitting the proposed bilateral agreement with Iraq to Congress. But before this can happen, the Bush administration must give up on its dream of making a last-minute deal with Iraq which will magically secure its legacy—at the expense of the next president.

sidebar

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An agreement regarding the temporary U.S. presence in Iraq and its activities and withdrawal from Iraq, between the United States and the Iraqi government

Oct. 13, 2008

Foreword

Iraq and the U.S., referred to here as "both sides", affirm the importance of: supporting their joint security, participating in global peace and stability, fighting terrorism, cooperation in the fields of security and defense, and deterring threats against Iraq's sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity.

Both sides affirm that this cooperation is based on mutual respect of both sides' sovereignty in accordance with the United Nations' goals and principles.

Both sides want to achieve mutual understanding to support their collaboration, without jeopardizing Iraq's sovereignty over its land, water, and sky, and based on the mutual guarantees given as equal and independent sovereign partners.

Both sides have agreed on:

Article One

Scope and Goal

This agreement specifies the rules and basic needs that regulate the temporary presence and activities of the U.S. troops and its withdrawal from Iraq.

Article Two

Definitions

1- "Installations and areas agreed upon" are the installations and areas owned by the Iraqi government and used by the U.S. forces from the date this agreement goes into effect. The U.S. forces shall submit to the Iraqi government, as soon as this agreement goes into effect, a list that includes all installations and areas used by the U.S. forces as of that date, for the purpose of being reviewed and agreed upon by both sides no later than June 30th 2009. The installations and areas agreed upon also include those areas and installations that might be offered to the U.S. forces

during the period of this agreement and for the exclusive tasks of this agreement, in accordance to what the two sides agree upon.

2- "U.S. forces" is the entity that includes the members of the armed forces, civilian members, and all the equipments and materials owned by the U.S. forces in Iraq.

3- "Members of the armed forces" include any member of the U.S. army, navy, air force, marines or coast guard.

4- "Civilian members" include any civilian working for the U.S. Ministry of Defense, excluding those members who usually reside in Iraq.

5- "U.S. contractors" or "workers hired by U.S. contractors" include non Iraqi persons and entities and employees who are U.S. or third country citizens and who are in Iraq to supply goods, services or security to the U.S. forces or on behalf of it in accordance to a contract. This does not include Iraqi entities and individuals.

6- "Official vehicles": commercial vehicles that may be modified for security reasons, and are designed originally to transport individuals on different terrains.

7- "Military vehicles": include all vehicles used by the U.S. armed forces, that were originally designed for combat operations, and have special numbers and signs in accordance to the regulations and laws of U.S. armed forces.

8- "defense equipment" include systems, weapons, ammunition, equipment, and materials used in conventional wars only, that the U.S. forces need in accordance to this agreement, and that are not connected in any way to weapons of mass destruction (chemical weapons, nuclear weapons, radiological weapons, biological weapons, and waste related to such weapons).

9- "storage": keeping defense equipment needed by the U.S. forces for activities agreed upon in this agreement.

10- "taxes and customs": include all taxes, customs (including border customs), and any other tariffs enforced by the Iraqi government and its entities and provinces in accordance to Iraqi laws and regulations. This does not include money paid for the Iraqi government in exchange for services required or used by the U.S. forces.

Article Three

Rule of Law

1- All members of the U.S. armed forces and civilian members must follow Iraqi laws, customs, traditions, and agreements

while conducting military operations in accordance to this agreement. They must also avoid any activities that do not agree with the text and spirit of this agreement. It is the responsibility of the U.S. to take all necessary measures to ensure this.

2- For the purposes of this agreement, the U.S. forces coordinates with the Iraqi government to ensure that any entry or exit for any Iraqi citizen, or other residents of Iraq, on the vehicles, ships, or airplanes included in this agreement shall be in accordance to the Iraqi laws and regulations. The U.S. forces shall not allow the entry or exit of any Iraqi citizens or residents who has been issued an arrest warrant by the Iraqi authorities through the installations and areas agreed upon used exclusively by the U.S. forces.

Article Four

Responsibilities

For the purpose of deterring external and internal threats against the Republic of Iraq, and to continue the collaboration to defeat Al-Qaeda in Iraq and other outlaw groups, temporarily, both sides have agreed on:

1- The Iraqi government asks for the temporary help of the U.S. forces to support Iraq's efforts in maintaining the security and stability of Iraq, including the collaboration in conducting operations against Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups and outlaw groups, including the remains of the former regime.

2- Military operations are conducted in accordance to this agreement with the approval of the Iraqi government and with full coordination with Iraqi authorities. Coordinating such military operations will be supervised by a joint mobile operations command center (JMOCC) created in accordance with this agreement. Any military issues that are not resolved by this committee are submitted to a joint committee of ministries.

3- Operations must respect the Iraqi constitution and laws, and Iraqi sovereignty and national interests as defined by the Iraqi government. The U.S. forces must respect the Iraqi laws, traditions, and customs and valid international laws.

4- Both sides will continue their efforts in collaboration to improve Iraq's security, as agreed upon by both sides, including training, supplying, supporting, establishing, and upgrading logistic systems (supplying troops with transportation, room and board).

5- This agreement specifies the two sides' right in self-defense, as described in related international laws.

Article Five

Property Ownership

1- Iraq owns all non-mobile buildings and structures that are built on the ground in the installations and areas agreed upon, including those built, used, enhanced, or changed by the U.S. forces.

2- The U.S. is responsible for all expenses of construction, remodeling, modification in installations and areas agreed upon used exclusively by the U.S. The U.S. forces will consult with the Iraqi authorities regarding construction, remodeling, and modification. The U.S. will seek the Iraqi government's approval for major construction or modification projects. In case of shared use of installations and areas agreed upon both sides are responsible for expenses based on the percentage of usage. The U.S. forces will pay the fees of services used exclusively by the U.S. Both sides cover the expenses of shared installations and areas agreed upon based on the percentage of usage.

3- In the case of the discovery of historic or cultural sites or the discovery of a strategic natural resource in the installations and areas agreed upon, all work of construction or modification or remodeling must stop immediately, and the Iraqi representatives in the joint committee must be informed.

4- The United States will return all installations and areas agreed upon and any non-mobile buildings that were constructed, remodeled, or modified under this agreement, according to mechanisms and priorities agreed upon by the joint committee. They will be returned to Iraq without charge, unless both sides agree otherwise.

5- The U.S. will return all installations and areas agreed upon that have special cultural or political importance and that were constructed, remodeled, or modified under this agreement, according to mechanisms and priorities agreed upon by the joint committee. When this agreement goes into effect, the U.S. will immediately return the properties mentioned in the letter sent by the U.S. ambassador in Iraq to the Iraqi minister of foreign affairs dated (...).

6- The remaining installations and areas agreed upon will be returned to the Iraqi authorities after this agreement expires, or if the agreement was cancelled, or on an earlier date agreed upon by both side, or if the U.S. forces no longer needs them in accordance to what the joint committee decides.

7- The U.S. forces and U.S. contractors maintain their ownership of all equipment, materials, supplements, mobile structures, and other mobile properties imported to Iraq or obtained in Iraq in accordance to the agreement.

Article Six

Usage of Installations and areas agreed upon

1- While respecting Iraq's sovereignty and within the framework of exchanging views between both sides, Iraq guarantees U.S. forces, contractors, their employees, and other persons or entities agreed upon, access to installations and areas agreed upon. When the installations and areas agreed upon are no longer needed in accordance to paragraph 6 of Article five, they will be returned to Iraq without charge and in accordance to what the joint military committee decides, unless both sides agree otherwise.

2- Iraq authorizes the U.S. forces to practice all the authorities and have all the rights to manage, construct, use, maintain, and secure installations and areas agreed upon. Both sides coordinate and collaborate regarding shared installations and areas agreed upon.

3- The United States forces control the entrances of the installations and areas agreed upon that are being used exclusively by them. Both sides coordinate their work in shared installations and areas agreed upon based on mechanisms put by the joint committee for military operations. Both sides coordinate security tasks in areas surrounding the areas and installations agreed upon through the joint committee for military operations.

Article Seven

Condition and Storage of defense equipments

The U.S. forces are authorized to store in the installations and areas agreed upon and other temporary locations agreed upon defense equipments, supplies, and materials used by the U.S. forces and linked to the tasks specified in this agreement. Weapons that are used by the U.S. forces must be suitable to the temporary nature of the U.S. mission in Iraq and are not connected in any way to weapons of mass destruction (chemical weapons, nuclear weapons, radiological weapons, biological weapons, and waste related to such weapons). The U.S. forces control the use and transportation of such weapons. The U.S. forces guarantees that no weapons or ammunition will be stored near residential areas, and the US right to transport the materials already stored in installations close to residential, and the US government will supply the Iraqi government with important information regarding their amount and types.

Article Eight

Environmental Protection

Both sides agree to implement this agreement while protecting nature and human security and health. The U.S. complies with

Iraqi environmental laws while conducting missions in accordance to this agreement.

Article Nine

Movement of vehicles, ships, and airplanes

For the purposes of this agreement:

1- While respecting relevant safety and traffic and marine regulations, U.S. forces' vehicles and ships are permitted to enter and exit and move inside Iraqi territories for the purposes of this agreement. The joint committee for military operations puts the appropriate regulations to control this movement.

2- While respecting relevant aviation laws, the U.S. government airplanes and civilian airplanes contracted with the U.S. Department of Defense are authorized to fly in the Iraqi airspace, refueling in the air, landing and departing in Iraq. The Iraqi authorities will give a one year authorization to the mentioned airplanes to land and depart from Iraq for the purposes of this agreement. No parties are allowed aboard U.S. government airplanes, ships, and vehicles, and civilian airplanes contracted with the U.S. Department of Defense without U.S. forces' approval, and they cannot be searched. The joint committee puts the appropriate regulations to facilitate their movement.

3- Air traffic control and surveillance are handed over immediately to the Iraqi authorities as soon as this agreement goes into effect.

4- Iraq can ask for the U.S. forces to temporarily take responsibility of the control and surveillance of the Iraqi airspace.

5- U.S. government airplanes and civilian airplanes contracted with the U.S. Department of Defense are not subject to taxes or related fees, including any fees related to flying in Iraqi airspace, refueling in the air, landing and departing in Iraq. Also, U.S. ships and civilian ships contracted with the U.S. Department of Defense are not subject to taxes or related fees during use of Iraqi ports. Airplanes and ships are not subject to any search, and all Iraqi requirements of registration are waived.

6- U.S. forces pay money for any services or materials obtained or received in Iraq.

7- Both sides exchange maps and other information on mines and other obstacles in Iraqi lands and waters that might jeopardize either side's movement in Iraq's land and waters.

Article Ten

Contracting

U.S. forces are permitted to sign contracts in accordance to U.S. law to obtain materials and services in Iraq, including construction services. U.S. forces will choose Iraqi contractors when possible as long as their bids have the best value. The U.S. forces will inform the Iraqi authorities of the Iraqi importers and Iraqi contractors' names and the amount of relevant contracts.

Article Eleven

Services and Telecommunications

1- U.S. forces are permitted to produce and generate water and electricity and other services for the installations and areas agreed upon in coordination with the Iraqi authorities through the relevant joint sub-committee.

2- The Iraqi government owns all frequencies. The Iraqi authorities allocate special waves for the U.S. forces based on what both sides decide through the joint committee (JMOCC). The U.S. forces will give these waves back after they are done using them.

3- The U.S. forces are permitted to operate their own wired and wireless telecommunications (according to the definition of wired and wireless telecommunications in the Convention of the International Telecommunication Union of 1992), including all the special services needed to secure the full capacity of telecommunications operations. The U.S. operates its systems in accordance to the Convention of the International Telecommunication Union whenever it is possible to implement these regulations.

4- For the purposes of this agreement, all fees related to the U.S. usage of telecommunications frequencies are waived, including any administrative or other related fees.

5- U.S. forces will coordinate with the Iraqi authorities regarding any telecommunications infrastructure projects outside the installations and areas agreed upon in accordance to article four.

Article Twelve

Legal Jurisdictions

Recognizing Iraq's sovereign right to decide and implement civil and criminal laws in Iraq's territory, and based on Iraq's request for temporary assistance from the U.S. forces as it was explained in article four, and while respecting Iraq's laws, regulations, traditions and customs, the two parties have agreed on the following:

1- The U.S. has the primary legal jurisdiction over U.S. armed forces members and civilian members concerning issues that occur inside the installations and areas agreed upon, and while they are on duty outside the installations and areas agreed upon, and in all conditions not mentioned in paragraph 2.

2- Iraq has the primary legal jurisdiction over armed forces members and civilian members in cases of major and intentional crimes mentioned in paragraph 8 that takes place outside areas and installations agreed upon while troops are off duty.

3- Iraq has the primary legal jurisdiction over contractors with the U.S. and their employees.

4- Both sides agree on assisting each other, when asked, in investigating incidents and collecting and exchanging evidence to ensure that justice is carried out.

5- All members of U.S. armed forces or civilian members must be handed over to the U.S. as soon as they are arrested by the Iraqi authorities. When Iraq is exercising its legal jurisdiction in accordance to paragraph 2 of this article, the U.S. authorities shall manage the tasks of detention of U.S. armed forces or civilian contractors. The U.S. authorities will allow Iraqi authorities access to suspects for interrogation and court hearings.

6- Both sides have the right to ask the other side to waive their primary legal jurisdiction over a specific case. Due to the exceptional importance of exercising such jurisdictions, the Iraqi government agrees to exercise its judicial jurisdictions in accordance to paragraph 2 only after it informs the U.S. in writing within 21 days of the discovery of the alleged crime.

7- U.S. armed forces members and civilian members have the right to enjoy the protections guaranteed by the U.S. constitution and laws in cases that fall under paragraph 1 where the U.S. exercises its legal jurisdictions. In case the victim of a crime that falls under paragraph 1 is a person who usually resides in Iraq, the two sides take the necessary steps through the joint committee to inform related persons of the following: crime investigation status, list of suspect's charges, court dates, results of negotiations regarding suspect's situation, the possibility to have suspect in public court sessions, coordinating with lawyers, and helping to submit requests in accordance to article twenty-one of this agreement. The U.S. authorities will try to conduct such courts in Iraq when the situation permits and when the two sides agree upon that. In case the court location in such cases was in the U.S., efforts will be made to facilitate the victim's personal presence at court.

8- In cases where Iraq is to exercise its legal jurisdictions in accordance to paragraph 2 of this article, the armed forces members and civilian members have the right to enjoy the legal

procedures and guarantees provided by the U.S. and Iraqi laws. The joint committee will put the necessary procedures and regulations needed to implement this article, including a description of the major and intentional crime that falls under paragraph 2, and the regulations that guarantees a legitimate trial. It is not permissible to exercise the legal jurisdictions related to paragraph 2 of this article unless in accordance to the procedures and mechanisms mentioned in this paragraph.

9- The U.S. authorities submit, in accordance to paragraphs 1 and 2 of this article, a declaration explaining whether the alleged crime occurred while suspects were off duty or on duty. In case the Iraqi authorities think the conditions require such a decision to be reviewed or changed, the two sides discuss that through the joint committee, and the U.S. authorities takes into consideration all the conditions, events and any other information submitted by the Iraqi authorities that might have an effect on changing the U.S. authorities decision.

10- Both sides review the regulations mentioned in this article every 6 months, including any suggested changes to the article, taking in consideration the security situation in Iraq, the level of U.S. forces engagement in military operations, the growth and development of the Iraqi judicial system, and the changes in both Iraq and U.S. laws.

Article Thirteen

Baring Guns and wearing uniforms

U.S. armed forces members and civilian members are authorized to carry U.S. government guns during their presence in Iraq based on the authorities and orders given to them and in accordance to the requirements of their task. U.S. armed forces members are also permitted to wear their official uniforms during duty in Iraq.

Article Fourteen

Entering and Exiting

1- For the purposes of the agreement, U.S. armed forces members and civilian members can enter and exit Iraq from official borders using U.S.-issued ID cards and travel documents issued by the US. The joint committee puts a mechanism for the Iraqi verification process, and the Iraqi authorities are in charge of carrying out the tasks of verification.

2- For purposes of verification the U.S. forces will submit to the Iraqi authorities a list with the names of U.S. armed forces members and civilian members entering and exiting Iraq or through the installations and areas agreed upon. For the purposes of this agreement, the U.S. armed forces members and civilian members can enter and exit Iraq through the installations and

areas agreed upon without being asked for anything other than U.S.-issued identification cards.

Article Fifteen

Importing and Exporting

1- For the purposes of the agreement, including training and services, the U.S. forces and their contractors are permitted to import into Iraq and export from Iraq (materials bought in Iraq) and re-export from Iraq and transport and use any equipments, supplements, materials, technology, training, or services except for those materials banned in Iraq at the time of signing this agreement. These materials are not subject to search or to license requirement or any other limitations in accordance to paragraph 10 of article two. Exporting Iraqi goods by the U.S. forces is not subject to search or any other limitations either except the license discussed later in this agreement. The joint committee will coordinate with the Iraqi ministry of trade to facilitate getting the required export license in accordance to the Iraqi laws related to exporting goods by U.S. forces.

2- U.S. forces members and civilian members are permitted to import, re-export, and use their personal equipment and materials for consumption or personal use. Such materials are not subject to any licenses, limitations, taxes and customs or other fees defined in paragraph 10 of Article Two, except for required or obtained services. The amount of imports must be reasonable and for personal use. The U.S. forces authorities will put the needed regulations to ensure no materials or articles of cultural or historical value are exported.

3- Materials will be searched by Iraqi authorities in accordance to paragraph 2 in a speedy fashion in a specific location agreed upon according to the joint committee.

4- If the tax exempt materials in accordance to this agreement were to be sold in Iraq to individuals or entities not included in tax exemption, taxes and customs as defined in paragraph 10 of Article Two are to be paid by the buyer (including the customs' fees).

5- It is not permissible to import any of the materials mentioned in this article for commercial reasons.

Article Sixteen

Taxes

1- Services and goods obtained by U.S. forces, or any entities acting on their behalf, in Iraq for official use are not subject to taxes and fees as defined in paragraph 10 of Article Two.

2- U.S. forces members and civilian members are not subject to any taxes or fees in Iraq except for services obtained or requested by them.

Article Seventeen

Licenses and Permits

1- Iraq agrees to accept valid U.S.-issued drivers' licenses held by U.S. forces members, civilian members and U.S. contractors without subjecting them to any tests or operation fees for vehicles, ships, and airplanes owned by the U.S. forces in Iraq.

2- Iraq agrees to accept valid U.S.-issued drivers' licenses held by U.S. forces members, civilian members and U.S. contractors to operate their personal cars in Iraq without subjecting them to any tests or fees.

3- Iraq agrees to accept valid U.S.-issued professional licensing held U.S. forces members, civilian members and U.S. contractors and their employees as long as such licenses were related to their jobs in accordance to conditions set by both sides.

Article Eighteen

Official and Military Vehicles

For the purposes of this article:

1- Official vehicles are commercial vehicles that might be modified for security reasons, and they will carry Iraqi license plates to be agreed upon by both sides. Iraqi authorities will issue, based on a request by the U.S. forces authorities, license plates for U.S. forces official cars without fees, and U.S. forces will reimburse the Iraqi authorities for the cost of these plates.

2- Iraq agrees to accept the validity of U.S.-issued licenses and registrations for the U.S. forces official vehicles.

3- All U.S. military vehicles are exempt from registration and licenses requirements. These vehicles will be identified with distinguishable numbers and signs.

Article Nineteen

Support Services

1- U.S. forces, or others acting on its behalf, are permitted to create and manage activities and entities inside the installations and areas agreed upon. This includes providing services to U.S. forces members, civilian members, and their contractors. These activities and entities might include military post offices,

financial services, stores selling food, medicine, goods and other services, and it includes other areas providing entertainment and telecommunications. All of the mentioned services do not require a permit.

2- Radio, media, and entertainment activities that reaches beyond the installations and areas agreed upon must comply with Iraqi laws.

3- Support services are for the exclusive use of the U.S. forces members, civilian members, their contractors, and other entities to be agreed upon. U.S. forces will take the required measures to ensure none of the mentioned support services are misused, and to ensure services and goods will not be re-sold to unauthorized individuals. The U.S. forces will limit radio and TV broadcasting to authorized receivers.

4- Entities and facilities offering services indicated this is article enjoy the same tax exemptions offered to the U.S. forces, including those exemptions mentioned in articles fifteen and sixteen of this agreement. These entities and facilities offering services are to be operated in accordance to U.S. regulations, and will not be obligated to collect or pay any taxes or fees on its operations.

5- Outgoing mail, sent through military postal services, is verified by the U.S. authorities and is exempt from being searched, examined, or confiscated by the Iraqi authorities except for the unofficial mail that might be subject to electronic monitoring. The specialized joint subcommittee deals with issues related to this paragraph, and issues shall be solved by both parties. The joint subcommittee shall routinely inspect the mechanisms used by the U.S. authorities to verify military mail.

Article Twenty

Currency and Foreign Exchange

1- U.S. forces are permitted to use any amount of U.S. currency or bonds for the purposes of this agreement. Using Iraqi currency in U.S. military banks must be in compliance with Iraqi laws.

2- U.S. forces are permitted to distribute or exchange any amount of currency to the U.S. forces members, civilians' members, and their contractors for purposes of travelling, including vacations.

3- U.S. forces will not take Iraqi currency out of Iraq, and will take all required measures to ensure none of the U.S. forces members, civilian members, or their contractors take Iraqi currency out of Iraq.

Article Twenty One

Claims

1- Except for contract related claims, both sides waive their rights to request compensation because of any harm, loss, or destruction of property, or request compensation for injury or death of forces members or civilian members from both sides occurring during their official duties.

2- US forces authorities will pay fair and reasonable compensation to settle third party claims arising due to a member of the armed forces or civilian members during their official duties, or due to non-combat accidents caused by U.S. armed forces. The U.S. forces' authorities may settle claims caused by non-official duties actions. Claims must be dealt with urgently by the U.S. forces' authorities in accordance to U.S. laws and regulations. When settling claims, the U.S. forces authorities will take in consideration any investigation reports, opinions regarding responsibility, or opinions regarding amount of damages issued by the Iraqi authorities.

3- When either of the two sides has issues related to claims resulting from paragraph 1 and 2 of this article, the two sides shall solve it through the joint committee, or if needed through the ministry joint committee.

Article Twenty Two

Detention

1- The U.S. forces are not permitted to detain or arrest anyone (except members of the armed forces and civilian members) unless it was based on an Iraqi decision issued in accordance to the Iraqi laws and in accordance to Article Four of this agreement.

2- All individuals detained by U.S. forces in accordance to the Iraqi laws and this agreement must be handed over to the Iraqi authorities within 24 hours.

3- The Iraqi authorities are permitted to request assistance from the U.S. forces to arrest or detain wanted individuals.

4- With complete and active coordination with the Iraqi authorities, when this agreement goes into effect all detainees in U.S. custody shall be released in a safe and organized fashion, unless the Iraqi authorities request otherwise in accordance to article four. The U.S. forces guarantees that, as soon as this agreement goes into effect, it will submit appropriate information to the Iraqi officials regarding situation of all the detainees. The U.S. forces hands over any detained individuals to the Iraqi authorities. The Iraqi forces works together with U.S. forces on such tasks during the current temporary period.

5- U.S. forces are not permitted to search houses and other properties without a court warrant, unless there was an active combat operation in accordance to article four, and in coordinating with the specialized Iraqi authorities.

Article Twenty Three

Extending this agreement to other countries

1- Iraq may reach an agreement with any other country participating in the Multi-National forces to ask for their help in achieving security and stability in Iraq.

2- Iraq is permitted to reach an agreement that includes any of the articles mentioned in this agreement with any country or international organization to ask for help in achieving security and stability in Iraq.

Article Twenty Four

Implementation

The following entities are responsible of the implementation of this agreement and the settlement of any disputes over its interpretation and application:

1- A joint committee of ministers that includes members with a minister rank chosen by both sides. This committee deal with the basic issues needed to interpret the implementation of this agreement.

2- The joint committee of ministers creates another joint committee for military operations that includes representatives from both sides. The joint committee to coordinate military operations will be jointly led by both sides.

3- The joint committee of ministers creates another joint committee formed by both sides that includes representatives chosen by both sides. This committee deals with all issues related to this agreement that do not fall under the mandate of the joint committee to coordinate military operations; this committee will jointly led by both sides.

4- The joint committee creates sub-committees in all different areas. Subcommittees shall discuss issues related to interpretation and implementation of this agreement each in accordance to its expertise.

Article Twenty Five

Withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq

Recognizing the improvement of the Iraqi security forces and its increased capabilities, and the fact that it is in charge of all security operations, and based on the strong relationship between the two sides, both sides have agreed on the following:

1- The U.S. forces shall withdraw from Iraqi territories no later than December 31st 2011.

2- U.S. combat forces will withdraw from all cities, towns, and villages as soon as the Iraqi forces take over the full security responsibility in them. The U.S. withdrawal from these areas shall take place no later than June 30th, 2009

3- All withdrawn U.S. combat troops in accordance to paragraph 2 regroup in installations and areas agreed upon located outside cities, towns, and villages. These installations and areas agreed upon will be specified by the joint committee of military operations before the date mentioned in paragraph 2 of this article.

4- Both sides review the progress towards achieving the date mentioned in paragraph 2 of this article and the conditions that might lead to one side asking the other to extend or reduce the time periods mentioned in paragraph 2 of this article. Any extension or reduction of the time period is subject to both sides' approval.

5- Before the end of the period mentioned in paragraph 1 of this article, and based on the Iraqi assessment of conditions, the Iraqi government is permitted to ask the U.S. government to keep specific forces for the purposes of training and support of the Iraqi security forces. In such a case, a special agreement will be negotiated and signed by both sides in accordance to laws and constitutional requirements in both countries. Or, the Iraqi government might ask for an extension of paragraph 1 of this article, and that can be done in accordance to paragraph 2 of article Thirty-One of this agreement.

6- U.S. forces may withdraw from Iraq before the dates indicated in this article if either of the two sides should so request. The U.S. government recognizes the Iraqi government's sovereign right to request a withdrawal of U.S. forces at anytime.

Article Twenty Six

Procedures to end the implementation of chapter 7 on Iraq

Recognizing the Iraqi government's right in refraining from requesting a renewal of the multi-national forces mandate in Iraq granted by the Security Council resolution 1790 (2007) expiring on December 31st 2008

Pointing out the letters addressed to the Security Council and attached to resolution 1790: one letter from the Iraqi prime minister and the other from the U.S. secretary of state consecutively dated 7th and 10th of December 2007

Noting the third part of the declaration of principles signed by the Iraqi PM and the U.S. president on November 26 of 2007 where Iraq has requested a final renewal of the U.S. mandate until December 31st of 2008

Recognizing the important and positive developments in Iraq, and keeping in mind that the situation in Iraq is fundamentally different from that time the Security Council adopted resolution number 661 (1990), especially that the danger posed on the international peace and stability by the former Iraqi government is gone now.

Both sides confirm that after the expiry of the United National mandate for the multi-national forces in Iraq on December 31st 2008, that Iraqi must regain its international and legal position that it used to enjoy before the Security Council resolution number 661 (in 1990). Both sides confirm that the U.S. will make its best to help Iraq take the necessary steps to accomplish that by December 31st of 2008.

Article Twenty Seven

Iraqi Assets

1- To help Iraq develop its economic regime through rebuilding its infrastructure, supplying the Iraqi people with necessary services, and continue to protect Iraq's natural resources of gas and oil and protect Iraq's foreign financial and economic assets, including the Iraq Development Fund, the two side work for:

A- Help Iraq waive the maximum amount of loans caused by the previous regime

B- Work to reach a final comprehensive solution for the compensation claims caused by the previous regime, including those compensation imposed by the Security Council.

2- Recognizing Iraq's efforts to deal with claims based on actions committed by the former regime, the U.S. president has used his authorities to protect the Iraqi accounts, Iraq Development Fund, and other asset from the U.S. judicial system. The U.S. government will continue to actively work with the Iraqi government to continue this protection against such claims.

3- Based on the letter sent from the U.S. president to the Iraqi Prime Minister on the (...) of 2008, the U.S. continues to be committed to helping Iraq regarding the request submitted to the Security Council asking for protection arrangements to Iraq's oil

and gas productions, their revenue, and the Iraq development fund, and these are the arrangements specified in the Security Council number 1483 (2003) and resolution 1546 (2003).

Article Twenty Eight

Deterring security threats

For the purpose of supporting security and stability in Iraq and to participate in maintaining international peace and stability, both sides aim to enhance the Iraqi government's political and military capabilities and to enable Iraq to deter threats against its sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. For these purposes, both sides work together in the following:

1- In the case of any internal or external threats against Iraq or in the case of foreign attacks that jeopardize Iraq's sovereignty, independence, and the territorial integrity of its waters, airspace or land, or survival of its democratic institutions, both sides, based on a request by the government of Iraq, go directly into strategic discussions, and according to what they agree on the U.S. shall take the appropriate measures that includes diplomatic, economical, or military actions, or a combination of the three, to deal with such threats.

2- Both sides agree to continue their close collaboration in supporting and maintaining security, political, and democratic institutions in Iraq including, and according to what both sides agree upon, collaboration in training, supplying and arming the Iraqi security forces to fight local and international terrorism and outlaw groups, based on the request of the Iraqi government.

Article Twenty Nine

International Zone

The Iraqi government takes full responsibility of the International Zone as soon as this agreement goes into effect. The Iraqi government is permitted to request temporary support from the U.S. forces in tasks related to security in the international zone. When such a request is submitted, the related Iraqi authorities shall work jointly with the U.S. forces to secure the International Zone during the temporary period requested by the Iraqi government.

Article thirty

Implementation Arrangements

Both sides enter into implementation arrangements to execute this agreement.

Article Thirty One

Contract Validity

- 1- This agreement is valid for three years unless it is terminated earlier in accordance to paragraph 3 of this article, or if either side did not agree to its extension in accordance to paragraph 2 of this article.
- 2- This agreement can be modified with the written approval of both sides and in accordance to constitutional procedures in both countries.
- 3- Cancellation of this agreement requires a written notice provided one year in advance.
- 4- This agreement goes into effect as of January, 1st 2009, after both sides exchange diplomatic memos confirming all required procedures have been met in accordance to the constitutions of both countries

Both the Arabic and English versions of this agreement were signed on (...), and the two versions are equal in their legal power.

Representative of the Iraqi government Representative of the U.S. government

map the candidates

11 Days to Go

McCain in Colorado, Palin in Missouri and Pennsylvania, Biden in West Virginia, and Michelle Obama in Ohio.

By E.J. Kalafarski and Chadwick Matlin

Friday, October 24, 2008, at 11:34 AM ET

medical examiner

Take a Chill, Pill

Why oral cancer drugs are not all they're cracked up to be.

By Jessica Wapner

Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at 1:09 PM ET

In the past few years, the world—or at least the portion of it dealing with cancer and its treatment—has gone gaga for oral drugs. Ever since the stunning success of [Gleevec](#), a once-daily anti-leukemia capsule, patients, doctors, and drug companies have been wooed by the siren call of pill-based medicine. Numerous such drugs have been approved in the past few years for several major cancers, and at least one-quarter of new cancer drugs in the pipeline are for oral formulations.

These oral drugs appear to herald a new era for cancer as a chronic illness—not a deadly disease, but a pesky condition like high blood pressure that simply requires swallowing a few pills every week. The convenience of taking pills at home instead of sitting at the cancer clinic with an IV tube stuck in your vein for hours on end is obvious. In part, pill-based therapy is a consequence of medical advancement. Traditional chemotherapy, which attacks all fast-growing cells (tumors, hair, bone marrow), requires a period of recovery between doses. Most new drugs are designed to kill only cancer cells and their enablers. Doing so practically requires that the medicine be in a take-home pill form because it means your body needs constant exposure to the medication.

But oral cancer drugs are hardly the dream treatment that many believe them to be. A host of problems means their use could end up in calamity, causing a far bigger headache than lying in a chair at a cancer clinic ever could.

First off is the elusive question of adherence: How likely are cancer patients to follow their at-home regimens correctly? Failure to follow prescriptions is a perennial conundrum of modern medicine that no one seems to quite understand. It might seem that cancer patients, coping with such a severe diagnosis, would be immune to that particular problem. Not so. The difficult regimens many treatments require can easily lead to missed doses. [One study](#) found that even among patients prescribed Gleevec—just one pill a day, no muss, no fuss—only half took their pills exactly as instructed.

On the flip side, some patients may be too willful. Fixated on the idea that they will die if they don't take their medicine, they may push themselves to endure debilitating side effects that really call for at least a change in dose. A breast cancer patient with an "I can get through this" mentality might not report diarrhea to her doctor on Friday, continue to take Xeloda over the weekend, and by Monday face life-threatening dehydration that could easily have been prevented. The assumption that cancer treatment equals suffering—as suggested by TV shows, movies, friends' and family members' experiences—may also lead patients to postpone a call to the doctor. When a patient expects to feel miserable during therapy, it might even seem silly to inform the clinic about side effects.

All of which leads to the question: Are cancer patients able to doctor themselves? That is essentially what is happening for many oral-drug takers. Patients need to be carefully instructed about what side effects to expect, how to know whether or not they are serious, and what to do if they are. There also needs to be an infrastructure to ensure that patients taking treatment at home are safe and well-cared-for in the absence of a doctor's or nurse's careful watch. A [recent study](#) found that few of those safeguards are in place at cancer centers around the country. How those safeguards will get there is anyone's guess, since

there are no budgets for installing such measures nor are such expenses reimbursed.

The ramifications of the pill trend also extend to the clinic. The extra counseling on the drugs and their side effects is time-consuming (although many pharmacists are relieved to serve a purpose beyond counting pills). But the real issue for clinics is with—surprise!—insurance. Unlike traditional chemotherapy drugs, oral drugs require prior authorization. The insurer needs to approve a prescription before it's filled, a task that regularly forces nurses, administrators, and even doctors to spend hours of nonreimbursed time on the telephone.

Also, many insurers require patients to fill their prescriptions through mail-order pharmacies, resulting in delays and botched shipments. For example, one kidney cancer patient suddenly experienced inexplicable disease progression on a drug that had been working for months. It turned out that her most recent refill, left on her front porch when she wasn't home to receive the delivery, had gone bad in the summer heat. Mail-order pharmacies also require large refills, sometimes up to 90 days, a completely impractical measure for a disease whose treatment requires frequent dose adjustments. That factor alone leads to thousands of dollars of medicine wasted.

On the plus side, many oral drugs are now distributed exclusively by specialty pharmacies, which help manage cancer patients taking treatment at home. Staffed by oncology pharmacists, these businesses serve as surrogate doctors, calling patients regularly to check about side effects, issue refill reminders, and help answer questions. But the extra middleman, while often useful, can just as easily lead to confusion and miscommunication. For example, a specialty-pharmacy caseworker might not know about a change in dose level made by the patient's doctor, causing problems with the next refill scheduled to be sent by the specialty pharmacy. Or a caseworker might neglect to report all the details of a conversation about an ongoing side effect. Motives come into question, too: Many specialty pharmacies provide data to drug companies about what drugs a doctor is prescribing to what patients, giving companies that restrict distribution of their drugs to specialty pharmacies a competitive edge over those who provide their pills through regular retail outlets.

Government insurance doesn't make things any easier. Oral cancer drugs are covered under [Medicare Part D](#), but with a serious catch. Part D covers the first \$2,000 with a 25 percent co-pay, followed by a \$2,850 coverage gap known as the doughnut hole, for which patients are completely responsible. After patients emerge from the doughnut hole, benefits resume for the rest of the year. Because oral cancer drugs are extremely expensive, a Medicare-insured cancer patient will enter the doughnut hole after a single prescription and may not be able to afford a refill. Back to the clinic administrator, who then spends hours locating a patient-assistance program, a charitable

organization set up to help cancer patients afford their treatments. Disturbingly, most patients who receive such assistance are probably getting money from an organization that gets donations from the very drug company whose pills they cannot afford.

Every single oral cancer drug is covered by Medicare Part D, giving pharmaceutical companies an extra incentive to focus on this approach. But doctors receive zero revenue for administering oral therapy. By contrast, traditional chemotherapy, covered under a different area of Medicare (without a doughnut hole and with generally lower co-pays), accounts for about 80 percent of the average oncologist's revenue. The eventual economic ramifications for cancer-care professionals are unknown.

Oral cancer drugs are an ideal option for vast numbers of cancer patients. These at-home regimens are convenient, often do have milder side effects than traditional chemotherapy, and herald a new era for those suffering from a horrible disease. For a patient who clearly comprehends what side effects are normal, which are not, and other complicated health matters, at-home treatment may make good sense. Clearly, though, hurdles abound, and many patients and doctors are proceeding under the misconception that pill-based therapy is a snap.

A [recent report](#) from the National Comprehensive Cancer Network, one of the main U.S. organizations for cancer-care professionals, states that it will probably be a decade before any cancer regimen is entirely oral-based. That should give plenty of time to work out the kinks.

moneybox

The 20-Hour Workweek

The unemployment rate seems low. That's because it's not counting all those underemployed workers.

By Daniel Gross

Wednesday, October 22, 2008, at 3:59 PM ET

It's hard to overstate the poor numbers coming out of Wall Street in recent months. But could it be that we're overstating the gravity of the situation? As job losses have mounted and consumer confidence has plunged, [policymakers](#), [news organizations](#), econo-pundits, and even some of my *Slate* colleagues have noted that the unemployment rate, which [rose to 6.1 percent in September](#), seems to be at a nonrecessionary, noncatastrophic, low level. The unemployment rate is still below where it was in 2003; and between September 1982 and May 1983, the last very deep recession, it topped 10 percent. (Go [here](#) for a chart and historical data).

But maybe the employment data are much worse than they seem. In the past year, the two key measures of employment—the unemployment rate and the payroll jobs figure—have been poor but not awful. The unemployment rate has risen from 4.5 percent a year ago to 6.1 percent. And in the first nine months, 760,000 payroll jobs were lost. This is unwelcome but not catastrophic. So why do things feel so bad? It's not because, as Phil Gramm suggested, we're a nation of whiners. And it's not a matter of columnists and spin doctors shading the numbers to make things look worse.

Rather, these two figures are undermeasuring the weakness in the labor market. By some measures, in fact, the job situation is worse than it has been at any time since 1994.

Here's why. Back in the 1990s, the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) recognized that in a changing economy, in which outsourcing, self-employment, and contracting were becoming more commonplace, the traditional methods of measuring unemployment and job growth might not accurately portray the economic situation. And it knew its methodology had some quirks—the unemployment rate doesn't account for people who have given up looking for jobs, or who have taken themselves out of the work force. So since 1994, the BLS has been compiling [alternative measures of labor underutilization](#). There are many different varieties of labor underutilization. There are marginally attached workers: "persons who currently are neither working nor looking for work but indicate that they want and are available for a job and have looked for work sometime in the recent past." There are discouraged workers, a subset of the marginally attached crowd, who have "given a job-market related reason for not looking currently for a job." There are people who work part-time because they can't find—or their employer can't provide—full-time work. There are people who have left the work force entirely. Neither the unemployment rate nor the payroll jobs figure captures the plight of many of these folks.

And the alternative labor underutilization measures show a lot of stress. The data on people [not in the work force](#) show the number of people not looking for work because they're discouraged about finding jobs has risen from 276,000 in September 2007 to 467,000 in September 2008—up 70 percent. The percentage of people unemployed for more than 15 weeks stood at 2.3 percent in September 2008, up from 1.6 percent in September 2007, a rise of nearly 45 percent. But the most troublesome is the U6. The U6 is sort of the summa of job angst, a shorthand tally for the aggregate of job-related frustration. (Moneybox [covered some of this terrain back in 2004](#).) To compile the U6, the BLS takes the number of unemployed, plus all marginally attached workers, plus all of those employed part-time for economic reasons, and then calculates that total as a percentage of the sum of the entire civilian labor force plus marginally attached workers.

The U6 in September rose to 11 percent, its highest level since the data series started in 1994 and significantly higher than it was in the last recession, in 2001. The ratio between the U6 and the official unemployment rate has remained relatively steady over the last several years. But that means that as the unemployment rate has risen, so too has the portion of the population suffering from other types of work deficits. Three years ago, when the unemployment rate was 5.1 percent, an additional 3.9 percent of the labor force fell into one of those other underutilized categories. Last month, with the unemployment rate at 6.1 percent, an additional 4.9 percent of the labor force was underutilized. (See charts comparing the [unemployment rate](#) and the [U6 rate](#).) Add it up, and more than 10 percent of American workers are essentially not contributing full-time to their families' well-being and to that of the economy at large. The unemployment rate may still be historically low, but the underutilization is historically high.

moneybox

Will Your Recession Be Tall, Grande, or Venti?

The more Starbucks a country has, the bigger its financial problems.

By Daniel Gross

Monday, October 20, 2008, at 6:04 PM ET

Remember Thomas Friedman's [McDonald's theory](#) of international relations? The thinking was that if two countries had evolved into prosperous, mass-consumer societies, with middle classes able to afford Big Macs, they would generally find peaceful means of adjudicating disputes. They'd sit down over a Happy Meal to resolve issues rather than use mortars. The recent unpleasanties between Israel and Lebanon, which both have McDonald's operations ([here](#) and [here](#), respectively) put paid to that reasoning. But the Golden Arches theory of realpolitik was good while it lasted.

In the same spirit, I propose the [Starbucks](#) theory of international economics. The higher the concentration of expensive, nautically themed, faux-Italian-branded Frappuccino joints in a country's financial capital, the more likely the country is to have suffered catastrophic financial losses.

It may sound doppio, but work with me. This recent crisis has its roots in the unhappy coupling of a frenzied nationwide real-estate market centered in California, Las Vegas, and Florida, and a nationwide credit mania centered in New York. If you could pick one brand name that personified these twin bubbles, it was Starbucks. The Seattle-based coffee chain followed new housing developments into the suburbs and exurbs, where its outlets became pit stops for real-estate brokers and their clients. It also

carpet-bombed the business districts of large cities, especially the financial centers, with [nearly 200 in Manhattan alone](#). Starbucks' frothy treats provided the fuel for the boom, the caffeine that enabled deal jockeys to stay up all hours putting together offering papers for CDOs, and helped mortgage brokers work overtime processing dubious loan documents. Starbucks strategically located many of its outlets on the ground floors of big investment banks. (The one around the corner from the former Bear Stearns headquarters has already closed.)

Like American financial capitalism, Starbucks, fueled by the capital markets, took a great idea too far (quality coffee for Starbucks, securitization for Wall Street) and diluted the experience unnecessarily (subprime food such as egg-and-sausage sandwiches for Starbucks, subprime loans for Wall Street). Like so many sadder-but-wiser Miami condo developers, Starbucks operated on a "build it and they will come" philosophy. Like many of the humiliated Wall Street firms, the coffee company let algorithms and number-crunching get the better of sound judgment: If the waiting time at one Starbucks was over a certain number of minutes, Starbucks reasoned that an opposite corner could sustain a new outlet. Like the housing market, Starbucks peaked in the spring of 2006 and has since [fallen precipitously](#).

America's financial crisis has gone global in the past month. European and Asian governments, which until recently were rejoicing over America's financial downfall, have had to nationalize banks and expand depositors' insurance. Why? Many of their banks feasted on American subprime debt and took shoddy risk-management cues from their American cousins. Indeed, the countries whose financial sectors were most connected to the U.S.-dominated global financial system, the ones whose financial institutions plunged into CDOs, credit-default swaps, and the whole catalog of horrors have suffered the most.

What does this have to do with the price of coffee? Well, when you start poking around Starbucks' international [store locator](#), some interesting patterns emerge. At first blush, there's a pretty close correlation between a country having a significant Starbucks presence, especially in its financial capital, and major financial cock-ups, from Australia (big blowups in finance, hedge funds, and asset management companies; [23 stores](#)) to the United Kingdom (nationalization of its largest banks). In many ways, London in recent years has been a more concentrated version of New York—the wellspring of many toxic innovations, a hedge-fund haven. It sports [256](#) Starbucks. In Spain, which is now grappling with the bursting of a speculative coastal real-estate bubble (sound familiar?), the financial capital, Madrid, has [48 outlets](#). In crazy Dubai, [48 Starbucks outlets](#) serve a population of [1.4 million](#). And so on: South Korea, which is bailing out its banks big time, has [253](#); Paris, the locus of several embarrassing debacles, has [35](#).

But there are many spots on the globe where it's tough to find a Starbucks. And these are precisely the places where banks are surviving, in large part because they have not financially integrated with banks in the Starbucks economies. In the entire continent of Africa, whose banks don't stray too far, I count just three (in Egypt). We haven't heard much about bailouts in Central America, where Starbucks has no presence. South America's banks may be buckling, but they haven't broken. Argentina, formerly a financial basket case and now a pocket of relative strength, has just [one store](#). Brazil, with a population of nearly 200 million, [has a mere 14](#). Italy hasn't suffered any major bank failures in part because its banking sector isn't very active on the international scene. The number of Starbucks there? Zero. And the small countries of Northern Europe, whose banking systems have been largely spared, are largely Starbucks-free. (There are two in [Denmark](#), three in [the Netherlands](#), and none in the Scandinavian trio of Sweden, Finland, and Norway.)

My tentative theory: Having a significant Starbucks presence is a pretty significant indicator of the degree of connectedness to the form of highly caffeinated, free-spending capitalism that got us into this mess. It's also a sign of a culture's willingness to abandon traditional norms and ways of doing business (virtually all the countries in which Starbucks has established beachheads have their own venerable coffee-house traditions) in favor of fast-moving American ones. The fact that the company or its local licensee felt there was room for dozens of outlets where consumers would pony up lots of euros, liras, and rials for expensive drinks is also a pretty good indicator that excessive financial optimism had entered the bloodstream.

This theory isn't foolproof. Some places that have relatively high concentrations of Starbucks, such as Santiago, Chile ([27](#)), have been safe havens. Russia, which has [just six](#), has blown up. But it's close enough. And so, if you're looking for potential trouble spots, forget about the *Financial Times* or the Bloomberg terminal. Just look at the user-friendly Starbucks store locator. The next potential trouble spot? I just returned from a week in Istanbul, Turkey, a booming financial capital increasingly tied to the fortunes of Western Europe. It has a storied coffee culture, yet I gave up counting the number of Starbucks stores occupying prime real estate. It turns out there are [67](#) of them. Watch out, Turkey.

movies

Everyone Sucks

Charlie Kaufman's *Synecdoche, New York*.

By Dana Stevens

Friday, October 24, 2008, at 11:08 AM ET

Synecdoche, New York (Sony Pictures Classics) is a very sad movie for two reasons. First off, the story, about a theater

director who's sucked into the vortex of his own impossible artistic ambitions, is unremittingly bleak, making for one of the most depressing nondocumentary films you're likely to see, well, ever. But secondly—and in the long run, more movingly—*Synecdoche* is sad because it's a constant reminder, a ghostly double, of the great movie it could have been.

Synecdoche (the title is a pun on the place name Schenectady and the [rhetorical device](#)) is the first movie directed by screenwriter Charlie Kaufman, who wrote four films—*Human Nature*, *Being John Malkovich*, *Adaptation*, and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*—that have established him as the Kafka of Hollywood. He's the only major screenwriter with a distinctly literary voice. In fact, he may be the only "major screenwriter," period; how many movies do you go see because of who wrote them? The near-universal plaudits for *Eternal Sunshine* tended to treat it as a "Charlie Kaufman film," while only mentioning the actual director, Michel Gondry, as an afterthought. And looking back on Kaufman's body of work, it's hard at first to remember which of his two collaborators, Gondry or Spike Jonze, directed which movie. These four films are tied together not by their look, their sound, or their pacing—elements a director controls—but by the writerly virtues they share, their mix of labyrinthine imagination and absurdist wit.

Given all that, the prospect of Kaufman's directorial debut was really exciting—which makes the lugubrious result that much more disappointing. Fittingly, "disappointment" is a key concept in *Synecdoche*. In an early scene that recurs later as a flashback, Adele Lack (Catherine Keener), the unhappy wife of regional theater director Caden Cotard (Philip Seymour Hoffman), packs her bags to move to Berlin without him, reassuring him that it's not his fault: "Everyone's disappointing once you get to know them." It's a dispiritingly cynical assessment of human relations, one that we assume the rest of the movie will, at least in part, attempt to refute. But over the next two hours, we'll get to know Caden Cotard very, very well—his desires, his frustrations, his neuroses, and his unpleasant bodily emissions—and, sure enough, as time goes on, he'll interest us less and less.

And time *does* go on in this movie, with a haphazard, vertiginous motion that splits the difference between Proust and Philip K. Dick. Caden resists the advances of Hazel (Samantha Morton), a sexy employee at his theater's box office, on the grounds that his wife has only been gone for a week. "She's been gone a year," Hazel replies. Later, Caden will fly to Berlin to track down his daughter, Olive (Sadie Goldstein), who's fallen into the clutches of his wife's scary best friend, Maria (Jennifer Jason Leigh, hilariously riffing on the scary-best-friend role she's specialized in ever since *Single White Female*). "She's 4 fucking years old!" Caden screams, upon learning that Maria has covered the girl's body in tattoos. But Olive, Maria tells him in her newly acquired German accent, is nearly 11.

The movie's sense of temporal dislocation is profound and pervasive and very skillfully done—walking out, you have no idea how long the whole experience lasted (though you're pretty sure it was much too long). Still, *Synecdoche* contains moments of beauty so aching, you find yourself mentally scrambling to fill in the movie that should have existed around them. Many of these high points involve the main character's relationship with his absent little girl, who pops up in brief, nostalgic tableaux. (If you've seen *Eternal Sunshine*, you know how brilliantly Kaufman can evoke the sharp pain of childhood remembered.)

But I'm getting ahead of myself, Caden Cotard-style. I haven't even described the theater piece at the movie's center, an untitled [Gesamtkunstwerk](#) that Caden undertakes upon receiving a MacArthur "genius" award. After renting out a vast warehouse in Manhattan, he attempts to construct a scale model of his own life, complete with actors playing his wife, his ex-lovers, his neighbors, and eventually himself—a kind of shadow figure (Tom Noonan) is hired to follow Caden everywhere and pretend to be directing his play. The distinction between reality and simulacrum disappears down the rabbit hole: The fake Caden falls in love with the real Hazel, the real Caden has a fling with the fake Hazel (Emily Watson), and an actress hired to play a maid (Dianne Wiest) angles to take over the whole show. Which, by the way, is a "show" only in the most abstract sense; as one disgruntled extra points out during a rehearsal, nearly 17 years have passed without the work ever being performed for an audience.

All this talk of doubling and simulacra sounds terribly cerebral, and at moments, the movie can be—when we hear characters eulogizing Beckett or see Caden cracking the first volume of Proust, even the most bookish viewer may permit herself a roll of the eyes. But *Synecdoche*'s main problem isn't that it overintellectualizes; in fact, one of Kaufman's chief tricks is the punch-to-the-gut emotional scene that comes out of nowhere. The problem is that the movie's worldview, in the end, isn't expansive enough to justify the (quite literal) stage it takes place on. When a takeaway message finally emerges from the film's mad swirl of images, memories, and ideas, it seems to add up to little more than, yeah, people *are* kind of lame once you get to know them. Or possibly, as an actor playing a priest intones over a fake grave in the play-within-a-movie, "Fuck everybody."

I'm not asking for humanist inspiration here—really, I'm not. I love a glum take on the human condition as much as the next guy. But Beckett was Beckett because he managed to write about what my endearingly depressive brother once called "the slow conveyor belt towards death" in a way that made you glad you were along for the ride. It's wonderful to be allowed once more inside the many mansions of Charlie Kaufman's brain—I hope he never stops writing and never stops grappling with the big questions, the corny embarrassing ones about why we live and love and die. I just never want to have to see this movie again.

movies

The Changeling

Angelina Jolie's Oscar attempt.

By Dana Stevens

Thursday, October 23, 2008, at 1:09 PM ET

Like an election conducted in a one-party state, *The Changeling* (Universal) offers its audience a single choice: to identify completely with Christine Collins (Angelina Jolie), the kind, beautiful, persecuted single mother whose 9-year-old son, Walter (Gattlin Griffith), disappears from their Los Angeles home one afternoon in 1928. (The film is based on a true story that made tabloid headlines at the time.) To make extra-double-sure that our loyalties never waver, the director, Clint Eastwood, stuffs the ballot box by surrounding the numinous Christine with scoundrels. The LAPD investigator assigned to her case (Jeffrey Donovan) is more concerned with burnishing the reputation of his corrupt department than tracking down the missing boy. In collusion with his equally bloodless boss (Colm Feore), he tries to pass off a runaway child, picked up five months later, as Christine's son.

The primal horror of this premise—a stranger is suddenly delivered to your home with the bland assurance that he's a member of your family—could have made for a movie as frightening as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and as psychologically astute as *Gaslight*, the 1944 film in which Charles Boyer slowly convinces a perfectly sane Ingrid Bergman that she's going mad. Instead, *The Changeling* settles for middlebrow uplift and handsomely conventional melodrama. Unlike the three-hankie "women's pictures" of the '30s and '40s, which Eastwood explicitly cites—the long middle section, set in a psych ward, comes straight from the 1948 potboiler *The Snake Pit*—*The Changeling* doesn't invite the viewer to share in its heroine's disorientation, rage, and grief. Rather, it keeps us at a stately remove, presenting Christine's suffering as a kind of religious tableau.

FBI profilers must only pray that real serial killers telegraph their intentions the way actor Jason Butler Harner does: by snickering from beneath a sweaty forelock, jabbering nonsensically, and fondling a rifle in the back of a flatbed truck. From the second he appears, it's evident that Harner's character, a chicken farmer named Gordon Northcott, is up to unwholesome shenanigans in some way related to the Collins boy's disappearance. A kindly juvenile-crimes cop, Detective Ybarra (Michael Kelly) picks up a teenage runaway on Northcott's property and interrogates him—an interrogation that will lead to revelations so shocking they will cause the investigator's cigarette ash to fall to the floor in slow motion.

In addition to Detective Ybarra, Christine has one other ally in her quest, the Rev. Gustav Briegleb (John Malkovich), a local preacher and radio evangelist who's on a crusade to expose corruption in the LAPD. At Briegleb's urging, Christine holds a press conference detailing her plight—with dire consequences. Casting Malkovich against type as a good guy was a smart idea, but handing him a role that's *so thoroughly* good sort of defeats the purpose. Briegleb is such an asexual namby-pamby that we never get any insight into his motives for standing up for the hapless Christine. Is he attracted to her? Awed by her? Or simply using her as a prop in his own vendetta? Malkovich's Robin Hood-like character never rises above the level of *deus ex machina* plot device (though it does give the actor a chance to repeat the fun-to-say name "Gustav Briegleb" in that inimitably menacing voice).

Angelina Jolie's performance as Christine Collins will be derided by some as Oscar-grubbing. She certainly runs through the full checklist of Academy-pleasing tropes: unearned suffering, lush period costumes (I want that acorn brooch), and plucky courage under duress. But Jolie isn't really to blame for this movie's clomping heavy-handedness. For one thing, she's profoundly miscast as an ordinary working-class woman gullible enough to be gaslighted by unscrupulous cops. Who among us believes that Angie J. couldn't clean up the LAPD with her own bare hands while roller-skating in high heels? (Jolie really does roller-skate in high heels in this movie; it's part of her character's job as the constantly mobile supervisor of a telephone switchboard and one of the period details that makes *The Changeling* look as terrific as it does.)

It may be that Jolie's extracurricular celebrity is now so outsized that it compromises her ability to disappear into a role (a phenomenon I wasn't alone in observing at work in last year's *A Mighty Heart*—as superbly as Jolie played Mariane Pearl, you never forgot who she really was). But, honestly, Angelina Jolie was never one to disappear into a role. She's *always* played women who are larger than life—too glamorous and tough and special to be assimilated into their respective milieus. Jolie is a freak of nature, sexier and crazier and more powerful and just plain *more* than the rest of us; that's what we love about her in the tabloids and in the movies. If Eastwood had wanted to cast someone who'd be convincing as a careworn single mother vulnerable enough to be taken in at first by the child-switching trick, he could have chosen Amy Ryan, whose always-welcome face briefly appears as the tough-but-kind prostitute who gives Christine advice in the loony bin.

The mere presence of such a character—the hooker with a heart of gold! who stands up to the bullying, electroshock-dealing doctor!—points to the fact that like many of Eastwood's late movies, this one takes place in a deeply phony moral universe. How hard is it to like a baby chick better than the hobnailed boot that's stomping on it? As gifted as Angelina Jolie may be, there are only so many different inflections she can give to the

monotone refrain, "Please help me find my son." All of Eastwood's rigorous craftsmanship seems wasted on a movie whose message never rises above the bumper-sticker admonition that "mean people suck."

other magazines

Red Europe vs. Blue Europe

The *Weekly Standard* on the other continental divide.

By Marc Tracy

Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at 4:44 PM ET

Weekly Standard, Oct. 27

An [article](#) casts Obama-loving, effete, money-concerned Western Europe as Blue America's soul mate and hardy, McCain-supporting Eastern Europe as Red America's trans-Atlantic twin. Germany wants to sustain the Russian peace and the flow of Russian energy while the former Eastern bloc distrusts its newly resurgent foe. The two Europes' divergent worldviews, the author says, explain their U.S. presidential preferences. ... A [dispatch](#) from North Carolina chronicles Sen. Elizabeth Dole's shockingly, yes, "doleful" re-election prospects. Democratic nominee Kay Hagan has fashioned a dead-heat race in this once-reliably Republican state the same way Barack Obama has—by subtly raising questions about her opponent's age (Dole is one month older than John McCain) and not-so-subtly invoking the economy. In other words, these politics are not local. "I'm not really running against Kay," Dole says. "I'm running against Chuck [Schumer]."

The New Republic, Nov. 5

A [profile](#) of "mustachioed, disheveled" Obama political guru David Axelrod [is hardly the first](#). But its focus on Axelrod's method of getting black Democrats elected—emphasize biography, take pains to avoid seeming angry—offers fresh insight into his current client's success. Axelrod is a big believer in what he calls "third-party authenticators"—credible, independent figures whose vocal support gives whites license to vote for a black man. Colin Powell, who endorsed Obama a few days after this piece went to print, may be the strongest example yet, even though "authenticators" are usually white. ... Speaking of third-party authenticators, literary editor Leon Wieseltier [endorses](#) Obama, saying the candidate is "smart ... decent ... [and] undangerous," if also inexperienced in foreign policy. McCain essentially forfeited Wieseltier's support with the tone of his campaign. "And when he picked Sarah Palin," Wieseltier adds, "he told the United States of America to go fuck itself."

Newsweek, Oct. 27

Editor Jon Meacham's [cover story](#), "America the Conservative," asserts, "We are at heart a right-leaning country skeptical of government once a crisis that requires government has passed."

The current financial meltdown is just such a crisis, he writes. Some suggest that the American system of government—not the American people—encourages center-right policies. There is a "perennial reality" of conservative presidents enacting whatever policies they want, and liberal presidents having to move rightward. ... A [rebuttal](#) takes a cyclical view of ideologies: First came the New Deal, then the Reagan Revolution, and now another liberal go-round. ... A fascinating [profile](#) follows psychologist Steven Reisner as he agitates for the American Psychological Association to bar participation in the United States' "enhanced interrogations" of suspected terrorists, which many say amount to torture.

The New Yorker, Oct. 27

An [article](#) paints Sarah Palin as one savvy hockey mom who hired a top PR firm to sell herself to the East Coast establishment. During two Juneau get-togethers, Palin won over Bill Kristol, Fred Barnes, Dick Morris, and other top conservative thinkers with her poise, knowledge of missile defense, and pre-meal prayer. ("I told a girlfriend afterwards, 'That was *some* grace!' " says one attendee.) The piece also confirms that McCain wanted to pick Sen. Joe Lieberman but was "scared off" by fears of a backbench revolt. "They took it away from him," one adviser says. ... A [piece](#) argues that rising income inequality is why most plumbers, unlike their colleague Joe, will not have their taxes raised by a President Obama (although neither will Joe). The author bemoans the right's slandering of progressive taxation, which even Adam Smith supported. "Smith's notion of reasonableness did not anticipate the Fox News Channel."

New York, Oct. 27

A [profile](#) of top Hillary operative-cum-Fox News talking head Howard Wolfson explores D.C.'s "permanent political class," whose ideological enemies "are more alike than they are different." Wolfson, who now defends Obama from some of the very talking points he himself first constructed during the primary, has no qualms about working for Fox: "Look, I am not the guy playing the Harlem Globetrotters." (The article also mentions Wolfson's indie-rock blog, [Gotham Acme](#).) ... A superb [piece](#) reports on the simmering intra-Republican feud—sure to reach full boil should McCain lose—over the party's future. Palin, in particular, has been a wedge between conservative "fundamentalists" and those who think the party needs a new, "post-Reagan" vision. The article mentions several alternatives, including populist "Sam's Club" conservatism and the reinvigorated British Tories' emphasis on "civil society."

poem

"Reading Faulkner at 17, You Foresee Your Reckoning"

By Catherine Pierce
Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at 6:58 AM ET

Click the arrow on the audio player to hear Catherine Pierce read this poem.

The harvest moon hangs heavy,
a gourd. Your desires heave inside you
like a blood wave. Ignore the cat

pulling on your trousers. Ignore
the cicadas bossing you from the elms.
See yourself in this hot gold light.

You are the brother in love with Caddy.
You are the idiot son. Your mouth dumb.
Your mind lucent. Everything you want

sharp as the cat's bite at your ankle. You pull
your foot back. A yowl, pointed as teeth.
The moon is what will fall on you.

politics

Track the Presidential Polls on Your iPhone

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

Friday, October 24, 2008, at 8:24 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

Obama's October Surprise

With less than two weeks to go, he's competitive in Indiana.

By John Dickerson

Thursday, October 23, 2008, at 7:16 PM ET

INDIANAPOLIS—When Barack Obama took the stage at noon at the end of Obelisk Square downtown, he faced two city blocks of people, stretching for almost one-quarter of a mile between rows of trees turning from green to yellow. These weren't just people who'd stopped by on their way to get a sandwich. Going to political rallies these days is a chore. You have to go through Secret Service screening, and once you've entered the fenced-in area, you can't go far. Still, some people arrived at 4:30 a.m., wearing their Colts knit caps and carrying blankets, to get a good spot and wait for nearly eight hours.

I know Obama is supposed to be the Ice Man, with special powers of equanimity. And maybe the swarms of people get old after a while. Still, especially at the end of campaigns, politicians tend to lavish special attention on their crowds—and revel in the adulation they receive in return. They try not to let on at the time. But after the race is over, they hearken back to that one moment when the cheers were so loud or so quiet that they got a hint of how things would go on Election Day.

If Obama wins, maybe he'll look back on Thursday, Oct. 23, in Indianapolis as that moment. It's not just the size of the crowd of 35,000 that was significant—heck, he saw nearly three times as large a gathering in St. Louis last week. What's significant was that even in Indiana, a historically red state, he was [tied in the polls](#) with John McCain less than two weeks before Election Day.

McCain was in Florida on Thursday for the first day of his "Joe the Plumber Tour," continuing his attack on Obama's tax and spending policies. Obama aides say the Joe the Plumber strategy isn't working beyond the Republican base. Beyond that, they say, people don't think that Joe's story is their story, as the McCain campaign argues. Perhaps, but Obama's remarks were

so clearly directed at rebutting McCain on the issue of taxes, McCain's populist appeal is posing at least some kind of threat.

McCain uses Joe the Plumber to argue that Obama doesn't look out for regular people. Obama counters by arguing that McCain's tax cuts will only go to fund corporations. Obama also presents himself as a fighter for working people. "Who's looking out for the teachers, the steel workers, and the teamsters? That's the president I want to be," he said. He reiterated that, under his plan, taxes will go up only for people who make more than \$250,000. When he asked everyone who made less than that to raise their hands, so many went up that it looked like the Colts had just scored a go-ahead touchdown.

If Obama wins, one key will have been how he won the tax issue. Just a month ago, when voters in the *Wall Street Journal* poll were asked which candidate would be "better on taxes," McCain was favored 41 percent to 37 percent. That's not the case anymore. [In the latest Wall Street Journal poll](#), Obama has a 14-point lead (48 percent to 34 percent) over McCain on this question. That's an 18-point swing.

This suggests Obama may have been able to shake the rap that has dogged Democrats since Walter Mondale promised to raise taxes in 1984—but it also says that the Obama campaign has been very effective in delivering a message. Obama has been able to change voters' minds over time. McCain's many gambits have been ineffective, which doesn't bode well for his ability to execute the inside-straight he'll have to manage to win 270 electoral votes.

And after all his talk about tax policy, Obama made sure to give the crowd some of the soaring rhetoric that had probably brought most of them out. At the end of his speech Obama returned to the theme of political unification that launched his candidacy nearly four years ago at the Democratic Convention.

"There are no real or fake parts of this country," he said, a reference to a Sarah Palin speech in North Carolina in which she said she was happy to be in "the real America" and praised "the pro-America areas of this great nation." Obama continued: "We are not separated by the pro-America and anti-America parts of this nation—we all love this country, no matter where we live or where we come from. There are patriots who supported this war in Iraq and patriots who opposed it, patriots who believe in Democratic policies and those who believe in Republican policies. The men and women from Indiana and all across America who serve on our battlefields may be Democrats and Republicans and Independents, but they have fought together and bled together and some died together under the same proud flag. They have not served a red America or a blue America—they have served the United States of America."

By the end, the crowd's hands were up in the air again.

politics

McCain in the Mountains

Could this have been McCain's final visit to New Hampshire?

By John Dickerson

Wednesday, October 22, 2008, at 7:31 PM ET

MANCHESTER, N.H.—The last time John McCain stood at the end of the hockey rink at St. Anselm's College, he was in even tougher political shape than he is right now. It was June 2007, and he was there for a GOP primary debate. Several of his top strategists had quit, he was running out of money, and he was sinking fast in the polls.

On Wednesday, McCain was back in nearly the same spot, hoping for the same kind of magic that helped him come from behind to win the last two Republican primaries in New Hampshire. He called on the crowd to prove the polls and pundits wrong. "I love you," he said. "I love New Hampshire. I know I can count on you. I'm asking you to come out for me one more time."

The crowd of a few thousand filled only about half the arena, some standing on the part of the rink that had been covered. The hockey boards and glass were still in place, putting McCain at the spot where a goalie would normally stand. The symbolism was almost too painful: McCain is playing defense. In several polls, Obama has opened up his largest lead of the campaign. In the CNN poll of polls, Obama is ahead by nine points, his largest margin yet. In New Hampshire, Obama is up by nearly 10 points or more.

In that June 2007 GOP debate at St. Anselm's, McCain and his rivals debated which of them was the genuine Republican. At the time, McCain was in trouble, because, while he had support among independents, he was weak with his party base. Now the opposite is true: In the recent *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News survey, McCain does well among the GOP base, but independents have abandoned him. Obama is now up by 12 points among that group. In September, McCain was up by 13 with independents—a 25-point swing. Looking at the blank patches in the crowd standing over the ice, it was tempting to think, "That's where the independents once stood."

The crowd felt more Republican than the McCain rallies of old. His crowds have always been thoroughly patriotic, lined with men in hats that list the wars in which those men fought. But the patriotism is more aggressive now. That happens as presidential campaigns draw to a close, but when the crowd chanted, "U-S-A," it sounded more like a taunt than a celebration.

There were no uncomfortable moments where McCain disagreed with his audience. But this sense of comity did not prevent the crowd from celebrating McCain's maverick reputation; before he took the stage, the crowd chanted, "Mav-er-ick," emphasizing each syllable. Eight shirtless men, each with a letter of that word on their chests, whooped and hollered, [calling the very definition of the word into question](#).

McCain said that Obama would raise their taxes. He talked about "Joe the Plumber" and Obama's plot to redistribute wealth. McCain did not mention, of course, how in 2001 he repeatedly argued that the Bush tax cuts were unfair because they were too tilted toward the wealthy. That he now attacks Obama for a version of that same sentiment, albeit a more robust version, gives some sense of the distance McCain has traveled on this issue.

In the afternoon, the full McCain-Palin team (candidates plus spouses) traveled to Ohio, where everyone visited a high school outside Akron. An enormous crowd greeted them with a sea of red pompoms. There were cheerleaders dressed in orange and black and a marching band. In the bleachers, thousands more formed a human American flag by wearing red, white, and blue shirts.

McCain focused on Joe the Plumber again, who, after all, is a native son of Ohio. But he also focused on Joe Biden, who recently said that, if elected, Obama would be immediately tested by a foreign-policy crisis. The McCain campaign is hoping this revives questions about Obama's mettle. "We don't want a president who invites testing from the world," McCain said to raucous applause. "Americans are already fighting two wars. ... I will not be a president that needs to be tested. I have been tested."

With the inexperienced Sarah Palin as his running mate, can McCain make this argument work? Voters don't seem to be buying it. Polls show Obama is considered just as plausible a commander in chief as McCain. In the recent *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News poll, it is Palin's qualifications to be president that rank as voters' top concern about a McCain presidency.

Nevertheless, McCain's aides say he will stay focused on the two Joes (Plumber and Biden) heading into Election Day. Neither he nor Palin mentioned Bill (as in Ayers) Wednesday. ACORN was mentioned only obliquely by Palin. (Presumably they'll leave those issues for the robo-calls and direct-mail appeals.)

Given that there are less than two weeks until Election Day, this may have been McCain's last visit to New Hampshire as a presidential candidate. He's behind in the polls, New Hampshire has been trending Democratic, and the state has only four electors. McCain needs to spend his time in more populous states like Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Florida.

But if there was any wistfulness about what could have been his final visit to New Hampshire, McCain didn't show it. The next time he visits the state, McCain may well be a private citizen. Or he could be president. Either way, he probably won't have to stand at one end of a half-empty hockey arena ever again.

politics

How Do You Spend \$150 Million?

Easy. Blow it all on TV and video games.

By Christopher Beam

Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at 6:01 PM ET

Presidential campaigns normally face a series of tough choices this time of year. Cut advertising in Pennsylvania or Ohio? Pull campaign workers out of [Michigan](#) or Colorado? Barack Obama's campaign faces a different but perhaps equally tough choice: Where, oh where, should it spend its mountains of cash?

The Obama campaign [announced](#) on Sunday that it raised \$150 million in September, bringing the candidate's total to more than \$600 million—almost as much money as was raised by every candidate in the 2004 presidential race combined. (John McCain's campaign, meanwhile, has [\\$47 million to spend](#) in October.) Obama has presumably spent a few score millions already, but can his campaign really blow through \$150 million before Election Day?

Easily. The Obama campaign will use the loot to pay for TV advertising, radio spots, transportation, mailers, phone banks, buttons, signs, flags, virtual ads, donations to other campaigns, consultants, bandwidth—and, if all goes well, confetti.

The single largest expense, unsurprisingly, is TV. In September, the Obama campaign spent \$65 million on media buys—including TV, radio, and Web ads—after spending \$32 million in August. Now it's spending more than \$30 million in a [single week](#). Obama is already [outspending](#) McCain 4-to-1 nationally. At this rate, Obama will likely break George W. Bush's 2004 record of spending \$188 million on advertising in a general election. But ads are like ice cream: There's always room for more.

The first step is to raise spending levels in regions where the campaign is already spending money. Some media markets are more expensive than others. Philadelphia and Cleveland are two of the most expensive swing-state markets, but more money means more—and more valuable—eyeballs. During one recent week, Obama bought time for 1,074 ads in the Philadelphia market for \$1.7 million, according to the Campaign Media

Analysis Group. Over the same period, McCain bought 531 spots for just more than \$1 million.

Step two is to expand into new markets. One of the advantages of Obama's cash hoard is that his campaign may never have to choose between airing spots in places where he *needs* to be competitive and places where he'd *like* to be competitive: He can do both.

In Florida, Obama is [outspending](#) McCain 3-to-1. In Virginia, a state McCain would rather not have to defend, the ratio is also 3-to-1. In North Carolina, which McCain would *really* rather not defend, it's 8-to-1. And so on. An influx of cash means Obama can expand to Georgia, West Virginia, and North Dakota. It doesn't matter if ad buys don't swing those states his way. As long as Obama can narrow McCain's margins in states McCain can't afford to lose, he can force McCain to compete there.

Lastly, Obama can afford to target niche audiences. Ads touting his commitment to Second Amendment rights might air during Saturday-morning sportsmen's shows in rural areas. A spot about water access in Colorado might run in the conservative Colorado Springs media market. Obama has already done some pretty sophisticated targeting, [placing ads in video games](#) like Madden '09 and Guitar Hero (just *barely* wrenching the youth vote from McCain's grasp). The campaign will also be airing a [half-hour infomercial](#) on CBS and NBC in the days before the election. (Devine estimated the cost to be "over \$10 million.") These kind of blowout moments—the TV equivalent of moving your acceptance speech to Invesco Field—give Obama far greater visibility than McCain.

But it's not all about TV. The cash injection also frees the campaign up to travel more frequently and more freely. The Obama campaign spent nearly \$5 million on travel and lodging in August, and that was before it had to support the Joe Biden Road Show. Now, with Barack, Michelle, Joe, and Jill all conducting separate tours, the campaign needs enough cash to keep all its jets aloft, its rallies prepared in advance, and its respective staffs fed and lodged. On Sunday, Biden [traveled](#) to Tacoma, Wash.—an odd choice so late in the election but an indicator of the campaign's financial wiggle room.

Other expenses will also go up. In September, the Obama camp spent a total of \$2.8 million on direct mail—\$1 million on production and \$1.8 million on postage. That has almost certainly increased in the final month. The campaign can also afford to pay for more staffers and volunteers. That doesn't necessarily mean hiring more people—it already has an obscene number of field offices, including [20](#) in Virginia and [more than 50](#) in Colorado. But the money can pay volunteers' expenses, which may make them want to work all the harder.

There are other fixed costs. Payroll is nearly \$3 million a month. Phone banks and robo-calls cost about a million bucks in

August. Computer equipment (\$150,000 in September alone), "strategy" (\$340,000), and internal polling expenses (\$1.1 million) also add up, not to mention rent, utilities, and phone bills. But the Obama camp doesn't have luxury consultants in the mold of Mark Penn, who famously billed \$14 million to the Clinton campaign during the primaries. Total payroll in September came in just more than \$3 million, and David Axelrod's AKP&D Media billed only \$46,000. (Its bill was \$150,000 in August.)

Another expense is contributions to state Democratic parties, which totaled about \$7.6 million in September. Naturally, the parties in Florida, Michigan, Ohio, and Colorado came in for some nice donations.

And of course there's the small stuff. The campaign blew \$3,000 at the [10 Pin Bowling Lounge in Chicago](#) in September. It also spent a few million on flags. For food, \$2,500 went to Panera cafes, \$500 to Potbelly Sandwich Works, and hundreds more to random pizza places. Obama apparently managed to limit his arugula intake—the campaign spent only \$30 at Whole Foods Market.

At any rate, it would be pretty hard to blow your millions on pizza and bowling. But when you're buying TV time, the money goes pretty fast. A decade from now, we may even look back at the Obama campaign and wonder how it did so much with so little.

politics

Fund Razing

Want to make your opponent rich? Attack him.

By Christopher Beam

Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at 4:23 PM ET

Negative campaigning works. It's one of those mantras you hear a thousand times. Sure, it may [alienate voters](#) and [suppress turnout](#), but it moves polls, and all the various goody-goody [efforts to stop it](#) have foundered on this basic fact of political life.

Obviously, appealing to their civic duty and sense of fair play is not getting candidates to stop going negative. So, maybe it's time for a new argument: Negative campaigning can make your opponent rich.

Minnesota Rep. Michelle Bachmann learned this the hard way. On Friday, she suggested on *Hardball* that Barack Obama is anti-American and [proposed](#) that members of Congress be vetted for patriotism. "I wish the American media would take a great

look at the views of the people in Congress and find out, are they pro-America or anti-America?" she [said](#). "I think people would love to see an exposé like that."

By Monday afternoon, her Democratic opponent, Elwyn Tinklenberg, had [raised](#) more than \$800,000 online. (Before that, it had taken him a year to raise \$1 million.) The money, plus all the national attention, quickly turned an expected Bachmann win into an October surprise, with Bachmann now [backstroking](#) [furiously](#) and Tinklenberg [surgin](#).

Others, too, have enriched their opponents by attacking them. Sarah Palin's speech at the Republican National Convention, in which she mocked community organizers and Barack Obama's voting record, drew rave reviews. More than \$1 million [poured](#) into RNC coffers in the next 24 hours. But by the time John McCain went onstage the following night, Barack Obama had raked in nearly \$10 million—his biggest daily haul so far.

Online fundraising makes negative attacks even riskier—and [umbrage](#) even more profitable. When voters see their favorite candidates attacked, they don't have to smash their keyboard anymore. Now they can click "Donate." Plus, there's a thrill to seeing your money transfer immediately into their coffers, which campaigns often display as thermometers. It's cathartic in a way that filling out a form and walking down to the mailbox never was. (No, I would not know.)

All of which has led to a curious spectacle: When your opponent launches an attack on you, you may want to publicize it. On the last night of the RNC, the Obama campaign popped a vein in an e-mail blast: "[T]he Republicans mocked, dismissed, and actually laughed out loud at Americans who engage in community service and organizing." Other times, campaigns will only hint at the offense. "I've heard some pretty unspeakable things in the past few days—deeply offensive smears that we'll hear over and over again until Election Day," "Joe Biden" wrote in an e-mail without naming any of them. Campaigns sometimes even attempt a double-double: In April, Obama tried to turn anger over his "bitter" comments back to his advantage—by [expressing outrage at the outrage](#) and asking for contributions.

The danger here is that of the boy who cried wolf. Anyone on Obama's e-mail list has received dozens of outraged messages in recent weeks about stem cells, the "bridge to nowhere," teaching sex ed to kindergartners, the Keating Five, golden parachutes, the Wall Street bailout, and other unspecified political attacks from the McCain campaign. After so much outrage, only the truly offensive insults really can crack the wallets.

Has all this umbrage-fueled fundraising reduced the level of negative campaigning? Not judging by the current tone. McCain surrogates continue to discuss Jeremiah Wright and Obama's past [drug use](#); Obama surrogates continue to [distort](#) McCain's health care plan. A Wisconsin study [found](#) in early October that

"nearly all" of McCain's ads were negative. (A month earlier, Obama had been [more negative](#).) But there's a learning curve. It's going to take time for campaigns to factor the full costs of negative campaigning—both reputational and financial—into their daily decisions.

And even when they do, it's unclear whether the drawbacks will outweigh the benefits. After all, if you're not going to discuss your opponent's tangential and irrelevant relationships, who will?

politics

Palin's Campaign vs. McCain's

When Sarah Palin disagrees with John McCain, it means something. Or does it?

By John Dickerson

Monday, October 20, 2008, at 7:22 PM ET

Has Sarah Palin "gone rogue"? For the last few weeks, Republicans inside and outside the McCain campaign have speculated about those moments when Palin and John McCain have appeared to disagree: Palin [pressed to have the campaign compete for Michigan voters](#) when strategists had given up on the state. She [disagreed](#) with McCain's opposition to a marriage amendment. She [disagreed](#) with McCain's opposition to removing North Korea from the list of terrorist nations. She thinks the campaign [should talk about Barack Obama's ties to his former pastor Jeremiah Wright](#).

Even on [Team Maverick](#), a vice-presidential candidate's job is to agree with the candidate at the top of the ticket. The only exception is when campaign strategists carefully orchestrate a schism—and we know when these moments are coming because everyone in the press is invited to watch.

But Palin's disagreements don't appear to be a part of a larger strategy. So, political insiders have started asking whether Palin is simply undisciplined or is intentionally ignoring the playbook. And if it's intentional, the question becomes: Is she putting her own political self-interest ahead of her running mate's?

As Obama's fortunes have improved, these questions have grown only more intense. I am sorry to report that I do not know the answers. But that's OK: Neither does anyone else. In fact, any answers you hear will almost certainly speak less to Palin's motivations than to those of the people talking about her.

Sunday, Palin appeared to call another audible. While McCain was defending his campaign's robo-calls attacking Barack Obama, Palin was knocking them. She said they were irritating

voters and represented the "[old conventional ways of campaigning](#)." Palin appeared to be joining with Sen. Susan Collins of Maine and other Republicans who oppose the tactic. Plus, she used the word *conventional* to describe the McCain tactics. That's a word Obama uses to attack.

What was Palin up to? The question came up in my political conversations Monday morning. Several Republican veterans thought she was trying to distance herself from campaign strategy, which has been [roundly criticized in GOP circles](#), to maintain her political viability for the future. The transcript, however, shows that Palin doesn't seem to be criticizing the tactic so much as bemoaning the fact that the campaign is stuck in a place where it has to use it. She's not making a moral argument that might burnish her credentials for the future as a reasonable person. She's just off-message.

Two weeks before, I was hearing the exact opposite spin: not that Palin was distancing herself from the campaign, but that the campaign was distancing itself from her. When Palin picked up her attacks on Obama, McCain loyalists, and even some inside his campaign, suggested that she'd done so on her own accord. Dressed in camouflage and night-vision goggles, she'd snuck out to hold rallies suggesting Obama palled around with terrorist William Ayers. She'd also told William Kristol that Obama's former pastor Jeremiah Wright was an appropriate topic of discussion, even though McCain had once said it was not.

This spin, the Palin-as-a-lone-wolf story, had the advantage of allowing McCain himself to remain above the fray while his campaign reaped the benefits of Palin's attacks. But if Palin-as-rogue was the strategy—and there's some evidence it was—it was a failure. Polls have shown that voters have a [dimmer view of McCain](#) because of these attacks. Obama's stature seems only to have grown.

Others argued that Palin's motives for picking up the attacks were not strategic but self-interested. By taking a tougher approach with Obama, she was aligning herself with conservative thinkers who have urged McCain to fight harder. If the McCain campaign is unsuccessful, she could say she was trying to do the right thing but was held back. A similar strategy was supposedly behind her opposition to the campaign's retreat from Michigan. If McCain loses, Palin will have proved that she was in favor of a more vigorous campaign—a useful position to cite if she hopes to run for national office again. And by supporting the gay-marriage-ban amendment, she keeps her ties strong to evangelical voters.

Part of this speculation is normal for any vice-presidential candidate. We've forgotten, during the Cheney years, that competing agendas always accompany any political partnership. Cheney had no future political ambitions ([sadly](#)), so no one speculated about how he might be positioning himself politically in the last eight years.

Also fueling the discussion about Palin's motivations is the brewing conversation that attends any campaign that appears to be on the ropes with two weeks to go. Democrats want to push the idea she's out for herself because it suggests that if the No. 2 on the ticket is looking out for her future, the race must *really* be over. Aides inside the campaign want to retain their political viability, so they blame Palin for the loss. The "going rogue" story line contributes to the idea that she sunk the effort. If they advocated for Palin in the first place, they can try to say (implausibly) that they never thought she'd be as bad as she's turned out to be.

Palin and her behavior have become a part of the crucial postmortem (pre-mortem?) for those hoping to affect the next generation of conservative thinking. McCain could still win. But as his fortunes appear to dim, those with the first explanations for his failure stand the best chance of shaping the post-McCain party.

Those outside the campaign who were *against* the Palin pick, meanwhile, want to characterize her as a purely self-interested politician—it's final proof of their prescience. Those who want to blame the campaign strategists paint Palin as a political natural damaged by a ham-handed campaign. One Republican veteran said that when Palin was asked to link Obama to Ayers, she resisted. It was McCain aides who pushed her to pick up the attack. A McCain aide tells me the exact opposite is true. Palin was regularly asking to be more aggressive.

With so many permutations and mixed motivations, the Palin saga is starting to feel like a Restoration play. (I hope in the end all the characters come onstage and all is revealed.) What does Sarah actually think? Who knows? Unlike previous vice-presidential candidates and most other politically ambitious people, she doesn't have a political hack who has been at her side for years, protecting her political portfolio and spinning the press to preserve her reputation. If she really wants to have a national political future, now may be the time for her to go out and get herself one.

press box

Stolen Elections—as American as Apple Pie

Dissecting John McCain's hyperbole about voter fraud.

By Jack Shafer

Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at 4:35 PM ET

John McCain proved himself a rotten student by finishing 894th in a class of 899 at Annapolis. In the third presidential [debate](#) last week, he demonstrated that flunking U.S. history must have

contributed to his dismal grade point average when he stated that ACORN was "now on the verge of maybe perpetrating one of the greatest frauds in voter history in this country, maybe destroying the fabric of democracy."

Getting a place on the short list of the greatest voter frauds would require something a lot more brazen than smuggling a few thousand ineligible voters onto the rolls, as ACORN has been accused of doing by some critics. Even a casual fanning of U.S. history books reveals hundreds of more blatant examples, including ballot stuffing, the purchase of votes, counterfeit votes, discarded ballots, voter intimidation, and bloody murder.

As [Tracy Campbell](#) demonstrates in *Deliver the Vote: A History of Election Fraud, an American Political Tradition—1742-2004*, election chicanery is "deeply embedded" in our political culture. Far from regarding cheating as wrong or anti-democratic, its perpetrators have treated it "as part of the game that one has to practice in order to counteract one's equally corrupt competitors."

"Election fraud is a crime that usually pays," Campbell writes.

Rampant voter fraud existed in the Colonial era, when voting was generally limited to white, property-owning men. To swing local elections, Campbell writes, corrupt campaigns would arrange for the landless to gain title to property in return for their vote, after which the land would be returned. The purchasing of votes was so popular in Rhode Island that the practice became known as "Rhode Islandism." Potential voters were also paid in Rhode Island not to cast a ballot. During Colonial times, sheriffs were known to "manipulate poll locations, voting times, and voter qualification," as well as to "simply change election results unilaterally and intimidate various voters."

George Washington won his seat in the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1758 by spending 40 pounds on booze for his neighbors. The passage of the Massachusetts Constitution in 1780 appears to have been the work of election thefts, concluded historian Samuel Eliot Morison in 1916. In the early days of the Union, Whigs encouraged passage of registry laws "since they felt Democrats resorted to importing voters in a large number of elections," Campbell notes. Democrats, of course, opposed registry laws because they discriminated against citizens who had recently relocated. In one Michigan city, Republicans co-opted a registry law by declaring scores of Democrats as improperly registered and allowing Republicans, "registered or not," to vote.

New York City's Tammany Hall "imported inmates from the Blackwell's Island Penitentiary to vote in Democratic wards" in an 1843 contest. Tammany was known to employ "floaters" who cast multiple ballots, "thugs" who intimidated opposition voters, and "colonizers," illegal voters who could be summoned from another city or state to swell the registration rolls at the last

minute and throw a close election. The 1844 and 1876 presidential elections appear to have been won by fraud. Historian [Alexander Keyssar](#) writes in *The Right To Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in America* that in 1845 Louisiana expanded its residency requirement from one year to two in order to stop newcomers from voting.

Yet, every instance of conventional voter fraud recorded in the history books pales in comparison with the murderous rampage that followed black suffrage in the South following the Civil War. Vigilantes, mobs, Klansmen, and law officers killed hundreds and probably thousands of African-Americans who voted or otherwise attempted to exercise their civic rights. Hundreds of thousands were brutalized and intimidated from voting. The terror extended for decades and well into the 20th century as blacks were killed, maimed, and blocked from the polls. It's a history lesson John McCain might want to brush up on before he speaks on the topic again.

Campbell essays at length on voter fraud in Kentucky, Missouri, Louisiana, California, Georgia, Texas (where Lyndon Baines Johnson stole a Senate election), Illinois, and other states throughout the 20th century. According to Keyssar, New York City suppressed Jewish turnout in 1908 by holding voting registration on the Jewish Sabbath and Yom Kippur. In the deep South, poll taxes and bogus literacy tests kept blacks from voting when bullets and beatings didn't.

In the last quarter of the 20th century, vote buying, vote tampering, and voter-registration shenanigans continued in places like Georgia, Kentucky, Illinois, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Florida, writes Campbell. And that's just an overview. Everybody has an opinion on whether the 2000 presidential election (butterfly ballots, hanging chads, absentee ballots, invalidated votes, et al.) was clean or stolen, but all agree it constituted a national embarrassment almost equal to a stolen election. Of the Florida outcome, Campbell writes, it validates Boss Tweed's observation: "The ballots didn't make the outcome, the counters did."

As Campbell notes in his book, compromising an election's integrity in any way qualifies as fraud, whether it changes the outcome or not. So when John McCain shouts fraud in response to the sham voter-registration forms submitted by ACORN for "Mickey Mouse," "Donald Duck," and the Dallas Cowboys starting lineup, he's right. Just because these registrations might have been purged before a vote could be cast with them doesn't invalidate his charge. Fraud is fraud.

Democrats get accused of voter fraud more often in the modern era than Republicans, but as Larry Sabato and Glenn R. Simpson write in *Dirty Little Secrets: The Persistence of Corruption in American Politics*, that's probably because they have more opportunities. (Where Republicans have chances, they're known to take them, Sabato and Simpson quip.) Typically in the

election cycle, Democrats are trying to increase the number of registered voters and boost turnout—especially among African-Americans and Hispanics, who tend to vote in lower percentages.

The more aggressive the Democratic registration effort, the more likely that "quality control" will suffer and fraud will result, and every relaxation of voter-registration rules increases the likelihood of "mischief." For example, while the passage of the "motor-voter" bill in 1993 enfranchised many of the disenfranchised, it also made it easier to commit voter fraud. (See this think-tank [critique](#), which declares the whole motor-voter process highly corrupt.)

Conversely, it's in the Republicans' interest to tamp down Democratic registration and turnout. Writing in the new [Rolling Stone](#), Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Greg Palast consider the ongoing efforts by Republicans to "obstruct" voter-registration drives, "purge" legitimate voters from the rolls, require "unnecessary" voter IDs, and reject "spoiled" ballots as an attempt to steal the 2008 vote, even where those efforts are legal. These barriers and others, Kennedy and Palast write, are examples of "GOP vote tampering"—the contemporary equivalent of poll taxes and literacy tests.

Finding the crease in the zone, where both inclusion and integrity reign at the American voting precinct, is probably impossible. If you care enough to see your candidate win, you probably care enough to cheat outright or, if not cheat outright, then bend the rules and rewrite them to your party's unfair advantage. Not even Solomon could satisfy everybody if he were in charge.

So, let's look on the bright side and enter the Election Day countdown appreciative of the fact that voter fraud—or charges of voter fraud—are leading indicators of high civic involvement.

My favorite example of voter fraud? Robert D. Novak writes in his memoir, *The Prince of Darkness: 50 Years of Reporting in Washington*, that he deliberately committed voter fraud by casting two ballots for Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956. Send your favorite 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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recycled

The Haunted Credit Card

An ode to store-bought Halloween costumes.

By Emily Bazelon

Saturday, October 18, 2008, at 6:16 AM ET

With Halloween approaching in the middle of a financial crunch, parents must decide whether to take the frugal route, crafting homemade costumes, or to take the easy (but expensive) way out. In 2007, Emily Bazelon presented her defense of store-bought Halloween costumes. The article is reprinted below.

"Mama, I love my Halloween costume," my son Eli sighed to me this week as I kissed him good night. Could any childish words be sweeter, and, in my case, more wholly unexpected?

I am the least crafty person I know. I don't sew, I don't glue, and I have dreaded every diorama to ever come my way. None of this precludes making a good Halloween costume. But lack of imagination does, and when it comes to dressing up, mine never fails to fail me. So this year, I cut corners, I sold out, I caved in—pick your cliché. I shopped for costumes online with my kids gleefully at my side. I know, this is unworthy on more than one level: commercialized, expensive, an abandonment of upright and wholesome values, an accretion of [more useless plastic objects, which I normally can't abide](#). But you know what? My kids and I are looking forward to trick or treating next week without a shred of anxiety.

My husband, Paul, was not happy with my executive Halloween decision. He remembers joyfully plowing through his family closets, wrapping himself in scarves and hats, and happily emerging as a "Russian Cossack." This easygoing, no-fuss approach to Halloween is one he thinks we should be able to create. He's right. But that was the '70s. And even then, my memories of Halloween consist of green felt Peter Pan hats and capes that fell apart and, most years, lots of wrong guesses from parents and friends about who I was trying to be. (Robin Hood, after Prince John's men tear his clothes to pieces? The Jolly Green Giant? A gawky elf?) So I thwarted Paul and typed *Harry Potter Halloween Costume* into Google.

Some crap came up, and so did some pricey outfits with all kinds of trimmings. But then my sons and I found a basic Gryffindor robe on sale for \$25.95. Dressing up as Harry Potter, of course, is only a smidgen more interesting than [going as Spider-Man \(1.5 million last year\) or a princess \(4 million\)](#). But Eli and his younger brother, Simon, had a concept: Eli would be Harry and Simon would be Ron Weasley. "So then we're on the same side," Simon said, and Eli nodded. Sibling bonhomie—that makes up for low creativity points, doesn't it?

In this cheery, brothers-as-best-friends moment, I got a little carried away and started to click around for accessories. Paul protested. We had a pair of Harry Potter glasses somewhere, left over from a birthday party, didn't we? He managed to find them, minus one arm, and said we could repair them. But I was caught up in my vision, and put a new pair of glasses into the shopping cart. We could dye Simon's hair red, we decided, or draw on his head with a red marker. "And they can make their own wands," Paul finished. When the kids looked a little glum, he pointed out that they've played for months with the lightsabers they made out of rolled up newspapers (with the help of a clever babysitter). They went off to bed with the promise of posterboard and marker supplies.

But later, I went back to the Web site I'd found and discovered wands that lit up and made noises when you swipe them through the air. A bargain, I thought, at \$10 each. I know, I know, this is why Halloween costume sales are expected to reach \$1.82 billion this year, an increase from \$1.5 billion just five years ago, [according to the National Retail Foundation](#). There are many better ways to spend money, not to mention that my indulgence would only make it that much harder for the parents who can't shell out \$35 per costume. And yet, those wands—wouldn't they get lots of use as toys after the holiday? More saliently, if I'm honest, wouldn't the kids be deliciously, sinfully *thrilled* when we pulled them out of the box?

Commentary about Halloween costumes tends to veer in one of two directions. There are the articles that promise that kids love homemade costumes best and try to goad you into making one with helpful hints about robot construction and Gypsy inspiration. "The key to a good costume was that Mom made it," [one writer reminisces](#) about the pumpkins and Power Rangers she sewed. This genre has found expression in a storybook, *Gus and Grandpa and the Halloween Costume*, in which Gus' parents refuse to buy him a store-bought costume, and Grandpa saves him by finding a costume that Grandma made for his father. The [other kind of article mourns the disappearance](#) of the lovingly pieced-together costume era and claims that, like Chuck E. Cheese birthday parties, store-bought superheroes are wrecking the real thing because kids inexplicably prefer them.

I don't know about that. At the annual Halloween parade at Eli's school, the costumes that merit finger-pointing and longing gazes are the ones that kids and parents come up with themselves. Harry Potter and Ron Weasley are fine; salt and pepper shakers made from boxes and tinfoil are truly cool. Even I had a superior Halloween moment once, when I got to be one of the five senses with my far more imaginative college roommates. But now that I'm left to my own boring devices, I'm grateful that buying off the rack no longer means settling for a cheap mask with a pinching elastic band and a plastic smock with a picture of what you're supposed to be. In contrast to my childhood memories, my kids and I can marvel at our brilliant, crafty friends without feeling humiliated. They get to be

ingenious, and we get to be passable. Some other day, it'll be my turn to pull off homemade virtue—by baking birthday cupcakes from scratch, say. And if our friends and I are really lucky, our parental lapses will make us less likely to judge each other when we happen to be the one doing it right.

Paul bought the poster board he'd promised for the wands. There it sat on our dining room table, and then the Harry-Ron costume box arrived. The kids tore it open, and they loved their wands. Paul was ready to strangle me, but he couldn't, because we were trying to ban the killing curse and teach Simon to say [lumos and leviosa](#) instead. I pointed out that at least these useless plastic objects appear to have staying power—for as long as we have AA batteries. The robes, meanwhile, are soft and cozy, and Eli and Simon announced that they will double as bathrobes. So now I really feel smug: \$60 bought me Halloween peace of mind, and a winter of warm nights. Selling out and feeling good.

slate fare

Slate's Makeover

Introducing our redesign.

By Julia Turner

Saturday, October 18, 2008, at 6:18 PM ET

It's been a busy fall here at *Slate*. We've been covering the financial crisis, launching a [new Web site](#), and obsessing over every last detail of the presidential campaign. But we've also found time to primp: Today, we're launching a site redesign. Our new look features a cleaner, less cluttered home page and airier article pages. We think you'll find it makes the site easier to navigate and more pleasant to read.

Why the makeover? Since *Slate* last redesigned the site, two and a half years ago, the magazine has expanded at a rapid clip. We've added new writers and columns. We've launched six blogs. We've been publishing more video, more slide shows, and more widgets, tools, and interactive features. And we've gained a few sister sites: [Slate V](#), our video magazine; [The Root](#), a magazine about the African-American experience, and [The Big Money](#), a magazine about business and finance. As a result, our home page has been looking, well, crowded.

Our new design accommodates *Slate's* growth, organizing all this material so it's easy for you to find. The redesigned [home page](#) will allow us to promote more pieces. Instead of one cover story, we'll have three: You can scroll through them by clicking the numbered tabs on each. And the space right below the cover—the row of small photos and headlines that we call, for mysterious ancient reasons, the "TAP3s"—has grown from five to eight articles. (You toggle from the first four articles to the next four by clicking the arrows beside them.)

We've also made it easier to tell what's an article and what's a blog post. Articles will continue to appear in reverse chronological order on the table of contents, under the header "Today in Slate." To find our blogs, toggle over to the "[Slate Blogs](#)" tab, which will showcase the most recent posts from "[Kausfiles](#)," "[XX Factor](#)," and the rest. And our daily visual features (Today's Pictures, Today's Cartoons, Doonesbury) will no longer appear on the home page in a rotating Flash pane that's devilishly hard to click. They'll be showcased—along with daily videos from *Slate V*—in a big, handsome tabbed module on both the home page and article pages. Click through the tabs to check out all four features.

We've also rethought our flyout menus, which used to drive readers batty, popping up whenever you wanted them to disappear. They've relocated from a vertical column at the left side of the page to a horizontal row at the top, so you're less likely to mouse over them by accident. You'll also notice that we've tweaked the sections slightly. All of our daily briefings—"Today's Papers," "Today's Business Press," "Explainer," and the like—can be found in the new Briefings flyout. Because our Arts & Life coverage has grown over the past few years, we've broken out our Arts coverage ("[Books](#)," "[Movies](#)," "[Television](#)," "[Art](#)," "[Architecture](#)," etc.) into its own section. We've also folded a few smaller sections (Travel & Food, Style & Shopping, and [Sports](#)) into a new Life section that will also include old favorites such as "[Family](#)," "[Human Guinea Pig](#)," and "[Dear Prudence](#)." Finally, we've added new flyouts for Podcasts & Video and Blogs, so it's easier to find the latest "[Political Gabfest](#)" from any page on the site. (Note: As of launch time, we were still working out a few kinks with these menus, so please bear with us.)

The redesign also makes it easier to find particular columns or writers without scrolling through days' worth of content. A new list of columnists to the left of the table of contents is an easy way to track a favorite writer's work. The new flyout menus also feature dedicated slots for all our regular features. Can't live without "Pressbox"? You'll always find Jack Shafer's [most recent column](#) in the second spot on the News & Politics flyout. Dying for a dose of Prudie's advice? Her [latest](#) will always be listed last on the Life flyout.

Our article pages have been designed to increase readability. They feature a wider well for the article text and a newly prominent tools box, so you'll be able e-mail or print articles—or (hallelujah!) view them on a single page—without scrolling all the way down to the bottom of the piece. We also increased the prominence of our Digg/Yahoo! Buzz box to make it easier for you to recommend *Slate* pieces to other Web readers.

It's important to remember that this redesign is a makeover, not reconstructive surgery. All the features you love are still here on *Slate* and should be easier to find. It's also important to remember that this is just a starting point. We'll be making

ongoing improvements to the site as we see how readers like the new arrangements. And for that reason, we'd love to hear your responses, positive and negative; please post such comments [here](#) in the Fray. (If you're having a technical problem, send e-mail to slateredesign@slate.com.) Thanks for giving the new site a shot. We hope you like it, and we're eager to hear what you think.

slate v

Cubez: NPR

A daily video from *Slate V*

Thursday, October 23, 2008, at 10:24 AM ET

slate v

Open Book: John Ashbery

A daily video from *Slate V*

Wednesday, October 22, 2008, at 10:46 AM ET

slate v

Vice Capades: Virtual Hooker

A daily video from *Slate V*

Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at 10:36 AM ET

slate v

Dear Prudence: Abusive Girlfriend

A daily video from *Slate V*

Monday, October 20, 2008, at 1:05 PM ET

sports nut

Philadelphia vs. the Phillies

Philly fans finally have a winning baseball team. Now they just need to stop hating themselves.

By Chris Wilson

Wednesday, October 22, 2008, at 4:12 PM ET

Of the many dubious achievements that Philadelphia sports fans have notched over the years—throwing [snowballs](#) at Santa Claus, [batteries](#) at J.D. Drew, etc., etc.—perhaps the most telling is that they once forced Mike Schmidt to trot onto the field [wearing sunglasses and a wig](#). Schmidt was one of the many Philadelphia athletes who never forged a good working relationship with the city's fans. His frustration culminated in

1985 when he [described the Philly crowd](#) to the *Montreal Gazette* as "a mob scene" that was "beyond help." Only the stunt with the wig—which Schmidt borrowed from [Larry Andersen](#), who apparently kept a wig on hand in the clubhouse for such occasions—could save him from the torrential booing that awaited in Veterans Stadium. It's to the credit of the Philly faithful that they saw the humor in the wig stunt, cheering the third baseman for his ingenuity.

Like many Phillies fans, I have a certain regard for the fans' eagerness to boo their own guys—it's a visceral response to a team that has disappointed the city for more than 100 years. While other teams obsess over curses and rivalries, Philly fans know they have only their own guys to blame. For years, I dismissed Red Sox fans the way a lot of Democrats dismiss Republicans—as a group that requires a villain to define itself. The GOP has welfare queens, teachers' unions, and the media elite. The Red Sox have the Yankees. But now, as the Phils enter the World Series after posting their sixth straight winning season, I'm realizing that a genuine rivalry isn't a sign of weakness. It's a sign that, after decades of futility, you've finally stopped losing.

For most of the franchise's history, the Phillies have lacked a go-to villain. The few rivalries the Phils have managed to incite have been as much characterized by geography and mutual badness as by genuine competition. "Long ago, the Dodgers, when they were in Brooklyn, were a pretty good rival," notes [Rich Westcott](#), a baseball writer who has penned six books about the Phillies. The teams became competitive around the same time, and the antagonism peaked in 1950, when Philadelphia's "Whiz Kids" edged out Brooklyn for the pennant on the last day of the season. But the Phillies petered out shortly afterward while the Dodgers won four World Series and another four league titles over the next 15 years. (Many argue that Philadelphia's reluctance to bring in black players was central to the dissolution of that promising 1950 team.)

The Phillies and the Pittsburgh Pirates had a [decent rivalry](#) in the 1970s, including a stretch from 1974-1980 during which they traded division titles and split their games against each other 63-63. Both teams soon sunk into their typical irrelevance, though, and whatever vestiges of enmity that remained were quashed when the Pirates moved to the NL Central in 1994. By then, Atlanta seemed poised to become a rival, particularly after joining the NL East that same year. But the Phillies just couldn't keep up as Atlanta lorded it over the division for the next decade.

I submit that in the last 50 years, the Philadelphia Phillies' only bona fide rival has been the Philadelphia Phillies. Philadelphia's brand of sports navel-gazing—or rather, navel-scowling—is punishing to players across all the city's franchises. (See [Donovan McNabb](#).) Nothing is more frustrating than watching a promising young player fail to click with the fans, get all

dyspeptic about it, and leave the team—only to launch a phenomenal career elsewhere. Scott Rolen comes to mind. The third baseman was drafted by the Phillies in 1993 and won the Rookie of the Year award four years later. As his numbers flagged over four losing seasons in the majors, his once enthusiastic fans soured, and after the 2001 season, he [declined to sign](#) a long-term contract with the team. He was [traded to the Cardinals](#) in 2002, where he won a championship ring in 2006. For the duration of his time with the Cards, he was enthusiastically booed in Philadelphia.

Every team has these disappointments. The Phillies seem to breed them.

It's a sign of the franchise's growth over the last several years, however, that this kind of self-hatred has come to a halt (at least temporarily). I give most of the credit for this phenomenon to Jimmy Rollins, the Phillies' transcendent shortstop. Rollins is the anti-Rolen. Like his one-time teammate, Rollins was a high draft pick who hit the ground running when he came to the big leagues, coming in [third in Rookie of the Year voting](#) in 2001. But unlike Rolen, he has figured out how to survive in Philadelphia. Even better, he's figured out how to save Phillies fans from themselves.

Rollins' quest began at the beginning of last season, when he was quoted as saying, "[I think we are the team to beat in the NL East](#)—finally. But that's only on paper." Rollins' comment was widely ridiculed; the New York Mets had won the division by 12 games in 2006. The shortstop was prophetic, though, as a Phillies surge and Mets meltdown [delivered the division title](#) to Philadelphia on the last day of the season. Rollins backed up his words with a career year, winning the National League MVP. Just as important, he slammed six home runs against the Mets, his most against any opponent in 2007.

Beyond what happened on the field, Rollins' statement had a huge psychological impact. Finally, the team and its fans felt good enough about themselves to instigate fights with actual opponents rather than just amongst themselves.

For a time this season, though, Philly seemed on the precipice of returning to its old ways. In August, as the team was struggling, [Rollins indicted Phillies fans on the Best Damn Sports Show Period](#). "When you're doing good, they're on your side," he said. "When you're doing bad, they're completely against you." In the short term, Rollins earned the usual helping of abuse, more or less confirming his sentiments. But in the long run, though, the comment was as strategically wise as the "team to beat" quote, both for Rollins and the franchise. Philly fans "like someone who occasionally speaks his mind," Westcott says. "They like to see a guy stick his neck out." They also like to see a guy who wins: Rollins played his best baseball of the season in September, and the Phils once again passed the Mets to make the playoffs.

Regardless of whether the Phillies beat Tampa Bay in the World Series, the team's relationship with its fans and the city depends the most on keeping alive what Rollins started in 2007. Given how evenly matched the Phillies and Mets have been over the past two seasons, conditions are ripe for the Phils to finally cement long-term hatred for an opponent. The players don't like each other, the fans don't like each other, and the teams play 18 times a year. The new ballpark in New York should also attract more Philadelphia fans to Mets home games, the same way Citizens Bank Park has drawn the New York faithful to Philly. "For the last couple years, a lot of Mets fans have been coming down here," says Fred McKie, another amateur Phillies historian. "We didn't like that."

Given his role as the resident neck-sticker-outer, it's up to Rollins to continue fanning the flames. If he's successful, it is my fervent hope that he'll permanently redirect the religious intensity of Philadelphia sports fans into more constructive avenues, like tearing down the Mets. And if, in the process, Rollins needs to occasionally remind the fans that they're unrepentant jerks most of the time, so be it. He's right.

sports nut

The Smartest Team in Baseball

How the Rays beat the Red Sox.

By Tim Marchman

Monday, October 20, 2008, at 3:06 PM ET

Over the next few days, you're going to learn a lot more about the Tampa Bay Rays than you ever thought you'd need to know. Thank goodness they're an unusually interesting bunch. Freakishly talented center fielder B.J. Upton, for instance, is only the second-best major leaguer to have [played middle infield for the 1993 Virginia Blasters](#). Fifth outfielder Fernando Perez is a Columbia graduate with [a taste for Howard Zinn](#). General manager Andrew Friedman, 31, was a Bear Stearns analyst before making a well-timed exit into baseball. And manager Joe Maddon has fashion-forward glasses and a taste for wine. Wacky!

For all their charming eccentricity, the Rays also happen to be really good at baseball. They beat out the New York Yankees for a playoff spot with a payroll one-fifth as big. They went into Fenway Park last week tied 1-1 in the American League Championship Series and kicked the Boston Red Sox around like dogs, outscoring the defending champs 29-5 over one stretch. And after the Red Sox made the greatest playoff comeback in at least 80 years in Game 5, winning a game they had [essentially no mathematical chance of winning](#), the Rays still pulled it out, for reasons having nothing to do with [Upton's](#)

[mohawk](#), all of which were on display in their Game 7 win on Sunday night.

What makes the Rays so good? Start with defense. The Rays ranked first in baseball in [defensive efficiency](#) this year, which measures how many balls in play they turn into outs. Jason Bartlett, a great-field/no-hit shortstop of a kind that's been out of fashion for at least a decade, showed how they do it in the second inning, materializing from the ether behind second base to rob Mark Kotsay of a base hit. You won't see ostentatious dives from the Rays, but you will see them in areas of the field they have no business being in. Bartlett, left fielder Carl Crawford, first baseman Carlos Pena, and second baseman Akinori Iwamura all rated among the top three in the league at their positions in making plays outside of their zones—that is, ranging beyond the space they're supposed to cover to corral balls that would otherwise go for hits. With all those great fielders, the Rays play like they have 10 men on the field.

That hurts all the more for opposing hitters given that the Rays have so many hard throwers. Matt Garza, the ALCS most valuable player, mowed down the Red Sox in Game 7, striking out nine in seven innings. Ranked ninth in the league this year in average fastball speed, Garza was one of [four Rays starters to rank in the league's top 30](#). The hardest-throwing Ray of all is left-hander David Price, the No. 1 overall pick in last year's draft. Price closed out the Red Sox with heat and brutal sliders, looking like the reincarnation of Steve Carlton. After Price's performance, the only good news for the Phillies is that the Rays' secret weapon is a secret no longer.

Defense and pitching are to baseball what transparency and accountability are to politics: Is there anyone who's not in favor of them? Of course, there's also virtue in hitting the living hell out of the ball. The main reason the Rays won is that they set an ALCS record for most home runs in a series, doing so against a fine Boston pitching staff. The Rays aren't, from one angle, a team of power hitters; they have five everyday players who hit fewer than 10 home runs this year. On the other hand, they did hit 180 long balls this year, as many as the Yankees, and they have a surprising depth of power, with bench hitters and platoon guys like Ben Zobrist and Willy Aybar—who hit a crucial home run in Game 7 that turned a 2-1 lead into a 3-1 gap—up in the double digits. As Joe Torre said last week, the Rays have sneaky power.

A preference for pitching, defense, and the home run, the very strategy preached by crusty old-school manager [Earl Weaver](#), doesn't quite qualify the Rays as baseball avant-gardists. Nevertheless, one could argue that the Rays provide a necessary corrective to recent heresies. The 2006 World Series champion St. Louis Cardinals had all of one starter who threw harder than 90 mph; the 2004 Red Sox employed defensive butchers Mark Bellhorn and Manny Ramirez. But the Rays weren't built as a reaction against the game's fallen state.

The secret of the Rays' success could be found on the mound at the end of Game 7. A veteran of five major league games coming into the playoffs, David Price came on in the eighth inning with his team up by two, the bases loaded, and J.D. Drew, hero of Game 5, at the plate. (No pressure, kid!) Price struck out Drew, set down three in a row after walking the leadoff man in the ninth, and ended up at the bottom of a big dog pile.

Bringing on a kid who's pitched fewer innings in his career than Leon Cadore of the Brooklyn Robins did in [one game in 1920](#) is nothing you'll find in baseball's infamous book. Nor is a fair amount of what the Rays do. After Game 5, everyone wanted to know exactly why Maddon had left in right-handed relievers Grant Balfour and Dan Wheeler to face lefties Drew and David Ortiz; Maddon said in so many words that a good pitcher is a good pitcher, and that Balfour and Wheeler are his best guys, however things happened to work out. What's the common bond here? Going with your best players—regardless of what hand they throw with or how many innings they've thrown in the big leagues—no matter if baseball orthodoxy would tell you otherwise. This shows an almost disturbing tendency toward common sense.

Look at the Rays on the field, and this strange reasonableness abounds. Ace pitcher Scott Kazmir and catcher Dioner Navarro were thought by many to be too small to succeed in the majors despite having great minor league numbers; the Rays decided to let them prove they couldn't succeed, and lo and behold neither did. Right fielder Rocco Baldelli can't play a full game because of a rare disease that keeps him from expending too much energy; the Rays play him as long as he can go and then swap in a caddy. Upton couldn't handle shortstop in the minors, committing dozens of errors a year; the Rays shrugged and moved him to center, where he's been brilliant. Pena was a solid first baseman with Detroit for years before somehow managing to wash out on both the Red Sox and Yankees in 2006; the Rays figured the accumulated weight of his career counted for more than one bad campaign, installed him as the starter, and watched him hit 77 home runs over the last two years.

All of this seems obvious right now, but that wasn't always so. Somewhere in the Rays' story, as befits the general manager's background, there's a best-selling business book waiting to be written. Call it *If It Isn't Common, Why Do They Call It Common Sense?* It would sell a million.

swingers

Will Obama Crap Out?

His ground game could win Nevada, but McCain's still a 13-12 favorite.

By Josh Levin

Wednesday, October 22, 2008, at 6:31 AM ET

HENDERSON, Nev.—[Wayne Allyn Root](#) is your typical Vegas oddsmaker turned vice-presidential candidate. Root grew up wanting to be Jimmy the Greek, and he built [a sports-handicapping empire](#) by talking fast and selling himself. When he's playing the part of Bob Barr's running mate, the pitch is pretty much the same: Root looks at America and sees a potential client. Like a guy who lost everything making dumb bets on football games, the United States has done everything wrong, gotten itself into a huge hole, and needs professional help. Root thinks he's just the guy to patch things up, but his prescription will have to wait. Dallas is at Arizona, a "Game of the Year" for Root (the term is relative; there are 12 to 15 Games of the Year each season), and he's desperate for the Cardinals to cover the spread.

Add Wayne Allyn Root to Nevada's claims to fame: the perennial [fastest-growing state](#) in the nation, the only place in America with legalized brothels, and now home to the only candidate for national office who runs a sports book on the side. (Or is it the other way around?) And in 2008, if it goes from red to blue, Nevada could legitimately claim to have tipped the election to Barack Obama.

To get a sense of the state mood, I could have gone on a statewide listening tour with stops in Las Vegas, Reno, Carson City, Elko, and Pahrump. But with gas prices what they are these days, I decided it would be more prudent to confine my reporting to a single block. Anthem Country Club is an upmarket gated community in the Las Vegas Valley—mountain views, a waterfall or two, the Strip's sparkling lights a mere 20 minutes away. Past the security guards is a pair of houses abutting a circular drive. Behind Door No. 1 is the Libertarian Party's vice-presidential nominee. Behind Door No. 2: Nevada's foreclosure king.

A former stalwart Republican with the [glory wall](#) to prove it—hello there, Karl Rove!—Root now peddles "conservative libertarianism." In April, he's releasing a Goldwaterian manifesto called *The Conscience of a Libertarian*. The theme of Root's campaign is to turn America into one big Nevada—a freedom-loving stronghold with no state income tax and a government that doesn't care if you gamble, smoke a joint, or pay for sex.

In 2004, the rest of the states might've signed off on that live-and-let-live plan. It seemed to be working for Nevada, with housing prices and gambling revenues soaring and unemployment an afterthought. Today, however, Root might have trouble getting people in Nevada to buy into his idea, much less the rest of the country. Tourism is on the wane, causing [Strip casino revenues to fall for eight straight months](#) and

companies like [Harrah's Entertainment to make big layoffs](#). [Unemployment is now up to 7.3 percent](#), the state's highest in 23 years. With credit hard to come by, [home builders and Vegas moguls have halted new projects](#). Nowhere has the housing bust been felt as acutely: Nevada has owned [America's highest foreclosure rate](#) for 20 straight months, and according to the Greater Las Vegas Association of Realtors, home prices in Southern Nevada have gone down 31 percent since last September.

Which brings us to Root's next-door neighbor. Michael Krein is the owner of Nevada Real Estate Services and the president of the [National REO Brokers Association](#), a trade group for brokers who manage and maintain real-estate-owned properties—that is, foreclosures. "Most real estate agents are not equipped either financially, mentally, or with the right skill set for this business," he says. Krein explains that the hassles and stresses of the foreclosure business are mostly mundane (though he does admit to being shot at twice and stabbed once): paying the utility bills, getting the pool cleaned, dealing with homeowners' associations.

In the last few years, Krein has had a lot of properties to maintain. Speculation in the Las Vegas market, he says, pushed home prices beyond the reach of the average people who live and work there. The bad news in Vegas is that foreclosed properties are everywhere. That's also the good news: Krein says there's never been a better time to buy a house (he *is* a Realtor, after all), so long as you have good credit and money for a down payment.

While many Nevadans seem to be heeding his advice—September home sales in Vegas were up 181 percent over the dead-than-dead September 2007 market—a lot more are sitting tight, uncertain about the economy and their jobs. Still, as Root tells it—and the [Census Bureau would agree](#)—Nevada must be doing something right because its 2.9 percent growth rate led the nation in 2007.

Each year, Root says, scads of newcomers pack up for Nevada, seeking refuge from the tax burden of the "People's Republic of California." These IRS-hating émigrés behave completely irrationally, he argues: "They're bringing the social ideas and the political ideas that made their life a living hell in California, and they're starting to vote Democrat." Nevertheless, back when the economy was going strong, Bush beat Kerry here by 21,500 votes. And that was no surprise: Save for two Ross Perot-aided victories by Bill Clinton, Nevada had gone with the Republican every year since 1968. But in the last four years, the state has indeed turned blue. There were 4,500 more registered Republicans than Democrats in 2004; as of Oct. 17, there are around 112,000 more registered Democrats than Republicans in Nevada.

Silver State Democrats, while perhaps aided by a quiet

annexation by Golden State liberals, clearly derived the most benefit from an early caucus date (the [brainchild of Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid](#)). The close contest between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama goosed party registrations and enthusiasm—[117,599 Democrats turned out for the 2008 caucus](#) compared with a piddling 9,000 in 2004. David Damore, a political science professor at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, says that while the caucus was a split decision, "You sort of had Hillary controlling the Democratic establishment. What impressed me about [Obama] at the time is that he put together an entire precinct-level organization with no help." (Obama did get the [endorsement of the powerful Culinary Workers Union](#), whose 60,000 members work predominately on the Las Vegas Strip.)

Meanwhile, John McCain punted the state's Republican caucuses, coming in third to Mitt Romney and Ron Paul. With McCain getting a late start, [even Republicans agree](#) that the GOP has been outthrustled this election cycle. [Chuck Muth](#), a former executive director of the Nevada Republican Party with a mordant sense of humor, is unwilling to say that the state party is disorganized. "You'd have to find it first," he says. Muth says the base isn't excited about McCain—"they're not walking door to door, they're not making donations, they're not making phone calls"—and that, unlike the Bush campaign in 2004, McCain simply doesn't have enough money to foster a big grass-roots push. (McCain now has nine offices in the state and around 30 paid staffers, compared with 15 and more than 100 for the Obama campaign.)

But even as [Obama has inched out to a lead here](#), all is not lost for the GOP. Kerry [lost by more than 40,000 votes in Nevada's rural counties](#), and while Obama has made a strong effort to tighten that gap—he's [visited sparsely populated Elko County three times](#)—it seems unlikely that he'll make huge inroads with the state's gun-loving conservatives. Heavily Democratic Clark County will also be a test for the Obama campaign's ground game—with casino employees working odd hours and many Latino voters going to the polls for the first time, turning out the vote will be a challenge. (Good news for the Dems: [According to the New York Times](#), "Information from counties representing more than 90 percent of Nevada's population show Democrats ... holding a commanding advantage in early voter turnout.")

There's also the Palin push to contend with. On Tuesday, the veep nominee drew big crowds to rallies in [Reno](#) and Henderson. According to Wayne Root, the Palin airlift is a conscious effort by the Republican Party to counteract his influence. "They picked Sarah Palin, I believe, because they said this guy has a shtick, this guy has an image—Wayne Root—that works, let's go find something like it. And Sarah Palin is a female version of my image." (For Root's extended soliloquy on the similarities—and fundamental difference—between himself and Sarah Palin, click [here](#).)

And Root may not be wrong. In a Zogby poll conducted just before Palin was chosen as McCain's running mate, the [Barr-Root ticket had 10 percent of the vote in Libertarian-friendly Nevada](#)—not far off the number that [Ron Paul pulled in the GOP caucus](#). (Paul isn't on the ballot in Nevada for the general election, and after a dispute with Barr, he's [thrown his support to Chuck Baldwin of the Constitution Party](#).) In Zogby's latest four-way poll, conducted Oct. 9 to 13, Barr is down to 1.2 percent, below Ralph Nader's 1.6 percent and "someone else" at 2.7. What gives? "When [Palin] joined the ticket, conservatives came flooding home," explains Zogby's Fritz Wenzel. "They are now showing some discontent over McCain's handling of the financial bailout and are again leaving, but they are now going to Obama, not Barr."

Wayne Allyn Root the oddsmaker pegs McCain as a 13-to-12 favorite in Nevada, though he does give the Libertarian ticket a "less than 50-50" shot of becoming a Ross Perot-like spoiler. If Obama wins the state, he says, "it will be because Bob Barr and I got between 6 and 10 percent." Root's future plans: "In 2012, I expect to be the [Libertarian] nominee. ... With my personality, which is bigger than life, I *will* attract five to 10 million votes in a Ross Perot-like number. And then in 2016, I will be a credible candidate for president of the United States. And in 2020, I'll win it." He also plans to continue picking NFL winners, which could perhaps lead to the happy outcome of the Super Bowl becoming a national day of rest.

Who is Michael Krein going to vote for? While he calls himself "a staunch conservative, bordering on social Darwinism," he says that he'll probably make more money if Obama is elected. "You increase taxes, you're going to affect jobs; you affect jobs, you create more foreclosures. Sorry, that's how life works." Is that reason enough to vote for Obama? Krein's not saying. He does say, however, that he's not necessarily rooting for more foreclosures. "At this point," he says, "I've got plenty."

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Wayne Root says that the Republicans chose Sarah Palin for two reasons. First, the GOP was concerned that the Libertarians would take votes away from McCain and throw Alaska to Obama. (Never mind that the state has voted Republican since prehistoric times.) Second, Root says, Palin is a "female version of my image." The similarities: "Well, first of all she says she's a hockey mom; I'm the son of a butcher. We both come from very humble beginnings. We both come from far Western frontier states that believe in no taxes and lots of guns. ... We both have

big families with a brand-new baby. ... And to top it off, if you could think of one attribute that describes me, I think it would be an Energizer Bunny—high-energy, exciting, passionate, gets crowds going crazy. I can get a crowd whipped into a frenzy in five minutes, whereas Sarah Palin does the same thing, she's the only one on the Republican side who does that. So I think they found a female version of me, except here's the difference: Underneath the excitement, OK, and underneath the citizen politician, I'm a policy wonk, I've studied politics my whole life. Underneath the entertainer exterior, I'm actually an intellectual who went to Columbia University and can tell you an awful lot about political history in this country. Sarah Palin is none of those things. She's from the University of Idaho, she's a ... beauty pageant participant. ... [U]nderneath the exterior there's gotta be some substance, and I'm not sure they found it with Palin. But I know they found it with me."

technology

Linux Is Making Me Insane

Grappling with Ubuntu, the free, open-source operating system.

By Farhad Manjoo

Thursday, October 23, 2008, at 5:41 PM ET

Ubuntu is the Zulu word for a [traditional African philosophy](#) that encourages people to live and work together harmoniously. Desmond Tutu [defines ubuntu](#) as "the very essence of being human," what you say when you want to "give high praise to someone." After a week spent wrestling with the [Ubuntu operating system](#)—the most popular, most consumer-friendly version of the Linux OS—I've discovered a few different usages for the word. It works quite well as an epithet—something to be yelled loudly and often as you struggle to adjust to a computer that has neither the elegance of a Mac nor the broad utility of a PC. But *ubuntu* can also be uttered as a sigh of anticipation: Though this Linux-based OS is far from perfect, it does make it seem increasingly possible to do all your work on a computer whose software costs you nothing at all.

I installed Ubuntu after being repeatedly challenged by a small but vocal group of readers to look beyond my comfort zone. Whenever I write about the relative differences between Apple and Microsoft-based machines, I invariably get comments from people who are irritated that I didn't mention Ubuntu as an alternative. I usually dismiss them in much the way I shrug off fans of third-party presidential candidates. I've run desktop versions of Linux in the past, and I've found them to be as pleasant as Ralph Nader—the OS was difficult to install and learn, and there wasn't enough available software to make the switch worth my while.

Fans of Ubuntu assured me that times had changed. The OS was [conceived in 2004](#) by Mark Shuttleworth, a South African software magnate who aims to make computers more widely available to people around the world. Ubuntu reflects that founding mission: It is designed and distributed in a way to make it easy to install and use. It has a look and feel that will ring familiar to Mac and Windows users, and it loads up on your machine with a wide range of useful apps that should allow you to do typical computer stuff: e-mail, IM, surf the Web, listen to music, watch DVDs, surf the Web, work on office documents, and surf the Web.

Still, to use Ubuntu is to realize the enormity of its mission. Apple and Microsoft invest billions in research, development, and testing, and the money's not for naught—it produces software that, while not perfect, is intuitive, graceful, and can handle a huge variety of consumer need. Ubuntu, in my testing, seemed more of a work in progress than a final product, a designation I don't think many of its fans would disagree with. It does a lot of things well, but there are enough bits of mediocrity—enough extra steps you've got to take, or extra tricks you've got to learn—to turn away large swaths of the computing population.

Take the installation process. I downloaded the 700 megabyte-plus install file last week and burned it on to a CD. Then I popped the CD into an old Pentium 4 Dell desktop. At first, Ubuntu seemed to be working—a black screen flashed, "Loading. ..." But then, nothing; I could hear the CD turning in the drive, but after 10 minutes with the screen still at "Loading ..." I went to Google looking for an answer and found that there was probably something about my computer's internal configuration that was preventing the Ubuntu installer from loading. Others who'd faced this problem recommended that I download a completely different version of the Ubuntu installer. I did that, but more and different problems ensued. The program seemed jinxed—it was only after about two hours and five burned CDs that I finally got the whole thing to work. (Click [here](#) for an explanation of how to avoid my mistakes.)

An operating system installation is rarely a painless affair, so I won't ding Ubuntu too many points for that part. I also must note that when I tried to put the OS on another computer—a two-year-old laptop currently running Windows XP—Ubuntu easily made itself at home. (It's capable of installing itself alongside Windows; when you turn on your computer, you can choose which OS you'd like to start up.)

Once the OS was up and running, I ran into more snags—though to tell the truth, these troubles were more my fault than the operating system's. After years of using Windows and various Mac OSes, I kept approaching Ubuntu as if it were one of those systems. It took me a while to get adjusted to its unique way of doing things—and once I figured out those special ways, things became a lot easier. For instance, at first I had lots of trouble

installing programs. The current release of Ubuntu ships with a Beta version of the Firefox Web browser, and I wanted the final version. So, like any Windows or Mac user, I went to the Firefox site and downloaded the latest version. But when the files appeared on my computer, I didn't know what to do with them—there was no setup or installation program, nothing I could double-click on to get it to run.

Turns out that going to a Web page and downloading an app is just not how things are done on Ubuntu. Instead, the OS runs an application called a "package manager" that keeps track of all the programs running on your system. If you want to install Firefox, you go to the package manager and type in "firefox"—the system will search vast online repositories of free software for your app. Then, you just click Firefox there, and the package manager downloads and installs it automatically. Once you get accustomed to it, this technique of adding programs actually seems easier than the Mac/Windows method. (On the downside, Ubuntu's [free software ethics](#) sometimes limit the programs available; if you want to install a proprietary program like Skype, for instance, you've got to go into the system and [explicitly add an address to Skype's servers](#), forcing Ubuntu to check there when you search for Skype.)

Once you've installed your program, then what? On Windows, the new app goes into your Start menu, while on the Mac OS, it goes into your Applications folder. Ubuntu has an applications menu, but not every program that I installed ended up there. Neither did the programs produce any clickable icons on my desktop or files that I could find anywhere else on my machine. How do I run the blasted program I just downloaded? The answer: ALT+F2. Googling revealed that this shamanistic combination of keys brings up a list of software on the machine. I also found that it's possible to manually add programs to the applications menu and to [create desktop shortcuts](#).

If it's looking to appeal to Mac and Windows converts, Ubuntu would be wise to flag such differences for first-time users. It should load up with a tutorial showing you how to perform the most common tasks—maybe some how-to videos like [the ones Apple produces for the iPod and iPhone](#)—and to let you know where to look for help. This would ease the transition for newbies, people whom I suspect won't be as patient as I was in learning Ubuntu's ways.

Millions of people around the world use Ubuntu, but they're a relatively tech-savvy group. I think that with a few simple changes to its interface and presentation, it could also appeal to the rest of us, even computer novices. Ubuntu has a real opportunity to succeed now because of the declining importance of the operating system in our daily computing needs. With more of our software moving online and being offered across multiple platforms, we aren't tied down, these days, to any particular OS—you can switch easily from Mac to Windows and back without losing a shred of your personal data, which is all stored

out there in the Internet cloud anyway. I'm not a Mac, you're not a PC—we're both Google. If Ubuntu can market itself as the Internet OS—the system that'll keep your computer safe and running, but will otherwise get out of your way while you go online—it could get many adherents. Why send your money to Apple or Microsoft when a free OS does the same thing?

At the moment, though, the fact that it's free—both monetarily and philosophically—is about the only reason I can see for running Ubuntu. Nothing about Ubuntu is an advantage over anything in either Mac or Windows—it has no more features, no better stability, no greater speed. (Ubuntu crashed several times while I used it.)

And yet, I'm intrigued by its possibilities. Shuttleworth, the South African magnate, continues to invest in Ubuntu; he seems to want to [become the Steve Jobs](#) of the free software world, an advocate of better usability and design among peers who consider text-input command line apps to be the zenith of computing. I'm glad Shuttleworth's pushing a new path, and I'll continue checking in on his progress. He's just got a really long way to go.

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Every time I tried to install Ubuntu, it seemed, I would get stuck at a different point in the installation process. I clogged Google's servers trying to track down the problem; eventually, I found a few [forums](#) that warned that I had to pay attention to how I'd burned the Ubuntu installation CD. It turns out that you need to set your CD burner to work at its slowest possible speed in order to avoid any data-writing problems on the disc. After I did that, the OS installed perfectly.

television

The Mentalist

Does this hit show signal the end of the *CSI* era?

By Troy Patterson

Thursday, October 23, 2008, at 6:22 PM ET

It would be premature to perform an autopsy on forensic-science cop shows, but this is the right moment to start searching around for some medical gloves to snap on. The genre—distinguished

by its fixation on the screens-within-screens computer analysis of biological evidence, populated by investigators who scan that evidence to the sound of electronic music—has thrived as the dominant form of TV crime fiction from the turn of century. It now seems marked for slow death.

Last week, market leader *CSI* (unquestionably still a big hit) dropped about 4 million viewers from its season premiere. Last night on CBS, one of its franchises, *CSI:NY*, looked horribly under the weather. The victim—"the vic," as they always say in this universe—was a foxy fixer a la Jodie Foster's in *Inside Man*. The violence was graphic, and—splashy computer analysis being crucial to the mood—the graphics were violent. The show's coed fraternity of lab dorks and flatfeet linked her to the perp by considering clues that seemed desperately sensationalistic even by local standards—the smashed cover of a girly-looking flash drive (loaded with 64 zettabytes of dark secrets) and synthetic material from a high-end blow-up doll (a la Ryan Gosling's in *Lars and the Real Girl*). At the hollow center of it all, the detective/hero performed no detectable detecting. Gary Sinise, the actor in the role, would merely lend an ear here or squint competently there and manfully attend to the overwrought subplots. He seemed to feel as bored as I.

When professional criminologists get sick of themselves on police procedurals, they turn to ever more eccentrically specialized specialists on the one hand and to enchanted amateurs on the other. It seems that the FBI would be a shambles without the assistance of the mad-science geniuses on Fox's new *Fringe* and of an edgy biophysicist on CBS's new *Eleventh Hour*—not to mention the math-whiz of *Numb3rs* (CBS) and the academic anthropologist of *Bones* (Fox). If you dig Archilochus, you might class these heroes as neurotic hedgehogs and contrast them with the smarmy fox in the title role of *The Mentalist* (CBS, Tuesdays at 9 p.m. ET).

The Mentalist is the fall season's biggest ratings success, and why not? Its detective plots are cozily formulaic, its defining twist cheerfully preposterous. As cop-show comfort food, it's a kind of California fusion cooked up to appeal to people fed up with techno-beat lab scenes. Softening the sadism of a genre that leaves the mind strewn with beautiful corpses, it's as sunny as any entertainment devoted to homicide investigations could be, in terms of both temperament and solar glare. Often does the mellow protagonist squint winningly under the Pacific light.

Where are his sunglasses? Shades would only obscure the pale eyes of star Simon Baker, and those are his key selling point. (They flirt with some of Robert Redford's abashed dashingness, some of Richard Gere's pleased crinkle.) And his character inherently presents a face that's a mask. The hero, Patrick Jane, ditched a career as a TV psychic to pursue public service after a serial killer he'd dissed on air slaughtered his wife and child. A reformed phony nonetheless projecting a charlatan's charm, he's been issued wounds to hide—and, like his fellow fake

supernaturalist on USA's *Psych*, he's got powers of deduction to shield.

I ask you, ladies: What is more attractive than a man who pays attention? A guy who understands your emotions better than you do? As an "independent consultant" to the California Bureau of Investigation, Jane's job is to go around *feeling* things. He displays keen intuition, yes—watch him serially humiliate a local-yokel sheriff at rock-paper-scissors—but he's also got hands good enough to hypnotize a distraught interviewee at a touch or to pickpocket a villain. I suspect it'll be a few seasons before Jane starts feeling on Senior Agent Teresa Lisbon (Robin Tunney)—a compact, by-the-books type—though, given the show's lack of subtlety, it could also be the case that Lisbon's last name indicates Sapphic preferences. The underlings on her unit are Wayne Rigsby (macho) and Grace Van Pelt (graceful), who do flirt often, and Kimball Cho (a bit fussy), who doesn't have anyone to flirt with because that's still generally how it is for Asian guys on prime-time television.

In a recent episode titled "Red Hair and Duck Tape," the mentalist and his entourage descended on Napa. The corpse of a goody-two-shoes high-school girl had turned up in a vineyard. The perp is not her besotted co-worker. Nor is it her drug-dealing secret boyfriend. (Here, Jane used his extraordinary talents of observation to get the boyfriend to open up in the interrogation room. "She made you feel like a dashing pirate," he said, remembering the scene before, when the guy was running right at him while holding a saber.) Meanwhile, the vic's younger brother has been lurking around with a hatchet in his backpack, and Jane gives the kid an empathetic talking-to about justice and vigilantism, as in a Big Brothers Big Sisters ice cream date. Jane's unorthodox idea for nabbing the murderer involves shrink-wrapping Van Pelt in a cocktail dress and sending her out to get abducted. Though this plan falls through, the unit still cracks the case, with Jane first detaining the husband-and-wife psycho killers through pure force of charm and Lisbon then gunning them down.

"Not every murder is a secret inside of a secret inside of a secret," Lisbon huffs to Jane at one point. If audiences were inclined to believe her, then this show wouldn't be emerging as a hit. As a character, the mentalist, with his heightened common sense, is an elevated everyman. As a show, *The Mentalist* sets the power of science on the side and says up with people. In turn, we're paying it attention.

television

The Winner Gets To Be Junior Editor

Competing for a job at *Elle* on the new *Stylista*.

By Troy Patterson

Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at 3:22 PM ET

The coinage *stylista* plays on the model of *fashionista*, a term so terribly abused that it has come to describe any person with an above-average concern that her bag not clash with her shoes. The newer word is clearly also suspect: It glints with militant frivolity and, moreover, typographically suggests some dermatological disorder or designer mouthwash. Still, it has a kernel of worthiness, style being the man himself and all that. The "11 aspiring trendsetters" on the reality show *Stylista* (The CW, Wednesdays at 9 p.m. ET) are, as their miscues and tender tantrums demonstrate, several trials short of becoming men and women, and a further maxim applies. When your correspondent was a turnip less ripe yet than these contestants, he sat at the knee of a stately old local-newspaper columnist who declaimed, "Style is you finding out who you are, what you're about."

Such is the theme of this coming-of-age competition, one that it approaches with an appreciable sincerity given its own synthetic terms. In vying for a "job" at *Elle* magazine, these dear children are trying to discover themselves. In the exaggerated fashion-magazine ethos *Stylista* posits, "finding your own voice" is a matter of bringing polish and creativity to the genuine expression of a core self. That's in the metaphorical sense. In the literal one, it means improving your accent, maybe affecting a hazily posh one in which the vowels have been cut and sanded so that no one can discern the meanness of your background or the quality of your borrowed French.

The youngest of the participants is 19-year-old Devin, an NYU student who avers in an entitled whine that she would give her "left arm for that position—not even kidding," clearly not having considered how that circumstance would limit her ability to imperiously hail a cab while holding a camel-hair coat. The oldest is 26-year-old William, who hails from Boston but attended "a university in Oxford" and took this sojourn as an excuse to start dressing like Malcolm McDowell in *A Clockwork Orange* and speaking like David Hemmings in *Blowup*. The most richly abominable is Megan, a 22-year-old boutique owner frequently heard administering insults in a tone redolent of expansive leisure time devoted to sharpening claws. The fattest is Danielle, who, in her role as the Ugly Betty underdog, tends to talk like a normal person.

Perhaps all of them will end up sounding like photo director Brett, one of their mentors and taskmistresses here. Brett's got a nonspecific upper-class drawl going on, as if her jaw is always returning to Locust Valley from the mall. In one segment, she follows the words "empire waist"—*ahm-peer*, sweetie—with a caesura so the kiddies can note her correctness. Surely none will reach the ridiculous heights of articulation achieved by Anne Slowey, *Elle*'s fashion-news director and *Stylista*'s queen bee, who has prepared for the vamping her screen role requires by studying Meryl Streep in *The Devil Wears Prada*, Bette Davis in everything, and, perhaps, actual frost crystals. In elimination scenes, the phrase "You can leave now" is what she says to the

winner. The only problem with Slowey—and this is especially disconcerting given the program's obligatory focus on her footwear—is that she walks funny, plodding gingerly, as if not yet accustomed to how the chunkiness of the season's accessories has reset her center of gravity.

In Wednesday night's first challenge, the youngsters scramble to fix Slowey breakfast. Sadly, none demonstrates the cleverness either to spend the allotted \$40 on narcotics or to present a fellow castmate's head on an attractive serving dish. All race to a local deli, getting to the counter with their nerves worn and their hands full. (Here, contestant Kate, whose sartorial instincts favor a streamlined trampiness, briefly lodges the head of a pineapple in her cleavage.) Mightily does the flatware clatter against the trays as the competitors shakily wait for review.

Viewers of a particular sensibility—that is, mine—will find themselves unwholesomely engaged by the tone *Stylista* brings to scenes about laying out sidebars and rethinking silly hats. The show feels approachably lo-fi (wardrobe by H&M, cinematography by no one interested in the beguiling gold of them thar *Hills*), and the references to aesthetics are just arch enough to convey that it's in the know as a work of trash about mechanical reproduction. The contestants, being somewhat more literate than your usual reality-TV cretins, say dumb things in an interesting way. (Poor, poor, unfortunate Arnaldo: "I think in the box, out of the box, and sometimes take the box and turn it into a triangle.") *Stylista* is not a guilty pleasure; the guilt *is* the pleasure, and never more so than when Kate, freshly savaged by Megan, whimpers with terror at her newfound capacity for contempt: "I've learned what it feels like to hate other people." Chin up, honey. You are only on the precipice of adulthood. With practice, hating people is as fun and easy as an afternoon of backgammon or an hour of bad TV.

television

Live From Wasilla ...

Sarah Palin did just enough on *Saturday Night Live*.

By Troy Patterson

Sunday, October 19, 2008, at 4:04 PM ET

Sarah Palin materialized on *Saturday Night Live* this weekend and deserves high marks for her small contribution. Having temporarily shelved her snideness of tone, she earned an A for delivery by simply doing her thing as a home-baked cutie-pie. Indeed, *SNL* required her to do little other than lend out her aura, confining the terms of her performance such that you'd have to give her an A for effort, too.

In a [cold open](#) depicting "the governor's first official press conference," a woman took the stage with a familiar gait—that

self-assured business-casual prance—and the viewer felt a moment's uncanny confusion before understanding that this was not the candidate but Tina Fey's Palin doppelgänger. The real thing soon appeared, watching her double's take on a monitor alongside *SNL* creator Lorne Michaels. Michaels: "I really wish that that had been you." Palin: "Well, Lorne, you know, I just didn't think it was a realistic depiction of how one of my press conferences woulda gone." Eventually, Hollywood liberal Alec Baldwin stomped in, initially mistaking Palin for Fey and expressing outrage that the candidate was defiling Studio 8H with her presence. Once properly introduced, Baldwin checked his feelings for the hockey mom: "Forgive me, but I feel I must say this: You are way hotter in person."

These two themes—the guest's image-consciousness and her hotness—were also central to the bit that concluded "Weekend Update." Here was Palin explaining to Seth Meyers that she wouldn't do the hip-hop number she'd rehearsed: "My gut is telling me it might be a bad idea for the campaign." A vastly pregnant Amy Poehler, as if an understudy, rose to the challenge, shifted into her bellicose home-girl mode, and spit rhymes in the governor's stead: "I'm Jeremiah Wright cuz tonight I'm a preacher/ I got a bookish look, and you're all hot for teacher." This was inspired—and not merely at the delirious level of Jason Sudeikis' dancing the Roger Rabbit as a snowsuit-clad first dude. Just as one of Fey's recent Palin sketches relied on a verbatim transcript of a real interview, the number simply recast Palin's positions, her jingoism, and her steady aggression as something you could dance to. Is there a more elegant analysis of the rhetoric of this campaign's mud-slinging than Poehler's call-and-response barking? ("When I say 'Obama,' you say 'Ayers!'") Not that there was anything too provocative in it. The whole point of Sarah Palin's going on *Saturday Night Live* was the going itself. All she was supposed to do was to play along. When Poehler made her out as a gangsta rousing a crowd—"All the mavericks in the house put your hands up"—Palin needed only to dull whatever the edge the assault might have had by putting her arms in the air and waving them very carefully.

the big idea

The End of Libertarianism

The financial collapse proves that its ideology makes no sense.

By Jacob Weisberg

Saturday, October 18, 2008, at 6:17 AM ET

A source of mild entertainment amid the financial carnage has been watching libertarians scurrying to explain how the global financial crisis is the result of too much government intervention rather than too little. [One line of argument](#) casts as villain the Community Reinvestment Act, which prevents banks from

"redlining" minority neighborhoods as not creditworthy. [Another theory](#) blames Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac for causing the trouble by subsidizing and securitizing mortgages with an implicit government guarantee. An alternative thesis is that past bailouts encouraged investors to behave recklessly in anticipation of a taxpayer rescue.

There are rebuttals to these claims and rejoinders to the rebuttals. But to summarize, the libertarian apologetics fall wildly short of providing any convincing explanation for what went wrong. The argument as a whole is reminiscent of wearying dorm-room debates that took place circa 1989 about whether the fall of the Soviet bloc demonstrated the failure of communism. Academic Marxists were never going to be convinced that anything that happened in the real world could invalidate their belief system. Utopians of the right, libertarians are just as convinced that their ideas have yet to be tried, and that they would work beautifully if we could only just have a do-over of human history. Like all true ideologues, they find a way to interpret mounting evidence of error as proof that they were right all along.

To which the rest of us can only respond, *Haven't you people done enough harm already?* We have narrowly avoided a global depression and are mercifully pointed toward merely the worst recession in a long while. This is thanks to a global economic meltdown made possible by libertarian ideas. I don't have much patience with the notion that trying to figure out how we got into this mess is somehow unacceptably vicious and pointless—Sarah Palin's view of global warming. As with any failure, inquest is central to improvement. And any competent forensic work has to put the libertarian theory of self-regulating financial markets at the scene of the crime.

To be more specific: In 1997 and 1998, the global economy was rocked by a series of cascading financial crises in Asia, Latin America, and Russia. Perhaps the most alarming moment was the failure of a giant, superleveraged hedge fund called [Long-Term Capital Management](#), which threatened the solvency of financial institutions that served as counter-parties to its derivative contracts, much in the manner of Bear Stearns and Lehman Bros. this year. After LTCM's collapse, it became abundantly clear to anyone paying attention to this unfortunately esoteric issue that unregulated credit market derivatives posed risks to the global financial system, and that supervision and limits of some kind were advisable. This was a very scary problem and a very boring one, a hazardous combination.

As with the government failures that made 9/11 possible, neglecting to prevent the crash of '08 was a sin of omission—less the result of deregulation per se than of disbelief in financial regulation as a legitimate mechanism. At any point from 1998 on, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, various members of their administrations, or a number of congressional leaders with oversight authority might have stood up and said, "Hey, I think we're in danger and need some additional rules here." The

Washington Post ran an excellent piece this week on [how one such attempt to regulate credit derivatives got derailed](#). Had the advocates of prudent regulation been more effective, there's an excellent chance that the subprime debacle would not have turned into a runaway financial inferno.

There's enough blame to go around, but this wasn't just a collective failure. Three officials, more than any others, have been responsible for preventing effective regulatory action over a period of years: Alan Greenspan, the [oracular](#) former Fed chairman; Phil Gramm, the [heartless](#) former chairman of the Senate banking committee; and Christopher Cox, the [unapologetic](#) chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission. Blame Greenspan for making the case that the exploding trade in derivatives was a benign way of hedging against risk. Blame Gramm for making sure derivatives weren't covered by the Commodity Futures Modernization Act, a bill he shepherded through Congress in 2000. Blame Cox for championing Bush's policy of "voluntary" regulation of investment banks at the SEC.

Cox and Gramm, in particular, are often [accused of being in the pocket of the securities industry](#). That's not entirely fair; these men took the hands-off positions they did because of their political philosophy, which holds that markets are always right and governments always wrong to interfere. They share with Greenspan, the only member of the trio who openly calls himself a libertarian, a deep aversion to any infringement of the right to buy and sell. That belief, which George Soros calls [market fundamentalism](#), is the best explanation of how the natural tendency of lending standards to turn permissive during a boom became a global calamity that spread so far and so quickly.

The best thing you can say about libertarians is that because their views derive from abstract theory, they tend to be highly principled and rigorous in their logic. Those outside of government at places like the Cato Institute and *Reason* magazine are just as consistent in their [opposition to government bailouts](#) as to the kind of regulation that might have prevented one from being necessary. "[Let failed banks fail](#)" is the purist line. This approach would deliver a wonderful lesson in personal responsibility, creating thousands of new jobs in the soup-kitchen and food-pantry industries.

The worst thing you can say about libertarians is that they are intellectually immature, frozen in the worldview many of them absorbed from reading [Ayn Rand](#) novels in high school. Like other ideologues, libertarians react to the world's failing to conform to their model by asking where the world went wrong. Their heroic view of capitalism makes it difficult for them to accept that markets can be irrational, misunderstand risk, and misallocate resources or that financial systems without vigorous government oversight and the capacity for pragmatic intervention constitute a recipe for disaster. They are bankrupt, and this time, there will be no bailout.

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

the chat room

Palin Dressed Down

Melinda Henneberger and Nina Shen Rastogi take your questions about the candidate's expensive wardrobe.

Thursday, October 23, 2008, at 1:04 PM ET

"XX Factor" bloggers Melinda Henneberger and Nina Shen Rastogi were online on Washingtonpost.com to chat with readers about Sarah Palin's [pricey wardrobe](#), her style, and [just how much clothing \\$150,000 can buy](#). An unedited transcript of the chat follows.

Washington: Good morning, I am an Obama supporter and I initially thought the choice for the Republican National Committee to purchase clothes for Palin was fine. I felt she should "look the part." However, after further examination, I think what shows a bit of poor judgment was not the fact the clothes were purchased, but *where* they were purchased. I think Sak's and Neiman make them look a bit hypocritical, after the "elite" statements about Obama—Perhaps Macy's or Ann Taylor would have been better selections. Do you agree the choice of merchant may speak to the voters more than the purchases themselves?

Melinda Henneberger: Exactly. My first reaction, too, was hey, I'm enjoying the fashion show—and if someone handed me a credit card and pointed me towards Neiman's, there's a zero percent chance I'd come back with a few durable things from Target. So I don't blame her for the clothes, but I do blame her for dividing us into elites and non-elites, real America and fake America. And yes, it is hypocritical to talk about "Wasilla Main Street values"—and then favor Escada and Valentino.

Washington: Who cares how much money she used? While I can't imagine spending that much on clothing, I think that's part of the whole scene. Why even bother having these big hooplas of conventions or allow the candidates to fly around in jet planes? It's all a waste of money when you think about it.

Nina Rastogi: I don't think the issue is so much that Sarah Palin spent \$150K on clothes—I wouldn't be surprised if Hillary Clinton spent that much on clothes and accessories in a comparable amount of time. I think the issue is that spending that much money at such high-end stores really shows the gulf between Palin's "aw shucks, regular gal" persona—which is

really being sold to the public—and the reality behind that persona.

Arlington, Va.: I don't imagine there are a lot of Hockey Moms out there spending \$150,000 on clothes, but my guess is that it won't matter one bit to them. She's a "good Christian" and many of the uber-narcissistic voters in the country want someone "just like me" in the White House. This is a two- or three-day story at most, no?

Melinda Henneberger: I'm not so sure, and 24 hours after my first reaction—which was hey, what's wrong with looking good?—I'm starting to see this more like John Edwards' haircut, a very telling disconnect between the candidate's stated agenda and personal priorities.

Washington: Did any of the \$150,000 go towards new clothes for Palin's kids? Perhaps a new dress for Piper, or maternity-wear for Bristol? Or a new onesie for Trig?

Nina Rastogi: Apparently some of that clothing budget did go toward clothes for Todd, Trig, Willow, et al.

Washington: It's an obvious election law/campaign finance violation ... when will Department of Justice or the Federal Elections Commission prosecute her? And \$150,000 on shopping, \$20,000 on flights for her kids to events they weren't invited to, and \$20,000 on per diems she didn't earn—who's the out of touch elitist? I know Joe the Plumber can't afford \$75,000 at Saks. With all that dough, they didn't hire a political science professor to explain to her what the vice president does?

Melinda Henneberger: I don't know what the legal implications are, but we knew she was "elite" even before we saw the clothing bill. She hired a Washington lobbyist even as mayor of a town of 5,000; who does that? She has assets of \$1.5 million. Which doesn't put her in Cindy McCain territory, but doesn't make her Josephine Sixpack, either. Or Josephine the Plumber.

Washington: Will you be doing a story on how much Michelle Obama spends on clothes? I thought not ... another *Post* hit job. So much for being a newspaper. Should be *The Washington Post*, not the Huffington Post. The *Post*'s coverage of this election has sunk to the level of NBC. The *Post* is supposed to be a newspaper—do both sides.

Melinda Henneberger: A lot has been written about Michelle Obama's clothes, but the difference is that Michelle is not a candidate, and her wardrobe is not being purchased with campaign funds. If it were, you can rest assured that that story would be on Page One of every paper in the country.

Falls Church, Va.: I think Robin Gihvan hit the nail on the head—you can't promote Palin as an aw-shucks hockey mom and then dress her up in such clothes. Would it have killed them to hit J Crew or Ann Taylor?

washingtonpost.com: [After a \\$150,000 Makeover, Sarah Palin Has an Image Problem](#) (*Post, Oct. 23*)

Melinda Henneberger: Right. I actually think that whoever is dressing her has done an excellent job of buying things that look like they could have come from Talbot's—but didn't. Like the black pencil skirt she wore at the convention, or the white blouses she often wears. But now that we know what they cost, the disconnect is glaring.

Washington: What does it mean to donate the clothes to charity? I presume that doesn't mean giving them to a charity like "Dress for Success"—I can't imagine the clients they serve wearing \$5,000 suits to interviews.

Nina Rastogi: As far as I know, the RNC hasn't said how, or to whom, the clothes will be donated. In the original Politico article about Palin's total price tag, spokeswoman Tracey Schmitt just said, "It was always the intent that the clothing go to a charitable purpose after the campaign."

I would love it if they donated the suits to Dress for Success—a beautiful, well-cut outfit certainly does boost your confidence and make you feel more professional, more ready to tackle the world. I'd be thrilled if Dress for Success's clients could feel that way.

Brooklyn, N.Y.: As an ex-finance person who loves fancy suits, how on earth did she spend so much? She's not wearing the most expensive couture. Is something else hidden in the \$150,000? Jewelry? Very expensive handbags? A mink coat?

Nina Rastogi: I'm not entirely sure how the \$150,000 broke down. *Slate* sent me on a fake shopping spree yesterday, to see if I could rack up the same amount at Saks Fifth Avenue. I ended up having to buy some very, very expensive jewelry to hit the full amount.

Melinda Henneberger: I dunno; if she really was told to leave every thread of her existing wardrobe back in Alaska, then I guess she needed a LOT of clothes.

Washington: Is she loses the election, will she still donate the clothes? My guy feeling so say no and we all will forget about it...

Melinda Henneberger: The McCain campaign says she will, and now that the story's out there, I'd think she would have to.

Washington: It seems to me that the fundamental problem is not with the total price tag, it's that the Republican National Committee was paying for it with donor money. What Cindy McCain's (or John McCain's or Michelle Obama's or Barack Obama's) clothes cost is perhaps interesting vis-a-vis the messages they are trying to convey, but those are all clothes they bought on their own, with their own money. I believe the outrage that the RNC has footed such an extravagant bill is well-founded.

Melinda Henneberger: I'm sure there are donors who would enjoy knowing that their contribution bought Sarah Palin a Valentino jacket, no? Given the fascination with her looks, a few Democrats might even want in on that deal...

St. Paul, Minn.: Why aren't more republicans upset at how their money is being used? I donated to the Obama campaign, and if he had spent \$150,000 on clothes, I'd be upset.

Nina Rastogi: Well, I can't speak for all the Republicans out there, but I think many people see it as a justified amount of money to spend on preparing a politician to be under heavy national scrutiny for several months—it's a whole lot when you spend it all at once, as Palin's people had to, but maybe not so galling if you spread it out over a longer period of time.

Silver Spring, Md.: I was surprised and disappointed yesterday that the reaction on the XX blog leaned toward defending Palin. I'm glad to see you're coming around. Sneering at the "elites" while wearing a \$2,500 Valentino jacket is a brazen act of hypocrisy. How can the McCain-Palin campaign be so tone deaf?

Melinda Henneberger: I think a lot of us just thought that we had way more serious beefs with her than her wardrobe. As an observer, I was enjoying the fashion show. But from their perspective, it really is as tone-deaf as Edwards getting that haircut. Because you know the expense reports are going to be made public, and you know that the bill is going to say Neiman's. And you know that those people you've been pitching to on Main Street can't afford a lot of shopping sprees right now. So I would say that this is just one example of a campaign in disarray.

Kansas City, Mo.: Do you really think they will donate all those clothes to charity? The makeup too? *Yuck!* Is there any mechanism to make sure they do?

Nina Rastogi: Well, I would hope that Sarah Palin will get to keep the makeup no matter what the outcome in November—for her sake and for hygiene's sake.

And a friend of mine pointed out that the RNC probably won't donate the clothes directly to charity—it might make more sense to auction off the clothes and then donate the proceeds.

Richmond, Va.: How does donating the clothes afterward make the inappropriate appropriation by the RNC any better? In some ways it's worse, because the value is lost rather than depreciated over a few years.

Nina Rastogi: If they auction off the clothes, then presumably the value of each piece will increase—you wouldn't just be paying for the apparel itself, but for the history and glamour that comes along with it. Just think how exciting it could be to own THE red blazer Palin wore on Saturday Night Live ... especially if it came with the flag pin!

Houston: "I'm starting to see this more like John Edwards' haircut, a very telling disconnect between the candidate's stated agenda and personal priorities." I still find this a ridiculous assertion many months past the point it mattered. You're assuming that someone who is wealthy cannot honestly want to help poor people. Edwards's spending on haircuts was irrelevant to his policy goals and doesn't tell us anything. Edwards is now irrelevant, but this meme that only a poor person can advocate for the poor needs to be stamped out.

Melinda Henneberger: I'm not saying that only the poor can advocate for the poor. I'm saying that it was very short-sighted of him to expense the haircut to his campaign, knowing it would

be made public, knowing that it would undermine his message. It wasn't smart, and it told us something about his judgment and self-indulgence that actually turned out to be pretty important information.

Wilmington, Del.: Do you think there's any chance the GOP will auction off the clothes, then donate the proceeds to charity? \$150,000 is such an exorbitant sum, but given how popular Palin is among some groups, I'm wondering if an auction might actually turn a profit.

Melinda Henneberger: I think that's quite likely, actually, and a good solution.

Anonymous: If the clothes are picked to look like they came from Talbots, why didn't they just buy them at Talbots?

Melinda Henneberger: Because sadly for all of us, the fit just is not the same!

Illinois: I am old enough to remember the fuss over Jackie Kennedy's clothes (and I wonder what her clothing total would be in inflation-adjusted dollars). I thought it was dumb then and dumb now. I was thrilled Jackie was so well-dressed. Ditto with Sarah Palin (and the rest of the family, as it included them).

Nina Rastogi: True, but Jackie O never touted her moose-hunting abilities or her small-town ways. She was always an aristocrat, and made no bones about it.

Who's the Personal Shopper?: And does that raise another question re: possible campaign finance violations—i.e. if that person's salary was paid for through donations, etc.?

Melinda Henneberger: I don't know who the personal shopper is, but she is a woman of taste and vision, with a big future ahead of her! I wondered if Cindy McCain had been helping her, given that her favorite designer is Escada, too.

Philadelphia: I wonder if they might be affecting Republican fundraising efforts. Why should I contribute money that I thought would be going to TV advertising when it instead winds up going to someone's wardrobe?

Nina Rastogi: Well, Palin's wardrobe is part of the advertising effort, isn't it? It's not as if fundraising funds were being used for extravagant dinners or vacations for the candidates' families. (At least, I don't think they were.) The campaign clearly felt it was important, image-wise, to show Palin in really top-notch, classy threads.

Buckland County, Ohio: Oh, puh-leeze. Sarah Palin didn't divide us—the cultural elitists on the left went after her the second Palin was nominated because she came from a small town with small town values. The news media coverage of her—and Joe the Plumber as well—has been completely over-the-top, and borderline predatory. Where's the extended, wall-to-wall, coverage on every single gaffe Joe Biden has made?

Melinda Henneberger: This whole small-town-versus-big-city idea annoys me, as someone who grew up in a town the size of Wasilla. Because I just don't see the big diff between people there and in cities—where lots of people from small towns move to find work. Are our values really so different? Did the NY firefighters who ran into the Twin Towers to save people suffer from a lack of "small town values"?

Palin didn't buy the clothes: Do you think there's a possibility that she simply had no idea how much they cost?

Melinda Henneberger: Good point. She has too much to do demand to see the bill—though that would've shown what a reforming maverick with executive experience could really accomplish, by taking on personal shoppers within her own campaign!

Washington: So how *would* you describe Sarah Palin's look? I find it very distinctive, and I think it works for her (not what I would go for personally, though). However, I can't quite sum it up. It is sort of executive-looking (slightly masculine), but the three-quarter-length sleeves also seem feminine, and all the lines are clean. How stylish of a look is it compared with East Coast fashions?

Nina Rastogi: Oh, I think she's incredibly stylish. (Or, I should say, she's stylish **now**—there were some outfits she wore in Wasilla that were real doozies.) The clean lines and bright colors suggest confidence, power. And she emphasizes her waist really nicely, making it very feminine and—dare I say it?—sexy at the same time.

For the record: My feet are killing me just *looking* at all the picture of those high high heels she wears. And I have a desk job, I'm not working rope lines or standing at podiums or trotting up plane steps!

Melinda Henneberger: Yes, if most of us had those shoes on, no one would notice because they'd be watching us grimacing in pain. But she is tough!

Alexandria, Va.: Could she really have been told to leave all her personal clothing behind before hitting the campaign trail? Do we think underwear was included in the \$150,000? After all, she needed to look (and feel) her best, and even in lingerie, quality makes a difference. Maybe \$500 or so went toward some great bras or cute undies.

Nina Rastogi: I think contemplating Sarah Palin's undies is a job for a very different forum! (But I did wonder whether I should add hosiery to my imaginary Saks shopping bag ...)

Philadelphia: I was really surprised when I heard \$150,000 was being spent for Palin's wardrobe. Some of the outfits I have seen her in recently are god-awful ugly. For example, the offwhite blazer and black skirt she wore for her speech during the convention and the red leather jacket she wore a couple days ago. Did she pick them out herself or did the RNC hire a stylist as well?

Melinda Henneberger: I'm sure that as Escada-gate continues, we will learn more about who chose the clothes. But with the exception of that red leather jacket, I would argue that they did get their money's worth.

Nina Rastogi: Thanks for participating, everyone—good to chat with you!

Melinda Henneberger: Thanks for joining the conversation.

the dismal science Will There Be Blood?

Will falling oil prices cause civil wars?

By Ray Fisman
Monday, October 20, 2008, at 2:30 PM ET

With the global banking system teetering on the edge of collapse and the Dow Jones Industrial Average experiencing a series of stomach-churning gyrations, it's easy to get nostalgic for the good old days when our biggest worry was \$120-a-barrel oil. Given the single-minded focus in recent days on the financial crisis and its myriad causes, it may have escaped your notice that the price of oil has quietly [made its way](#) back down to \$70 per barrel. Other commodities have seen similar declines, with wheat and corn prices off by 40 percent from their recent highs. This should provide some relief to recession-battered American consumers. But what does it mean for the countries where those commodities come from?

In a [recent paper](#), economists [Oeindrila Dube](#) and [Juan Vargas](#) use data on Colombia's decades-old civil war to show that the stakes may be much higher for resource-dependent economies, where the ups and downs of commodity markets can literally mean the difference between war and peace.

How are commodities prices connected to civil strife? Poor farmers impoverished by lower crop prices may be eager recruits for rebel groups who can promise a better livelihood from stolen loot than what the soil can provide (not to mention protection from pillaging, since unaligned farmers may be easy prey for either rebels or government troops). A cheaper cup of joe may thus translate into conflict in the coffee-growing world. (It has, in fact, [been suggested](#) that the mass murder in 1994 of perhaps 1 million Tutsis in Rwanda was triggered by the 50 percent fall in the price of Arabica beans, the economic lifeblood of Rwanda's poor farmers.)

Then again, lower prices may also mean *less* conflict. One of the great ironies of modern economic history is that natural resources can be less an economic blessing than a curse (the so-called [natural resource curse](#)). One reason for this apparent paradox is that resource-abundant countries suffer through frequent civil conflicts as competing factions struggle for control over oil wells, diamond mines, and other sources of natural wealth (and use the resulting revenues to fuel further conflict). If resource prices fall, then there's less wealth to bicker over, less reason to fight, and less cash on hand to purchase further armaments.

Given these two opposing forces, when should we expect price drops to trigger more violence, and when should we expect less? Dube and Vargas argue that the critical difference is the "labor intensity" of extracting a resource—that is, the value of workers relative to the cost of buildings and machines. For example, a farmer tending his land may need little more than a strong back and a shovel, but an oil rig may cost billions and a pipeline

billions more. Subsistence farming is labor-intensive; oil drilling is capital-intensive.

When farm prices (or those of other labor-intensive resources) go up, the benefits are widespread, and many laborers see their incomes increase accordingly. But higher oil prices bring gains only to the privileged few who own the wells (and perhaps also their relatively small workforce), leading to even greater conflict over who controls the increasingly valuable oil.

The war-torn nation of Colombia serves as an ideal testing ground for the researchers' theories of civil conflict. The country is "blessed" with extensive deposits of oil, gold, and other capital-intensive resources, as well as some of the world's richest soil for growing labor-intensive agricultural goods like coffee. It is also cursed with a seemingly interminable and bloody [civil war](#). The roller-coaster ride of recent coffee and oil prices offers the economists an opportunity to figure out whether higher prices translate into less violence in the country's coffee regions and more violence in oil regions.

Using newspaper reports of violent skirmishes in 950 Colombian municipalities between 1988 and 2005, Dube and Vargas find that when coffee prices went up, violence went down in locations where a large fraction of land area was under coffee cultivation. When coffee prices fell, however, as they did by almost 70 percent in the late 1990s, violence in coffee areas rose dramatically. The researchers estimate that an additional 500 deaths may have resulted from the increased conflict that came from lower coffee prices. The opposite was true for oil: It was *higher* prices that intensified conflict in areas with productive oil wells or pipelines. (Since both coffee and oil prices are traded in global markets, it is unlikely that price increases were caused by panicking commodities traders spooked by increased civil-war violence in Colombia.)

To reduce violence in Colombia and other commodities-rich countries, care has to be taken to recognize how fluctuating prices actually affect the situation on the ground. If lower coffee prices drive poor farmers to desperation, we need to do something to cushion the blow to their incomes. One [recent suggestion](#) from University of California, Berkeley, economist [Edward Miguel](#) and myself is to shift some amount of international development assistance away from long-term investment and toward short-term emergency aid for countries hard-hit by a collapse in prices of labor-intensive commodities. (Countries would similarly get aid if pummeled by weather shocks like drought.) This aid would kick in as soon as prices headed south, before famine or war broke out. So we'd channel aid to Colombia's farmers when coffee prices fell (or if the Colombian rain gods failed to nurture their crops). These emergency funds would be scaled back when prices stabilized—as they did in 2001—or the rains returned.

A very different logic applies to the prices of capital-intensive commodities like gold, diamonds, and oil. Some pointers on what to do may come from countries like Finland (forestry and minerals) and Botswana (diamonds) that have managed their resources for the good of all citizens. Each has strong political institutions that give voice to the people and ensure that would-be political rogues and warlords never get rich through divide-and-conquer tactics. One must be somewhat circumspect in drawing generalizations from Botswana (a postage-stamp-sized African nation) or from the Finns (or from any other Scandinavians, who are simply too nice to be trusted). But it does suggest that "[institution building](#)"—the development buzzword of the moment—to nurture democracy and financial accountability is a crucial foundation for any nation cursed with too many diamonds or too much oil.

America's botched attempts at building exactly these institutions in the oil-rich nation of Iraq highlights the challenges of a heavy-handed approach to democratic reform. But when the global aid community tried a more hands-off approach in ensuring that the proceeds of an oil pipeline in Chad would benefit the country's people, policymakers learned how easy it is for corrupt dictators, already enriched by oil revenues, to [thumb their noses](#) at would-be institution builders.

A lot of smart people have spent a lot of time thinking about [how to escape the resource curse](#), though their ideas usually require the participation of mining or drilling companies or the well-meaning collaboration of countries' leaders. As long as there are [companies that pursue profits at any cost](#) and political leadership remains in the hands of [venal dictators](#), people in the developing world may continue to lament their unfortunate abundance of natural resources. However, if Dube and Vargas are right, they can be thankful that perhaps falling prices will mean less violence, at least for now.

the green lantern

Is Fair Trade Green?

Making sense of sanctimonious product labels.

By Jacob Leibenluft

Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at 7:04 AM ET

Here's one that's been bothering me for a while: Are fair-trade products really more environmentally friendly? People are always equating the two concepts, but they don't seem related to me. How can I be confident that a fair-trade item is also green?

The rise of the "ethical" consumer hasn't just created a market for greener products—it's also created a market for new labels meant to show that those products have been vetted on your

behalf. But for the average shopper, the labels can get confusing pretty fast. It's tempting to assume that any chocolate bar with a sticker including words like *earth* or *fair* must be good for the environment and good for workers and probably helps grandmothers cross the street, too.

That's just not the case. But to answer your question, let's focus on items that are officially "fair-trade certified." (That means we're ignoring labels like [bird-friendly](#), [Rainforest Alliance-approved](#), [UTZ certified](#), or [Direct Trade](#)—alas.) Traditionally, the fair-trade designation has been associated more closely with labor standards than the environment, suggesting that workers in far-off places are enjoying better wages and conditions than they would for producing products under conventional labels. But any product that's certified as fair trade must also meet a set of [environmental standards](#) determined by a group called [Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International](#).

In some respects, these restrictions are very straightforward—for example, the certification process specifically bans [this list of pesticides](#) (PDF). The standards are more general in other respects, telling producers to leave buffer zones around conservation areas, minimize water use for irrigation, and ensure that organic waste is "disposed of in a sustainable manner." Fair-trade advocates argue that the eco-benefits extend beyond these simple rules: By helping to promote smaller producers, the label helps those who are most likely to use sustainable, traditional growing methods that are better for the environment.

Keep in mind that fair trade does not equal organic: The international labeling group encourages, but does not require, producers to "work towards organic practices where socially and economically practical." According to Transfair USA—the group that implements these standards in the United States—more than 60 percent of fair-trade coffee is also organic. There is also substantial overlap between fair-trade coffee and "bird friendly," shade-grown varieties—but one doesn't imply the other. Still, if you assume the certifiers are doing their job, fair trade appears likely to be greener than the conventional stuff you'd find in a supermarket.

Still, critics have raised some big concerns. The first, pointed out by regular *Slate* contributor Tim Harford, is that the promise of higher wages through fair-trade arrangements may provide farmers with an [incentive to overproduce](#) (subscription required). (More broadly, Harford has argued that fair-trade farmers may not receive much benefit from that higher price you pay—a claim you can read more about [here](#) and [here](#).) Not only would overproduction keep the rest of the world's farmers poor, but it would result in more and more of the world's land being cleared for farming. But these concerns may be overstated: Fair-trade certification generally bans the use of virgin forest land, and there is little evidence that its small-scale adoption has caused any overproduction. Washington State University professor Daniel Jaffee actually found that the certification had a

positive impact on land use among [one group of Mexican coffee growers](#)—while also encouraging better practices surrounding water protection and soil erosion.

A second worry is that fair-trade products, by definition, are produced outside the country, so they need to travel a fair distance to get to your home. If the items are shipped by sea, the impact may not be so bad—as the Lantern has [pointed out before](#), the emissions impact of long ocean hauls may be less than trucking a product within the United States. (Besides, if you crave a product like chocolate or coffee, domestic farms aren't going to do you much good, anyway.) A few types of perishable fruits and vegetables are more likely to be shipped by air, which raises more serious concerns. In Britain, the result has been a [touchy debate](#) over whether it's better to increase trade with Africa or to reduce emissions from the air freighting of otherwise environmentally sound produce.

Here's the bottom line: If you care about both global poverty and climate change, you can't always have it both ways. The Lantern suggests you keep things in perspective: Boycotting bananas from the Dominican Republic may reduce your carbon footprint a tad, but you'll make a bigger dent by putting that hamburger meat back on the shelf once in a while—and you won't be cutting a poor grower out of the global economy.

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 has-been Well North of 50

Senate Democrats don't need 60 seats to reach their magic number.

By Bruce Reed

Monday, October 20, 2008, at 5:51 PM ET

A fortnight away from the electoral abyss, conservatives are down to their last flare: warning what Democrats might do if there aren't enough Republicans left in Washington to stop them. Friday's lead editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*, "[A Liberal Supermajority](#)," predicted "a period of unchecked left-wing ascendancy" not seen since 1933 or 1965. Conservative columnist Mona Charen recently suggested that with a 60-seat, filibuster-proof Senate, [Democrats would destroy talk radio, bring on an economic depression, and usher in a "crypto-socialist" era](#).

For the next two weeks, panicky conservatives no doubt will invoke the number 60 with a dread once reserved for 666. Perhaps looking for a backup plan to keep us up late on election night, the press has chimed in as well, dubbing 60 the "magic number."

While Democrats have scores of reasons to smile these days, conservative Cassandras can calm down. The number 60 is neither magical nor menacing. Senate Democrats will be able to accomplish a great deal whether or not they win a filibuster-proof majority—and the toughest votes will still be tough even if Democrats win this election by a country mile.

Although not a magic number, 60 is certainly a novel one. Neither party has crossed the 60-seat threshold since the four years after Watergate, when the Senate was a vastly different place. Even in a banner year, Democrats would have to run the table to reach that mark this time around. *Congressional Quarterly's* [latest tip sheet](#) projects a Democratic gain of five seats with another four tossup races and three Republicans leading but not out of the woods.

The real reason Senate Democrats are looking forward to this election isn't the remote shot at a supermajority. It's that however the tossups break, Democrats should wake up Nov. 5 with what really matters—a governing majority. When this tumultuous decade began, the Senate was split 50-50. Democrats gained control in 2001 and 2006 but both times by the barest of margins supplied by independents. From the standpoint of governing, the measure of this year's progress is not so much how close Senate Democrats get to 60 as how far they can get from 50.

In the unlikely event that Democrats reached 60, what would it mean? To be sure, a cloture-sized majority would make a difference on some party-line questions that tend to get bogged down for partisan rather than ideological reasons—for example, voting rights for D.C. Prolonged confirmation battles, already infrequent, would become even more so.

But reaching 60 seats won't suspend the laws of political gravity for Senate Democrats, nor will

keeping Democrats in the 50s do much to ease Senate Republicans' pain. Here's why:

*** On tough votes, the real magic number is 50.** To get around the 60-vote hurdle, the Senate long ago established the [budget reconciliation process](#), a fast-track procedure that cannot be filibustered and requires a simple majority. Not every matter is [germane](#) under reconciliation, but the questions with the greatest fiscal consequence are.

On the most contentious economic debates of the past two decades, the pass-fail line has been 50, not 60. In 1993, Vice President Al Gore cast the deciding vote to squeak Bill Clinton's pivotal economic package through the Senate, [51-50](#). Senate Republicans used reconciliation to pass the Bush tax cuts.

For an Obama administration, the real benefit of getting to 60 is that on tough economic votes, it would be that much easier to get to 50. Even with 57 Senate Democrats in 1993, it took all of Clinton's powers of persuasion and a last-minute plea to then-Sen. Bob Kerrey to pass his economic plan by a single vote.

*** Democrats don't need to win 60 seats to reach 60 votes.** For all the deep partisan divisions in Washington, most issues that come before the Senate don't produce straight party-line votes. This year, half a dozen Republicans joined Democrats to come within three votes of breaking a filibuster of [the Lily Ledbetter equal-pay bill](#). The seats Democrats already appear set to pick up should ensure that bill reaches the next president's desk.

Indeed, Republicans' biggest worry may not be how many seats Democrats win this year but how hard it will be to keep their own troops in line next year. A banner Democratic year will spell more GOP defections ahead. In 2010, Republicans will have to [defend 19 Senate seats](#), the Democrats just 15. Vulnerable incumbents who watched their colleagues fall in 2008 may start showing a maverick streak. If you can't beat a supermajority, join one.

On some ideas with broad public support, such as the expansion of children's health insurance, many Senate Republicans already [folded their hand](#). The

better Democrats do this year, the harder it will be for conservatives to revive the over-my-dead-body caucus that Phil Gramm formed to block Clinton's stimulus and health care plans in the early '90s.

*** Bush is leaving Democrats a big tent—and an even bigger mortgage.** For Congress and the new administration, the economic crisis—not the size of the majority—will be both the biggest constraint and the greatest action-forcing mechanism. A host of economic numbers will affect Democrats' fortunes more than whether their Senate caucus is over or under 60: how much unemployment goes up, how soon the housing and stock markets settle down, how sharply out-year revenue and deficit forecasts turn south. Republicans need not worry that Democrats will have a blank check; the Bush administration left behind an empty checkbook.

*** Misery loves company.** If Republicans are afraid of languishing on the sidelines, they can take heart: Democrats won't let them. Democrats will have good reasons, both practical and political, to reach across the aisle. As both parties have learned in the past month, digging out from under this economic crisis will require more pain than either party alone can bear. With a great deal of arm twisting, congressional Democrats might have been able to pass last month's rescue package without Republican votes. But on a matter of such consequence, they were right to insist on bipartisan buy-in.

In the next few years, there are bound to be more tough votes like that one. Democrats won't want to go it alone, even if they have the numbers to do so. With so much at stake, Americans will have zero tolerance for political games. Daniel Patrick Moynihan's warning to both parties still rings true: In the long run, the sweeping changes the country needs can succeed only with broad bipartisan support.

Red- and purple-state Democrats will be especially eager to keep Obama's promise of working across party lines to get the job done. It won't be lost on the new Democratic majority that in the last three decades, control of the Senate has changed hands more often (1980, '86, '94, 2001, '02, and '06) than control of the White House. Not so long ago, Democrats were the ones fretting about the GOP

winning a filibuster-proof Senate. Come November, Democratic senators will be delighted to have all the extra company, but even with 60 seats, they'll still be eager to hold onto their own.

the undercover economist

The Theory and Practice of Blackmail

Why it's so hard to get away with it.

By Tim Harford

Saturday, October 18, 2008, at 6:15 AM ET

In March 1959, a promising young Harvard economist delivered a lecture in Boston on "[The Theory and Practice of Blackmail](#)," drawing on the then-young branch of economics and mathematics called "game theory." Strictly speaking, his subject wasn't just blackmail—the threat to reveal damaging information in order to get what you want—but the broader practice of extortion or coercion.

The lecturer emphasized a central problem in coercion, which is to make the victim believe that if the coercion is unsuccessful, the threat will be carried out nevertheless. That is not straightforward, but it is possible. For instance, in December 1958, a "little old lady" walked into a bank, placed a glass of colorless liquid on the counter, and passed a note to the teller. "I have acid in a glass, and if you don't give me what I want I'll splash it on you," said the note. It continued, "I have two men in here. I'll throw the acid in your face and somebody will get shot. Hurry. Put all the fives, tens and twenties in this bag."

What would you have done in the teller's shoes? A quick-thinking teller might well have thought that it was safe to refuse, because the lady's best option would then be to pick up the glass and walk out in search of another bank. She would have nothing to gain from hurling the acid except a longer prison sentence.

Yet the teller handed over a bagful of money. It was, after all, not his. Other bank robbers of the day enjoyed similar success. One convinced a teller that a comb in his waistband was a gun. Another walked away with \$5,000, quite a sum in 1958, after brandishing what looked like a grenade; surely he cannot have intended to blow himself up. A third robber managed two holdups armed only with a polite note. The little old lady herself was arrested on a second heist and found to be equipped with a glass of tap water.

One lesson is that bank tellers have little to lose by complying, which is why banks started introducing locks, alarms, cameras, and other systems that could not be overridden by staff. Another lesson is that small doubts over the rationality of the coercer can

go a long way in enforcing a threat. After all, if Grandma walks into the bank and starts trying to extort money, she's already demonstrated herself to be a little out of the ordinary.

Blackmail proper is a more difficult threat to make credible. [Judge Richard Posner](#), a pioneer on the frontier between law and economics, has pointed out the basic difficulty: Unless the blackmail victim is himself a criminal, he has the powerful counterthreat of a complaint to the police. If the victim's secret is revealed, he has nothing to lose by then reporting the crime. If the victim goes to the police immediately, the blackmailer cannot reveal the secret without risking a longer sentence. Small wonder that blackmail seems to be a rare crime.

An epilogue: The economist who gave his 1959 lecture on blackmail later ended up with more practical experience of it than anybody would want. His name is Daniel Ellsberg. After his early contributions to economics, he became far more famous as the military analyst who risked a life sentence for espionage after leaking the Pentagon Papers to the press in 1971 in the hope of obstructing the Vietnam War. It was a memorable instance of blackmail's heroic twin, whistle-blowing.

The Watergate burglars then broke into the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist, perhaps with the hope of obtaining blackmail material. That burglary was one reason that the trial of Ellsberg collapsed. Blackmail is a difficult business—but even back in 1959, Ellsberg had known that very well.

today's business press

The Greenspan Effect: Oops

By Bernhard Warner and Matthew Yeomans

Friday, October 24, 2008, at 7:01 AM ET

today's papers

Arrested Development

By Daniel Politi

Friday, October 24, 2008, at 6:23 AM ET

The [New York Times](#) leads with word that Western officials are discussing ways in which they can help developing countries that are increasingly being affected by the financial crisis. The International Monetary Fund is the key player in all of this—it is currently working on setting up a "[huge credit line](#)" for emerging economies that are in desperate need of foreign capital and is negotiating with several countries to provide emergency loans to these troubled economies. The [Washington Post](#) leads with the lashing that [Congress](#) delivered to Alan Greenspan, the man who was once referred to as "the Oracle" of the economy. Angry

lawmakers trampled over themselves to blame the former Federal Reserve chairman for the [current crisis](#) and criticize decisions Greenspan made during his 18-year tenure.

The [Los Angeles Times](#) leads with a look at how many are praising Countrywide's mortgage-modification program that is being implemented and could eventually [save borrowers as much as \\$8.4 billion](#). At a time when the government is under increased pressure to do more to help distressed homeowners, some key officials and consumer advocates are pointing to Countrywide's effort as an example that other mortgage-servicing companies should emulate. The [Wall Street Journal](#) leads its worldwide newsbox with Barack Obama's stepped-up efforts to help [down-ticket Democrats](#) with staff, funds, and appearances as his lead in the polls continues to hold. [USA Today](#) leads with FBI statistics that show more than one-third of police officers killed last year were [not wearing body armor](#). While most police officers have access to bullet-resistant vests, some estimate that up to 50 percent choose not to wear them, mostly because they're not exactly comfortable.

Many developing countries that had been experiencing huge economic growth are suddenly living through a reversal of fortune as they find themselves [engulfed by a crisis](#) that started far from their borders. The [WSJ](#) says that the financial crisis has [managed to undo](#) "years of hard-won gains by emerging economies" in a matter of weeks. Banks in the developing world largely stayed away from the mortgage-backed securities that have been responsible for much of the trouble faced by their American and European counterparts. Rather, emerging economies are being hit particularly hard by the credit crunch as foreign capital has become harder to obtain, which has sent investors scrambling to reach safer waters amid growing fears that governments will have no choice but to default on their loans, which have suddenly become much more expensive.

The [WSJ](#) puts it in stark terms, noting that, over the past month, developing countries have seen [borrowing costs increase](#) "to levels that haven't been seen in six years," and there's no sign of relief in sight. The [NYT](#) points out that these troubles [could represent](#) "a volatile, dangerous new phase in the crisis." The chief economist of the Institute for International Finance does the best job of explaining why Western nations can't just sit back and watch these once-promising economies crumble: "Right now, it's a liquidity problem, but if it goes on long enough, it can become a solvency problem." The IMF currently has \$250 billion at its disposal to make loans, but it's trying to shore up its piggy bank by soliciting pledges from central banks. The [WP](#) hears something different and says only the IMF would be involved because asking other countries to participate ["might prove difficult"](#). No one knows how much money would ultimately be made available, but the [WP](#) says the IMF's board will vote on the plan next week.

Meanwhile, congressional leaders continue on their determined path to look backward and assign blame. Yesterday, it was [Greenspan's turn](#). And the man who once could do no wrong found himself on the receiving end of some scathing criticism. Greenspan expressed befuddlement, saying that he was in a state of "shocked disbelief" about the financial crisis, which "has turned out to be much broader than anything I could have imagined." The "Maestro" defended his tenure but also admitted some mistakes, particularly in his long-held belief that the free market would automatically self-correct to avoid a crisis of this magnitude. It was a dramatic scene that illustrated the view held by many economists that some of Greenspan's successes "were in fact illusory," [as the WP puts it](#), and helped create the credit bubble that led to the current crisis.

Obama's efforts to help Democrats running for Congress marks a shift in strategy for a candidate who has been reluctant to [divert attention from the presidential race](#) and who has worried that appearing with other candidates would hurt his image as an outsider. Some Democrats have been expressing frustration at Obama's resistance to help out other candidates. But now that he continues to lead in the polls, Obama seems more willing to lend a helping hand. But his campaign isn't rushing to highlight these efforts out of a concern that it could make Obama look overconfident.

Still, you can't blame Obama if he's feeling a bit confident these days. The [WP](#) and [NYT](#) both front looks at how it seems increasingly unlikely that John McCain will be able to carve out [a path to victory](#). McCain's advisers admit it won't be easy, but they insist the Republican candidate still has a chance. But while polls show Obama has many ways to reach the crucial 270 electoral votes needed to win, McCain basically has to win back all the Republican states that are now sliding toward Obama in order to [remain competitive](#). The [NYT](#) says McCain and Obama aides agree McCain "remains very much in the game in Ohio and Florida," but he still faces an uphill battle.

In the final days of the campaign, McCain will primarily focus on taxes and spending as well as national security issues. In particular, McCain will keep highlighting Obama's comment to Joe the Plumber that he wants to "spread the wealth" as well as Joe Biden's comment that his running mate would be tested with an international crisis [early in his presidency](#). The Republican will also emphasize the Democratic plans for the new Congress to point to "the perils of an Obama presidency with no checks and balances," as one McCain adviser [tells the Post](#).

The [WSJ](#) points out that McCain will be releasing a new attack today that will claim Obama's tax plan will hurt families with [special-needs children](#), particularly those that set up trusts to pay for expenses that come with a disability. It's not that families with special-needs children are such an important constituency, but McCain's campaign wants to show the "bizarre, unintended consequences" of Obama's tax plan, a McCain adviser said.

Obama's campaign calls this new attack line a "blatant lie" and says that the Democratic candidate has often emphasized he would work with the Treasury Department to make sure that tax rates aren't inadvertently increased on families making less than \$250,000.

The *LAT* fronts a look at how Sarah Palin wasn't shy about appointing donors and friends to state jobs when she became the [governor of Alaska](#). The paper examined state records that show how, in many instances, Palin's "approach to government was business as usual" despite her claims of being an outsider keen on reform. Some of Palin's appointments created controversy because the donors and friends she plucked for the state jobs were particularly unqualified. Palin helped out donors not just with jobs but also with money as several went on to receive state-subsidized loans.

In an almost unbelievable—and certainly offensive—op-ed piece in the *WP*, [Kathleen Parker](#) suggests McCain picked Palin because his judgment was impaired when faced with such a hot woman. To be fair, Parker doesn't quite say it like that, and she takes pains to emphasize she's not "suggesting anything untoward between McCain and his running mate." But she cites a study that found "pretty women foil men's ability to assess the future" and wonders whether McCain will "join the pantheon of men who, intoxicated by a woman's power, made the wrong call." TP can't decide whether McCain or Palin should be more offended, though the *WP* should certainly feel embarrassed for publishing such sexist musings.

The *NYT*'s editorial board [endorses Obama](#) today, saying that the senator from Illinois "has proved that he is the right choice." For those keeping track at home, that almost certainly rounds up endorsement season for the five papers that make up TP, as the *NYT*, *WP*, and *LAT* have all endorsed the Democratic nominee. *USAT* and the *WSJ* have a history of not endorsing candidates, though there was some talk a few months ago that the *WSJ* [might switch tracks this year](#) and endorse its first candidate since Herbert Hoover.

today's papers

Homeward Bound

By Daniel Politi

Thursday, October 23, 2008, at 6:35 AM ET

The *Washington Post* leads with a look at how the job market in the United States appears to be [steadily deteriorating](#) as employers rush to cut costs to deal with what many predict will be a long recession. Mass layoffs and new claims for unemployment benefits have been reaching levels not seen since 2001, and there are strong hints that things will get worse as

more companies cut jobs and impose hiring freezes. This, in turn, is emerging as a key reason why investors are fearful that a deep recession is almost inevitable. The *Wall Street Journal* banners these fears, which, once again, decreased the value of stocks and currencies around the world yesterday as the dollar [continued to gain ground](#).

USA Today analyzed government data and reveals that the [same mistake](#) that likely led to the plane crash in Madrid last summer has been committed by pilots in the United States 55 times since 2000. It is widely believed that the pilots' failure to properly set the wings for takeoff was the reason behind the Spanair crash that killed 154 people. In the United States, a warning system saved the day in most cases, but several times the mistakes were "nearly catastrophic," says *USAT*. The *Los Angeles Times* leads with a new poll that says [a majority of California voters](#) oppose a measure to ban marriage for same-sex couples. The *New York Times* leads with a comparison of how each of the presidential candidates would use [American power abroad](#) if elected. A close look at their proposals often finds contradictions "that do not fit the neat hawk-and-dove images promoted by each campaign." For example, Barack Obama has expressed much more willingness to threaten the use of U.S. ground troops in Pakistan than John McCain. Still, it's important to remember that campaigns "are usually terrible predictors of presidential decision-making."

Many say the overall decline in hiring isn't necessarily due to the credit crunch, but rather as a result of a cautionary approach by executives who don't know how the financial crisis will [affect their customers](#), so they're trying to play it safe. While the official unemployment rate of 6.1 percent is "not astronomical by historical standards," it is accelerating. *Slate*'s [Daniel Gross](#) looked at a variety of indicators that suggest "the job situation is worse than it has been at any time since 1994."

Fear is still the name of the game, and it was on full display on Wall Street yesterday as the Dow Jones industrial average plunged 5.7 percent and suffered the [seventh-biggest point drop in history](#). The Dow has dropped 746 points in the past two days, "reversing a burst of optimism early in the week tied to a modest loosening in the credit markets," notes the *WSJ*. For its part, the broad Standard & Poor's 500-stock index plunged 6.1 percent, "a decline that in any other financial environment would be considered extraordinary," [notes the NYT](#). Indeed, as a measure of how recent turmoil has upped the ante in what is considered big news, the *WSJ* is alone in devoting a stand-alone front-page story to yesterday's stock-market plunge, though *USAT* does have an above-the-fold graphic that pretty much says everything you need to know: "Stocks plummet on profit worries."

"The market continues to ignore anything that even looks like good news," a floor trader said. "It's basically 1973 or 1974 all over again." Stocks in emerging markets were particularly hard-hit yesterday and the [WSJ points out](#) that they've now "lost more

than half their value in dollar terms since they peaked in May." Oil continued plunging yesterday and closed at \$66.75, which marks a 54 percent drop since July.

Asian stocks fell today, with South Korea's market plunging [more than 7 percent](#). European stocks were also on a downward trend this morning, but the outlook for U.S. markets doesn't look as grim, largely due to a scoop reported on Page One of the *WSJ*.

The *WSJ* gets word that the Bush administration is considering "a roughly \$40 billion proposal" to [aid homeowners at risk of foreclosure](#). The chairwoman of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., Sheila Bair, is expected to present an idea to lawmakers today that would give banks a financial incentive to make some mortgages more affordable by having the government share in any future losses on the new loans. The Treasury Department is considering this plan but also discussing how to use part of the \$700 billion bailout package "to directly buy and renegotiate mortgages."

Treasury officials are also scheduled to brief lawmakers behind closed doors today to discuss a variety of options and "it's not yet clear which will prevail," declares the *WSJ*. The moves come amid growing pressure to help troubled homeowners, but any plan to directly deal with mortgages is bound to be filled with complications and could be controversial if the government is seen as helping lenders and borrowers who made bad decisions. Early morning wire reports reveal that the number of homeowners who received [at least one foreclosure-related notice](#) grew by more than 70 percent in the third quarter of this year compared with the same period in 2007.

The new poll highlighted by the *LAT* found that 52 percent oppose the measure to [ban marriage for same-sex couples](#) while 44 percent are in favor. This is a marked difference from other recent polls that have predicted the measure will pass. Regardless, it's clear that Californians are divided on the issue, and it's difficult to predict how the expected surge of new voters will affect the outcome. The debate over the measure, known as Proposition 8, has turned into an expensive campaign as those who favor the ban have raised \$26.7 million, while those opposed have brought in \$26.1 million.

The *WP* fronts news that the Pakistani government is taking a page out of the Iraq conflict and has decided to [arm tens of thousands of militias](#) in its western tribal regions to fight against the Taliban. The government will give the militias, called lashkars, Chinese assault rifles and other small arms in what Bush administration officials see as yet another encouraging sign that the Pakistani government is willing to fight more aggressively against extremist groups along the Afghan border. Still, U.S. officials warn that the Pakistani government is still not doing enough to win the hearts and minds of the tribes in the troubled regions. "The secret to success in this kind of operation is tea," one official said.

The *NYT* fronts, and everyone mentions, the latest kerfuffle from the campaign trail that had to do with the revelation that the Republican National Committee spent around \$150,000 on clothing for Sarah Palin and her family [since September](#). Campaign operatives tried to minimize the commotion and said the clothes from such high-end retailers as Neiman Marcus and Saks Fifth Avenue would be [donated in November](#). But even some Republicans spoke up and expressed shock that aides would be so careless as to not think through how this would look to voters living through an economic downturn, particularly when the campaign has worked so hard to portray Palin as a working mom who understands the problems of middle-class Americans. Some think this could go a long way toward destroying Palin's carefully constructed image, much like John Edwards suffered after the whole mini controversy regarding his \$400 haircuts.

As much of an easy and fun story as it is to cover, what's \$150,000 anyway? Yes, as the *LAT* points out, it's about [75 times](#) more than what the average American spends on clothing a year. But, it's clearly loose change when you consider how much is being spent on political campaigns this year. *USAT* fronts a new report that reveals the total cost of campaigns to send newly elected politicians to Washington is on track to [reach \\$5.3 billion](#). That figure, which includes expenditures by the candidates, parties, and outside groups, would represent a \$1 billion increase from 2004. And if that's an eye-popping figure, consider that it's still less than the estimate of how much Americans will spend on Halloween this year, a whopping \$6 billion.

Clearly, it's not just about the money, but about what the clothes represent. The *WP*'s resident fashion expert [Robin Givhan](#), who calls the expenditures "some seriously bad judgment," says that the wardrobe choices made for Palin are "evidence of a tin ear for the symbolism of popular culture." People define themselves through their fashion choices, which is why a "smart retailer stands for something," writes Givhan. "And in our culture Neiman Marcus stands for 'elite,' not for 'Everyman.'"

today's papers Small Claims

By Daniel Politi

Wednesday, October 22, 2008, at 6:14 AM ET

The *Washington Post* leads with an in-house investigation that reveals U.S. government agencies frequently misclassify a contractor [as a small business](#). The *Post* examined a sample of government contracts that supposedly went to small businesses and found "at least \$5 billion in mistakes" as global behemoths like Lockheed Martin and Dell were sometimes classified as

"small." The [New York Times](#) leads with a look at how Americans are [cutting back on prescription drugs](#). While no one can say for certain, and there are several factors that could contribute to this downturn, experts attribute much of the decline to cost-conscious consumers who are having a hard time making ends meet.

[USA Today](#) leads with news that more Democrats are [voting early](#) in several key states, which marks a change from previous elections. "This is like a mirror image of what we've seen in the past," one expert tells the paper. The [Wall Street Journal](#) leads its world-wide newsbox with a new poll that gives Barack Obama a 10-point lead [over John McCain](#). Despite McCain's efforts to make taxes a central part of the campaign, Obama has a 14-point lead on the issue. Meanwhile, Sarah Palin's popularity continues its downward spiral. Only 38 percent of voters have a positive view of the Alaska governor, and 55 percent say she isn't qualified to be president. The [Los Angeles Times](#) leads with the arrest of dozens of members of the [Mongols biker gang](#) in six states. The move came after a three-year investigation in which the California-based group was infiltrated by undercover agents. In what was described as an unprecedented move, prosecutors will attempt to take control of the Mongols' name, which would forbid members from wearing it. "We're going after their very identity," U.S. Attorney Thomas O'Brien said.

Under a congressional mandate, the government should strive to award 23 percent of all [contracts to small businesses](#). But government officials readily admit that mistakes in classification are all too frequent, leading to what are certainly exaggerated claims of how much taxpayer money actually goes to supporting small firms. Many of the problems arise when a large company acquires a small business or when a company that was once small outgrows the classification and government officials fail to update, or even check, their databases. The Small Business Administration said many of the mistakes have been caught in a report it plans to release today that will reveal small businesses got \$83.2 billion from government contracts last year, which represents "about a \$6 billion drop" from what federal agencies reported.

The number of prescriptions filled in the first eight months of the year was lower than the same period last year. Although the decline was minimal, it came after more than 10 years of [steady growth](#). Some are quick to say that the downward trend might not be such a bad thing in a country where doctors are often accused of overprescribing. But, of course, there are worries that many are choosing to forgo essential medications that could be preventing major medical complications, which could lead to higher health care costs. And it's also bad news for the pharmaceutical industry, which was already bracing for the so-called "generic cliff," when several popular drugs will be losing their patents in the coming years.

The [WP](#) fronts a look at how it could take more than a year for Washington to deliver money from the [\\$25 billion loan program](#) to help domestic automakers develop fuel-efficient vehicles that Congress approved last month. As the industry's woes continue to mount, executives and some lawmakers say companies can't afford to wait that long and are pushing officials to release the money as quickly as possible, a message that has been echoed by both presidential candidates.

The [NYT](#) highlights financier Kirk Kerkorian's decision to start selling his \$1 billion [stake in Ford](#) at a huge loss, which raised even more fears about the industry's future. Meanwhile, in a big sign of the anxiety that is swirling around Detroit's Big Three, investors haven't stepped up to finance the merger of Chrysler and General Motors. "Conditions in the industry are so perilous they are scaring away even the most fearless investors," a consultant said. Many now think it's inevitable that Detroit will ask for more federal financial assistance in the near future. "It's reaching a point where we'll have to decide if we're willing to let the U.S. auto industry fail," an industry expert said.

By now it can hardly be considered news to point out that while Obama's campaign is quick to attribute its unprecedented fundraising to small donors, the truth is that the Democrat owes much of his success to rich benefactors. But today the [WP](#) puts the number in context and points out that [only one-quarter](#) of the \$600 million he has raised has come from contributions of up to \$200, which is "slightly less, as a percentage, than President Bush raised in small donations during his 2004 race." Of course, Obama has more donors than Bush ever did.

In the beginning of October, Obama and the Democratic Party committees working on his campaign had a total of \$164 million, while McCain and his party had \$132 million. Obama holds most of the Democratic money, while the Republican National Committee holds the largest share of GOP cash. The [WSJ](#) points out that fact puts McCain at a clear disadvantage because broadcasters must charge their lowest rates to candidates [but not to political parties](#). That is bad news for McCain because, according to a GOP strategist, it means Republicans are paying at least 25 percent more for television ads.

The [WP's](#) editorial board says that the public campaign-financing system is "badly outdated" and in [desperate need of reform](#). When Obama decided to go back on his word and rejected public financing for his campaign—a move that "remains troubling"—he vowed to reform the system as president. "If Mr. McCain wins the presidency, he may have a motive to fix the system," declares the [WP](#). "If Mr. Obama wins, he will have an obligation."

today's papers Melting Point?

By Daniel Politi

Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at 5:57 AM ET

The [New York Times](#) leads with a look at how the credit markets gave [encouraging signs](#) yesterday as the crunch appeared to ease somewhat and money began to tentatively flow through the financial system. Wall Street cheered at the positive signs and the Dow Jones industrial average soared 4.7 percent. The [Washington Post](#) mentions the developments in the credit markets in its lead story but focuses on Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke's endorsement of plans for a [new stimulus package](#), which was also partly responsible for the increase in the stock markets. Bernanke told lawmakers that because the economy is "likely to be weak for several quarters" and there's "some risk of a protracted slowdown," a new stimulus package "seems appropriate." The [Wall Street Journal](#) leads its world-wide newsbox with Barack Obama's [rallies in Florida](#) that coincided with the beginning of early voting in that state. By the middle of this week, voters in 18 states will be able to head to the polls, and Democrats are eager to mobilize supporters as early as possible to capitalize on Obama's current lead in the polls. The Democratic candidate announced he'll be canceling campaign events Thursday and Friday to visit his gravely ill grandmother in Hawaii.

[USA Today](#) leads with an in-house survey that found the number of homeless families with children is increasing in [several large cities](#). Homelessness had largely been on the decline, but it appears to have experienced an upswing lately as foreclosures and job losses increase at a time when higher prices for food and fuel had already stretched the average family's budget. The [Los Angeles Times](#) leads locally and goes high with the [first in a three-part series](#) looking at the broken state of the health insurance system in the United States that "leaves patients responsible for bills they understood would be covered, squeezes doctors and hospitals, and tries to avoid even minuscule risks." Ever conscious of their bottom lines, insurance companies are making it more expensive and difficult for Americans to get individual coverage. And those lucky enough to have health insurance frequently find it does them no good [when they need it most](#). Even some insurance executives "agree the system is inefficient and sometimes inhumane," notes the [LAT](#).

The encouraging signs from the credit markets seem to suggest that the unprecedented global effort to tackle the financial crisis is making a difference. One critical measure of the borrowing rate between banks, known as LIBOR, dropped yesterday by the largest amount in [nine months](#), which is "an indication of growing confidence in the financial system," notes the [NYT](#). The VIX index, which measures volatility in the market, fell 25 percent from Friday, and interest rates on commercial paper "fell to a four-month low." While no one thinks we're out of the woods yet, these were all seen as signs that fear is receding and

that the credit markets are inching toward normalcy. In a [piece inside](#), the [WSJ](#) also notes these positive developments but says it could still "be weeks or months before the markets return to normal."

Meanwhile, investors weren't the only ones cheering after Bernanke expressed support for a new stimulus package. Democrats have been arguing for weeks that a new round of government spending is needed to boost the economy and were encouraged by Bernanke's words. As the [LAT](#) and [WSJ](#) point out, Bernanke's support was critical when lawmakers approved the \$168 billion stimulus package [earlier this year](#). And the same is likely to be true this time. While the Bush administration hasn't been eager to support new spending, its tune appeared to change after Bernanke spoke. The White House said the president was "open to ideas" as long as they were "[targeted, temporary, and timely](#)."

Bernanke didn't advocate specific steps but made it clear that any stimulus package should be "significant" and provide real relief in the coming months. The [WP](#) talks to economists who say that a package aimed at [low-income Americans](#) is likely to provide the quickest results since they're less likely to save any money they receive. Democrats have been pushing for a \$150 billion package, though there's word that key lawmakers are working on a \$300 billion plan they could pass [after the election](#). Among other measures, Democrats are arguing for an expansion of unemployment benefits, which appears to have some bipartisan support. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has also made it clear she wants any legislation to include new spending on infrastructure. Republicans don't like that idea and would prefer to stimulate the economy through a variety of tax breaks for [businesses and consumers](#).

While many bank executives debate whether to apply for a piece of the \$250 billion government plan to prop up financial institutions, the question remains: How will they use the money? In an almost-warning tone, the [WSJ](#) says that many banks are likely to use the taxpayer money to "[gobble up their weaker peers](#)." This move "could prove controversial" because acquisitions are likely to provide less of a boost to the economy than increased lending, which the Treasury has always said was its goal. The [WSJ](#) talks to Treasury officials who say they don't want government money to go directly to funding acquisitions. But the [NYT](#) hears something completely different from "two senior officials" who say that in deciding who gets a piece of the pie, the government will select banks who [need money to finance acquisitions](#). "One purpose of this plan is to drive consolidation," one official said. The [NYT](#) sees this as evidence that "the government wants not only to stabilize the industry, but also to reshape it."

[USAT](#) fronts a look at how the sharp rise in [narcotic pain-relief prescriptions](#) for U.S. troops is raising questions about whether doctors who treat service members are relying too much on the

powerful drugs without worrying about the potential for addiction and abuse. It's hardly surprising that pain is the No. 1 medical complaint when service members return from duty. But many say doctors are too quick to reach for their prescription pad instead of exploring other ways to manage pain.

The *WP* points out an often-overlooked aspect of the expanded veterans benefits that Congress passed this year is that it will take effect in August of next year and [won't be retroactive](#). That means many veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan who chose to go back to school will be saddled with thousands of dollars of debt by the time they graduate. Now there's even a question of whether the Department of Veterans Affairs will be able to meet the deadline to implement the program after it suddenly decided to implement the program itself rather than hire a private contractor.

The *NYT* issues a correction related to an article earlier this month that talked about the increasing [stress of business travel](#). The article cited an annual survey that supposedly revealed people are most vulnerable to stress on a business trip and in the office and that the financial crisis "was the No. 1 cause of anxiety." Turns out the survey said nothing of the sort and didn't even ask any questions that referred to Wall Street or an economic crisis. "The author of the article distorted the survey's findings to fit his theme," the *NYT* states.

In an editorial, the *NYT* criticizes Sen. Christopher Dodd for failing to keep his word to release documents that will supposedly clear his name from charges that he benefited financially from preferential treatment on two home mortgages issued by Countrywide. Dodd's "excuses are wearing ridiculously thin," [says the NYT](#). "I think it will become obvious at the time when it's the right time, and I'll explain that at the time when I do so," Dodd said last week. When asked to elaborate, he said: "My answer is what it is, and in the right time, it will be there."

today's papers

Mad Money

By Daniel Politi

Monday, October 20, 2008, at 6:20 AM ET

The *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Wall Street Journal*'s world-wide newsbox lead with twin pieces of [good news](#) for Barack Obama's campaign that could go a long way to help the Democratic candidate seal the deal with undecided voters in the final sprint to Election Day. On the same day when former Secretary of State Colin Powell became the highest-profile Republican to [endorse Obama](#), the Democrat's campaign announced that it had raised more than \$150 million [in](#)

[September](#). The staggering sum more than doubled the \$66 million Obama collected in August, which, at the time, [marked a record](#) for monthly fundraising.

USA Today fronts the Powell endorsement but leads with a look at how airlines will be offering 11 percent fewer flights this [Thanksgiving season](#) compared with last year. This means passengers during the busy season can expect higher fares, packed airplanes, and fewer choices to recover from delays and missed connections.

On NBC's *Meet the Press*, Powell [described Obama](#) as a "transformational figure" who has "given us a more inclusive, broader reach into the needs and aspirations of our people." While Powell emphasized that he respects McCain and considers him a friend, he also said that in recent weeks he got the feeling that the Republican candidate didn't really understand the economic problems facing the nation.

Powell also said the choice of Sarah Palin made him question [McCain's judgment](#) and criticized the tone of McCain's campaign, particularly the continued focus on William Ayers. "McCain says that he's a washed-out terrorist," Powell said. "Well, then, why do we keep talking about him?" Considering Powell's 35-year military career, some think that his endorsement could help convince voters who are still concerned about Obama's [lack of national-security experience](#). "What that just did in one sound bite," said former House Speaker [Newt Gingrich](#), "is it eliminated the experience argument. How are you going to say the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs, former national security adviser, former secretary of state was taken in?"

Slate contributor [Melinda Henneberger](#) wondered why Powell's endorsement should be treated as a big deal. "Who cares what Powell, the 'loyal soldier'—if by loyal you mean willing to betray the American people—thinks?" In a front-page piece, the *NYT*'s [Elisabeth Bumiller](#) says Powell's endorsement was, at least in part, an effort to address this issue and "reshape a legacy that he himself considers tainted by his service under President Bush." In fact, many Washington insiders quickly concluded the endorsement was more about Powell than either candidate, as the former secretary of state bet his chips against the president whom he used to serve. The endorsement came about after a long courtship by Obama, who has been trying to get Powell's support for several months.

While Powell's endorsement provides quite a bit of political drama, it's clear that the most important piece of news for Obama was his record-breaking fundraising numbers, which gives him a huge advantage over his rival. This means Obama will be able to continue to inundate the airwaves in traditional Republican states in his effort to expand the electoral map. Since Obama launched his campaign at the beginning of 2007, he has raised more than \$600 million, which almost doubles the

previous record set by President Bush in 2004. "The dam is broken," [McCain said yesterday](#). "We're now going to see huge amounts of money coming into political campaigns, and we know history tells us that always leads to scandal."

In a piece inside, the *LAT* points out that we could very well be seeing the death of the [federal campaign-finance system](#). About half of Obama's contributors are small donors, and they have been a key reason why the Democrat has been able to raise an unprecedented sum for his campaign. When Obama decided to become the first candidate to decline federal financing, many doubted whether the gamble would pay off. But now that it has, future candidates are likely to follow his lead. "My guess is that this system will just go away," a Democratic consultant said. "The public financing system is basically the horse and buggy of politics."

The *WP* fronts, and everyone goes inside with, new resistance by powerful Iraqi lawmakers to a [draft-version security agreement](#) with the United States. The United Iraqi Alliance, a key bloc of Shiite parties that includes Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's Dawa Party, said it wants all U.S. troops to leave Iraq by December 2011. The draft agreement includes this same deadline but would allow an extension if both countries agree. The current draft also gives U.S. troops immunity from Iraqi law, except in cases when service members commit a major crime while off-duty. But the Shiite bloc says that is too vague and would allow U.S. officials to determine whether a service member is off-duty. Instead, the Iraqi politicians want to set up a joint committee to review suspected criminal cases and decide whether they should be tried in an Iraqi court.

It's unclear how much to make of these latest demands by Iraqi politicians. The *LAT* and *WSJ* both emphasize that the draft security agreement will be forwarded to the [Cabinet this week](#). The *WSJ* says this is a sign that the disagreements [over the draft](#) "weren't considered significant enough ... to keep the pact from moving forward." But the fact remains that prominent Iraqi politicians are still reluctant to support the agreement, partly out of fear that voters will punish them in the upcoming elections for siding with the United States. If an agreement isn't reached by the end of the year, U.S. troops won't have a legal basis for their presence in Iraq and would probably have to stop practically all of their operations and [prepare to leave](#).

The *LAT* reefer news that "Mr. Blackwell," infamous for his annual worst-dressed list, [died late last night](#). He was 86. Blackwell wrote up his first list in 1960 and never stopped. He "helped popularize the sort of dishy commentary that takes notable figures down a notch by poking fun at their personal style," notes the *LAT*. Victoria Beckham took the top spot in his 48th list this year.

The *NYT*'s [Alessandra Stanley](#) says Sarah Palin's performance on *Saturday Night Live*, which gave the show its largest audience

since 1994, was "definitely entertaining, but it was hard at times to tell whether it was a bold political tactic or a show-business audition." Perhaps Palin will "follow [Ronald] Reagan's path in reverse" because "[o]ne thing everybody can agree on," writes Stanley, "is that Gov. Sarah Palin is qualified—to someday host her own television show."

today's papers

Vicious Circle

By Kara Hodge

Sunday, October 19, 2008, at 6:19 AM ET

Faced with dramatically lower tax revenues because of the ailing economy, 22 states are trying to balance [widening budget gaps](#). Decreases in payroll, property, and sales taxes have left state governments struggling to come up with a combined total of \$11.2 billion to meet their budgets, prompting them to cut jobs and services. The belt tightening is just beginning, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, but even as states are cutting corners, the federal government is relying on their assistance. In the wake of the dismantling and nationalizing of some of Wall Street's major players, the federal government lacks the resources to investigate all the instances of mortgage fraud and other white-collar crimes behind the current economic crisis. The *New York Times*' [lede](#) details a decrease in the FBI's criminal investigators that has forced state and local governments and the private sector "to pick up the slack."

In a step toward regaining control of the economy, President George W. Bush announced last night in a joint statement with French President Nicolas Sarkozy and the president of the European Commission that the U.S. will host an [international economic summit](#) after the U.S. election to overhaul global finance regulations. The *Washington Post*, which compares the summit to that held in 1944 in Bretton Woods, N.H., offers the most comprehensive preview of the summit's goals to revamp the earlier regulations by "increasing the transparency of markets, revising the rules that govern the flow of investment around the world and improving oversight of big banks, ratings agencies and hedge funds." The American president-elect will be invited to offer his input, and the summit will include industrialized countries as well as developing nations such as India and China. The *LAT* and *NYT* both stuff the story, but all three papers suggest that Bush will buck attempts by other nations to rein in American capitalism.

As Bush prepares to deal with the economic crisis on an international scale, states find themselves trying to make ends meet at the local level as they encounter budgeting challenges that "may signal the onset of a historic fiscal crisis for state governments," [says the LAT](#). The Center on Budget and Policy

Properties points out "that as the economy declines, residents require more services from their state government, not fewer." The resulting trickle-down effect forces local governments to foot the bill for services cut by the state. Every state in the nation except Vermont legally mandates a balanced budget, but Washington may step in to smooth the cut corners for some states as part of a \$150-billion economic stimulus package proposed by House Democrats last week.

Even as budgets are drying up at all levels, the FBI is looking for more resources to support its criminal investigation units. The FBI currently has 177 agents investigating Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, American International Group, Lehman Bros., and more than 1,500 other mortgage-related cases, "but the staffing level is still hundreds of agents below the levels seen in the 1980s during the savings and loan crisis," [the NYT reports](#). As a result, private investigators and accounting firms have stepped in to assist in preparing evidence and courtroom testimonies for prosecution. Some FBI officials suspect that delayed government action in dealing with the mortgage crisis may have allowed more "schemes" to unfold, while others are concerned that the recently enacted bailout itself lacks "controls to deter fraud."

In the run-up to the election, the *LAT* examines African-American voters' attitudes toward having a black president in a [front-page story](#). While black voters "overwhelmingly support Barack Obama in the presidential race," many are trying not to get their hopes up. The article canvasses a mix of ordinary folks around Atlanta, Ga., and academics from other states to investigate the roots of their skepticism, including concerns that voters' "racial fears" will govern electoral decisions and worries that Obama will be assassinated.

Meanwhile, the *NYT* fronts a [profile](#) of the "Sarah Dude" population, the "burly" men who make up a large part of Sarah Palin's fan base. Since her nomination, Palin has had more male supporters than female, but as her ratings have dropped in subsequent weeks, men have also expressed their disenchantment with the governor at a higher rate than women. The article points out the obvious by noting that Palin has been criticized for "being essentially unserious and uncurious," but [the A section](#) of the *NYT* joins the *LAT* in reviewing the candidate's cameo last night on *Saturday Night Live*. (The *WP* stuffs an [AP piece](#) on Palin's appearance but gives the topic a longer look on one of its [blogs](#).)

In her *NYT* [column](#), Maureen Dowd channels a "vengeful and bloodthirsty ... Madame Defarge sharpening her knitting needles at the guillotine" as she calls for the heads of former AIG financiers who embarked on a lavish partridge hunt in England after their taxpayer-funded bailout.

In "[Polly Wants Her Freedom](#)," the *WP* reviews two recent books that demonstrate why parrots and people are an ill-suited match despite the birds' immense popularity as pets. The

impossibly aptly named author Mira Tweti tails the birds from Brazil to Wisconsin as she details the mistreatment they face in the parrot pet market, while Nancy Ellis-Bell's book about life with her parrot leaves TP wondering whether pet or owner rules the roost.

today's papers

Ballot Blocks

By Arthur Delaney

Saturday, October 18, 2008, at 5:28 AM ET

The *Washington Post* [leads](#) with new state voting-registration systems that may mistakenly purge thousands of voters from the rolls, provoking lawsuits and, perhaps, confusion on election day. The *Wall Street Journal* [goes](#) with the Supreme Court's decision to quash Republican efforts for extra scrutiny on voter registrations in Ohio. The *New York Times* [leads](#) with Barack Obama's TV-ad frenzy, reporting that the Democratic candidate is running almost as many advertisements as the Geico gecko. The [top story](#) from the *Los Angeles Times* is the closing of the Mervyns department-store chain, which the paper calls another in a series of casualties of the faltering economy.

The problems with state voter rolls are popping up as states comply with a federal law mandating a switch from locally managed registration records to statewide databases, [says](#) the *WP*. Goofups emerge when states compare local rolls to state records, such as drivers' licenses. The size of the problem varies from state to state; in Wisconsin, officials say one out of every five registered voters is flagged as ineligible due to problems over middle initials, birthdays, and misspellings. In Alabama, the rub is for people convicted of "moral turpitude." Congress passed the law requiring the change in 2002 after the debacle in Florida two years previously. The problems typically lead to lawsuits.

On Thursday, the U.S. Supreme Court blocked a Republican party challenge to hundreds of thousands of new voter registrations in Ohio. The *WSJ* [says](#) Republicans are out to portray Democrats as trying to steal the election with voter fraud, while Democrats cast the GOP as wanting to suppress the vote. The story notes that President Bush won Ohio in 2004 by only 118,000 votes.

Obama is running at least [four times as many TV ads](#) as his Republican opponent, John McCain. The key to Obama's airtime prowess is money, of course, which, the *NYT* reminds readers, is more abundantly available to the Illinois senator since he broke his promise to use federal financing for his campaign as McCain does. In a few days, the Obama campaign will have spent more than the \$188 million George W. Bush's 2004 re-election

campaign did on TV spots. McCain has spent \$91 million on ads since his nomination. (Inside, the *LAT*'s [got a story](#) on California voters saying they were tricked into registering as Republicans.)

The closing of Mervyns department stores will occasion liquidation sales just in time for the holidays, [reports](#) the *LAT*, but Mervyns will have competition: Firms have been contracted to help liquidate stock at Linens 'n Things and Shoe Pavilion as well. If this is supposed to be some kind of big upheaval, though, Mervyns customers accosted by *Times* reporters expressed "mostly indifference" at the closing.

The *WP* [fronts word](#) that the federal government's "spending surge" is pushing the federal deficit toward \$1 trillion. Tax breaks and other measures to stimulate economic growth, on top of billions to bail out Wall Street, are expanding the difference between what the government spends and what it collects in taxes to the widest it's been since the end of World War II. The *Post* suggests the gap may continue to grow as the presidential candidates and congressional leaders of both parties promise more and more spending increases and tax breaks.

When she first came to Washington, Cindy McCain sat at a table by herself and nobody would join her during a luncheon for congressional spouses, according to a [big profile](#) splashed on the front of today's *NYT*. Despite consistently getting the rough treatment in politics, and even though they've spent most of their time apart, McCain has done whatever she could to advance her husband's career and would take her cues as First Lady from Princess Di, according to the *Times*.

When a CIA agent in Georgia was killed in 1993, local police blamed the crime on the town drunk, and everybody was relieved. Said drunk says today that he was framed, and witnesses have retracted testimony. The *WSJ* revisits the matter with a front-page story that [takes a look](#) at the spy games taking place at the time.

Four of al-Qaida's five Web sites went offline in September and haven't returned, [reports](#) a Page One *WP* story. The terrorist organization is usually able to reboot its sites; it is unclear why it has failed to do so this time. An analyst says having only one site working has left al-Qaida's propaganda arm "hanging by a thread." What TP doesn't understand is why news stories about these kinds of Web sites never provide addresses for the sites or, at least, explain why not. TP is just curious, is all.

The *LAT* [fronts](#) a look at the deadly, deadly California pastime of diving for abalone, which so far this year has left seven people sleeping with the fishes. Among other perils in the hunt for the red mollusks, divers have to watch out for kelp, which can entangle them, and sharks, which can eat them.

war stories

This Is Not a Test

Sitting on an aircraft-carrier deck in 1962 didn't prepare John McCain for the presidency.

By Fred Kaplan

Thursday, October 23, 2008, at 3:57 PM ET

In the last few days, Sen. John McCain has told crowds that he's "been tested" when it comes to dealing with international crises, and as proof he cited the big enchilada of crises, the showdown over Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba in 1962. "I had a little personal experience in that," [McCain said in Ohio](#). "I was *there*."

But where was "there"? Was McCain a White House fellow or a junior aide in the Pentagon, watching, albeit from a distance, while President John Kennedy or Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara grappled with the dilemmas?

No, he was the pilot of a naval attack plane on an aircraft carrier in the Caribbean. [As he put it at a campaign rally in Pennsylvania](#), "I sat in the cockpit on the flight deck of the *U.S.S. Enterprise*, off of Cuba. I had a target." Then he added: "My friends, you know how close we came to nuclear war. Americans will not have a president who needs to be tested. I've been tested, my friends."

I mean no disrespect for carrier pilots, especially those poised for combat. The job requires a special sort of skill, nerve, and bravery that few of us have ever faced. (Certainly I never have.) But it is not at all clear how this experience tested McCain—or any of the other pilots on the four aircraft carriers off the coast of Cuba—for the job of making *strategic decisions* in a crisis, any more than working an assembly line tests someone to be president of a major manufacturing corporation.

As a 26-year-old Navy lieutenant in October 1962, John McCain was prepared to follow orders, fly his plane along a predetermined path to a preselected target, drop his preloaded bombs, and fly back. Again, this is not to be minimized. But neither does it constitute being "tested" to be—either then or 46 years later—the president of the United States.

Here's what the president at the time, John F. Kennedy, did during the crisis.

The confrontation began when U-2 spy planes detected the Soviets surreptitiously shipping missile launchers and nuclear warheads to Cuba and, in some cases, already setting them up on Cuban bases.

Kennedy assembled all his top advisers in the Cabinet Room to discuss how to respond. (Lucky for historians, he secretly tape-recorded all these deliberations. You can buy copies of the tapes from the JFK Library or read [Sheldon Stern's book](#) *Averting "The Final Failure": John F. Kennedy and the Secret Cuban Missile Crisis Meetings*, an excellent account.)

On the first day of deliberations, Kennedy figured that he would have to bomb the missile sites. McNamara suggested blockading the island as an interim measure to buy some time. Kennedy agreed.

By the third day of the crisis, Kennedy was musing about Soviet motives and wondering what kind of "face-saving" gesture he might offer to get them to back off. One possibility, he said, might be a trade: We'd withdraw the missiles we had in Turkey—on the Soviet Union's southern border—if they withdrew the missiles they had in Cuba. None of the advisers reacted to this remark.

On Oct. 26, the 13th and final day, Khrushchev sent Kennedy a telegram offering just such a trade. Kennedy favored taking the deal. "To any man at the United Nations or any other rational man," he can be heard on the tapes saying, "it will look like a very fair trade. ... Most people think that if you're allowed an even trade, you ought to take advantage of it."

All of Kennedy's advisers—his brother Robert Kennedy, Vice President Lyndon Johnson, McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, the entire Joint Chiefs of Staff—vociferously opposed the deal. All of them at this point—even McNamara—urged Kennedy to bomb the missile sites. They protested that trading the missiles in Turkey would amount to appeasement; it would wreck NATO, betray the Turks, advertise our weakness. On the tapes, they sound hysterical; you can hear the quivering in their voices.

Kennedy remained preternaturally cool. He recalled that the attack plan, drawn up a few days earlier by the Joint Chiefs and endorsed by McNamara, was calling for 3,500 conventional bombing sorties against the Soviet missile sites and air bases in Cuba—500 sorties a day for seven days—followed by an invasion of the island.

"I'm just thinking," Kennedy said, with remarkable calm, "about what we're going to have to do in a day or so ... 500 sorties ... and possibly an invasion, all because we wouldn't take missiles out of Turkey. And we all know how quickly everybody's courage goes when the blood starts to flow, and that's what's going to happen in NATO ... when we start these things and the Soviets grab Berlin" in retaliation, "and everybody's going to say, 'Well, this Khrushchev offer was a pretty good position.' " At another point, Kennedy noted that if we went to war and it was later learned that this deal had been on the table and we had rejected it, it was "not going to be a good war."

At the end of the day, without telling more than a handful of his advisers, President Kennedy ordered his brother to tell the Soviet ambassador that he accepted Khrushchev's deal—as long as it was kept a total secret, as indeed it was until the tapes came out 20 years later. (Not wanting to appear weak, Kennedy himself contrived the cover story—and ordered his palace historians, Arthur Schlesinger and Ted Sorensen, to perpetrate the myth—that he'd stared the Russians down.)

And so, the point is even more clear-cut than it might seem at first glance: Just because John McCain sat in a cockpit on a flight deck during the tensest five days of the Cuban Missile Crisis, that doesn't mean he absorbed the slightest bit of wisdom about how to handle a crisis from the top.

What about Sen. Barack Obama—has he ever been tested for a crisis of this sort? There's no evidence that he has. In this sense, former President Bill Clinton's [evasive remark](#) a few months ago when he was asked about Obama's qualifications—"You can argue that nobody is ready to be president"—may well be true.

The lesson of Kennedy's performance in the Cuban Missile Crisis is that a president should be cool-headed, ask the right questions, listen to a wide range of advice, then exercise his own judgment.

With this history in mind, which of the two candidates—McCain or Obama—seems best-suited to handle a crisis? That's the appropriate question.

war stories

Who Cares How Colin Powell Is Voting?

Quite a few people, actually.

By Fred Kaplan

Monday, October 20, 2008, at 4:36 PM ET

So Colin Powell [announced](#) on *Meet the Press* that he's voting for Barack Obama. Should anyone—will anyone—care? Will his endorsement have any effect on the election?

Actually, it might.

Whatever his image among political activists (his fellow Republicans find him too moderate, while many Democrats still resent the role he played in promoting the invasion of Iraq), Gen. Powell—former secretary of state, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and a man who once contemplated running for president himself—enjoys remarkably high favor among the broader population.

In a [Rasmussen poll](#) taken earlier this month, Powell was viewed favorably by 80 percent of those surveyed—considerably higher than the [positive ratings](#) for Sen. Obama (56 percent) or his Republican opponent, Sen. John McCain (49 percent).

More remarkable, 12 percent of those polled said that Powell's endorsement would probably have at least some effect on their vote. Within that group, just 5 percent said it would "very likely" have an effect. (Seven percent said the prospect was "somewhat likely.") Still, given that so few voters remain undecided at this late date, 12 percent, or even 5 percent, is not a trivial share—and, depending on its geographic distribution, could even be decisive in certain states.

Whatever Powell's endorsement is worth, it's probably worth more than most others. In a [poll last February](#), when the primaries were still going on, registered voters were given a list of 10 prominent figures and asked whether an endorsement from each would make them more or less likely to vote for the favored candidate. Powell was the only name on the list whose positive influence (28 percent) outweighed his negative influence (19 percent).

The fact that Powell hasn't voted for a Democratic presidential candidate since Jimmy Carter in 1976, that he's a longtime friend of McCain's, and that his own friend and former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage is listed as an adviser to McCain's campaign—all this makes his support for Obama a more striking move still.

His endorsement of Obama probably would have made a bigger splash had he announced it two months ago, before the financial crisis erupted and when national security was a more decisive issue. Still, he might yet have an effect on two groups.

The first group is the faction that used to be called "Reagan Democrats"—voters who are concerned about military strength. Powell is seen as a figure of stature among these people. His endorsement might allay their concerns that Obama lacks the gravitas to be president. (In this sense, Powell's refusal on *Meet the Press* to retract his earlier support for the Iraq war—or to lash out at his old boss, President George W. Bush—probably strengthened the force of his endorsement.)

The second group is the military. By all accounts, McCain is way ahead of Obama among military personnel, active and retired. A [Gallup poll of veterans](#) taken in August showed McCain leading 56 to 34. The polling firm noted, however, that this margin was nearly identical to the 55-39 margin by which veterans voted for Bush over John Kerry in the 2004 election. In other words, the main factor here may be simply that veterans tend to be male (91 percent), above the age of 50 (more than half), and Republican (47 percent, as opposed to 39 percent Democratic)—demographics that favor McCain even among nonveterans.

A poll of 4,300 military personnel, taken this month by the [Military Times newspapers](#) (which include *Army Times*, *Air Force Times*, *Navy Times*, and *Marine Corps Times*), shows McCain leading Obama by an even wider margin, 67-24.

The survey certainly exaggerates his edge. It was a voluntary poll; those who wanted to take part sent in their responses. The *Military Times* editors themselves note that the respondents were older, whiter, and more senior in rank than the actual composition of the armed services. This makes a difference. In the poll, McCain led Obama 76-17 among whites, but Obama led McCain 79-12 among blacks.

Still, a more significant finding in this context is that 74 percent of those surveyed consider McCain's military experience as an important factor in their vote—and 66 percent regard Obama's lack of military experience as an important factor.

Here is where Gen. Powell's endorsement *may* come into play. Many officers, especially senior officers, view Powell as more of a political figure than a combat veteran; he earned his stars in the White House and the Pentagon. Many enlisted men and women, however, especially those in the Army, see him as a fellow grunt, an infantryman who fought in the mud and the grime of Vietnam and stuck around afterward to make the Army his career. I have recently corresponded with a few of these soldiers, who have fought—some are still fighting—in Iraq and Afghanistan, and they say that Powell is still a model to many of their buddies.

One noncommissioned officer in Iraq told me that many of the soldiers in his unit like McCain because of his experience as a prisoner of war, which they honor and respect. However, he added, Powell's endorsement imparts some legitimacy to Obama; it might go some distance toward compensating for Obama's lack of combat experience, nullifying McCain's advantage, and thus at least leveling the field so that other factors (such as the economy) might come into play.

The NCO made another point: Today's active-duty Army is more diverse than soldiers of decades past could ever have imagined. His unit in Iraq includes U.S. soldiers who were born in Mexico, Russia, Senegal, Ecuador, and Iran. In the barracks, they hurl racial stereotypes at one another as a joke. But, the NCO said, they are all disturbed when they hear Gov. Sarah Palin talk about small, predominantly white towns as the "real America." And they were all moved when they heard Gen. Powell bemoan the tendency, especially among the Republicans' right-wing "base," to equate "Muslim" with "anti-American." One of the NCO's best friends, who was killed in a firefight and remains much missed by everyone in the unit, was an American soldier named Omar.

The soldier cautioned against exaggeration. He knows plenty of soldiers who wouldn't dream of voting for Obama, either

because they admire McCain too much or because they're self-described "rednecks." Still, many soldiers are sitting on the fence, and Gen. Powell's endorsement could push them into Obama's camp.

xx factor xxtra

My Saks Shopping Spree

How to spend \$150,000 just like Sarah Palin.

By Nina Shen Rastogi

Wednesday, October 22, 2008, at 7:53 PM ET

On Wednesday, we learned from *Politico* that the Republican National Committee had spent [\\$150,000 on clothes and accessories to outfit Sarah Palin and her family](#). *Whoa*, I thought. *Now that is a whole lot of flag pins*. So, what kind of campaign duds would a cool 150 grand actually buy you? To find out, I headed over to Saks Fifth Avenue—one of several high-end department stores where Palin has shopped since John McCain tapped her as his running mate.

Suits and separates

I've never had a job that required me to dress up. The last time I bought a suit, I think, I was getting ready for a high-school speech and debate tournament. So here was my chance to finally put together a fantasy grown-up wardrobe. If I were running for vice president, as Palin is, I figured I would need a lot of smart-looking separates to get me through the endless rounds of rallies, town-hall meetings, and photo ops. Flush with all my make-believe cash (no, *Slate* does not have a clothing expense account), I headed straight for the Saks section dedicated to [Escada](#), the swanky brand favored by both Palin and Cindy McCain. There I found several campaign-appropriate blazers in the bright jewel tones Palin likes so much: I happily put a red one, a checked one, an orange one, and a purple one into my, sadly, still-imaginary shopping bag along with a few matching skirts. I fell in love with a kelly-green, two-button suede jacket. And then I looked at the price tag—\$4,550, or about four months' rent for my tiny studio in Brooklyn, N.Y. *But today I am Sarah Palin!* I reminded myself. Think how nicely that bright color would show off my fresh, outdoorsy complexion. I added it to the list and then high-tailed it to another boutique, sensing that my grad-student-giveaway messenger bag and beat-up sneakers were starting to attract too much attention from the saleswomen.

I breezed through the racks of clothes by [St. John](#), the knitwear line Angelina Jolie hawks. The saleswoman suggested I buy multiple black shells and skirts, which could be swapped out

underneath an array of blazers. Good idea: Who has time to do laundry while zigzagging from Indiana to Pennsylvania to Colorado and back? I got a dozen plain, sleeveless tops and four black skirts for a total of \$5,100. I added two jackets—one in a vivid red provocatively named "wildfire." Then I decided I needed some neutrals. I grabbed a navy wool crepe dress and matching jacket from [Loro Piana](#) (\$4,965 for the set) before hitting the jackpot at [Akris Punto](#), where I found a slew of well-cut jackets and skirts in sensible black and gray. When I told the saleswoman that I was fake-shopping as if I were Sarah Palin, she told me that the governor had once worn the salt-and-pepper fleece jacket I was currently eyeing. Success! Unbeknownst to the candidate, she and I were achieving some kind of long-distance Vulcan mind meld. Obviously, I needed to really stock up here. I bought seven more jackets, three crisp white blouses, two pairs of black pants, a dress, and another skirt.

Now I had enough outfits to take me through at least two weeks on the trail without doubling up on anything distinctive—surely it was time to go look at [shoes](#)? But no, when I tallied the bill so far, I was only at a measly \$40,970. Somewhere, Palin was laughing at my pathetic spending strategy. I screwed up my courage, walked up to the floor where they kept the *really* fancy separates, and picked out two black Michael Kors pantsuits, a gray-flecked Carolina Herrera blazer, and two jackets from Akris, the high-end sister line to Akris Punto. The last two alone cost me a cool \$7,000, though my untrained eye couldn't tell the difference between them and the lower-priced lovelies I'd already scooped up.

Total price tag for suits and separates: \$56,000, or about \$61,460 with taxes

Shoes

In the shoe department, I looked for things that said *sexy librarian*—namely, lots of Palin's beloved peep-toes. A good start: two pairs of Cole Haans (black suede and black patent—*mrowr*), two pairs of Christian Louboutin (a black peep-toe and a very sensible camel-colored square toe), and one pair of Jimmy Choos in gray and black. I added a classic pair of Ferragamo patent-leather bow-tie heels and a pair of Taryn Rose pumps, which are designed by a former podiatrist and therefore would help me through all that walking and standing and waving. I also picked up two pairs of high-heeled Gucci boots, in brown and black, with very subtle leather piping up the back. For the first time, I was genuinely sorry that all my spending money was pretend. But as much as I wanted to linger over shoes, there was no way I was going to meet my spending goal if I stayed in this department, even if I bought 15 pairs of [Gucci's \\$1,125 knotted-leather tortoise-trim platforms](#). (Mavericks, certainly, but perhaps not in the way Sarah Palin would want.)

Total price tag for shoes: \$6,244 with taxes

Coats and Bags

As I trekked up the floors of Saks' mammoth building, I confess I was starting to get exhausted. I hadn't even spent half of my fake clothing allowance, but I felt as though I was beginning to run out of things to buy. I considered ducking into the bridal section and just splurging on a really nice dress for Bristol. But that felt like cheating, so I soldiered on. A candidate needs to be prepared for all kinds of weather, so I turned my weary inner shopper to coats. Nothing too flashy, I reasoned. Maybe a couple that might relate to [all those parkas](#) I used to wear as governor of Alaska. Sure, the McCain campaign probably made me burn all my old clothes, or at least leave them at home, far far from the lower 48, but they wouldn't stop me from coming up with some tasteful reminder of home, would they? I picked up a Peter Som magenta coat with toggle buttons, a gunmetal quilted coat by Max Mara, and a long, sleek parka by Postcard. I hesitated over a long, black wool double-breasted coat by Burberry, worrying that the label would be too East Coast elite, but I figured I'd need something to wear to fancy fundraising dinners (or even the inaugural ball? A girl can dream), so I added it to the pile. At this point, I had to call in reinforcements because my deadline loomed. Sophie Gilbert, an intern in the *Slate* New York office, attacked the handbag department on my behalf and picked out two Yves Saint Laurent bags, a Longchamp purse, and two Judith Lieber clutches, enough to take even a purse-horse candidate from day to night. One of those clutches alone—a simple crocodile bag with an Austrian crystal trim—brought us \$6,000 closer to our goal.

Total price tag for coats and bags: \$18,889 with taxes

Jewelry

We have no idea whether Palin bought jewelry on her shopping sprees, but she definitely wears the stuff—and how! Check out the beaded earrings and the sparkly shout-out to her home state in [this photo](#). Beads and baubles, Sophie and I decided, were going to bring us home. We were on the lookout for tasteful, classic pieces. Nothing too big, nothing too showy; stuff a politician could wear again and again without attracting too much attention. We started with big-ticket items: a Chopard diamond-studded crucifix for \$11,830 and a string of South Sea and Tahitian pearls from Mikimoto for \$25,000. We finished off with a pair of Faraone Mennella white-gold, diamond-studded hoops, a pair of rose-quartz-and-diamond earrings from David Yurman, and an elegant Cartier tank watch—or so we thought. Still about \$10,000 short, we added a gold pearl ring from David Harris.

Total price tag for jewelry: \$63,331 with taxes

Total for the whole Saks shopping spree: \$149,924 with taxes

Here's what I learned at Saks, trying to mind meld with Sarah Palin: Blowing \$150,000 in a department store in an afternoon is a lot harder than it sounds. Of course, if my vice-presidential fantasy extended to scooping up some gorgeous but totally campaign-inappropriate [Alexander McQueen party dresses](#) and [Carolina Herrera ball gowns](#), that would be a different story. But unless she's squirreled a bunch of glam formal pieces back to Wasilla, you have to think that most of Palin's purchases were off-the-rack suits and accessories like the ones I picked out for her. And in that case, coming up with a hefty-enough spending total was a job for a woman far more dedicated to pantsuits and peep-toes than I.

On the other hand, when I got back to the office and looked over the virtual purchases I'd scribbled in my notebook, they seemed somehow puny. Especially when you consider that, by the time the election winds to an end, Palin will have spent nearly two and a half solid months in front of the camera, striving to look polished, professional, and ready to govern at a moment's notice. A couple dozen suits might seem like a lot to me. But when clothing is your armor of choice, as it seems to be for Sarah, can you ever really have enough?

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