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

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**architecture**

**Big Box**

A San Francisco museum reinvented.

By Witold Rybczynski

Friday, January 26, 2007, at 7:10 AM ET

Click [here](#) to read a slide-show essay about Herzog & de Meuron's new de Young museum in San Francisco.

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**bad advice**

**Stop Picking Stocks—Immediately!**

Why the world's greatest stock picker stopped picking stocks, and why you should, too.

By Henry Blodget

Monday, January 22, 2007, at 4:14 PM ET

The most dangerous investment advice is often that which seems most sensible, which is why the worst investing counsel you will likely ever receive is that you should try to pick "good" stocks and sell "bad" ones. You will get this advice in one form or another from innumerable sources, including (some) investment advisers, friends, colleagues, Wall Street, and the investment media. You should ignore it.

Since the dawn of investment time, great stock pickers (there are some) have been revered, and even most novices can proudly recite picks that have produced mountainous returns. ("*I bought Google at \$85!*") Unfortunately, what is smart (or lucky) on occasion often proves dumb over time, and, in the end, most stock pickers do worse than if they had never tried to pick stocks at all. Despite snagging the occasional [ten bagger](#), for example, even professional mutual-fund stock pickers still have depressingly poor odds of beating the market once their losers and costs are taken into account (between 1-in-4 and 1-in-40, depending on how you measure performance). If you pursue a stock-picking strategy, you are almost certain to *lag* the market.

The problem for investors is that even though stock-picking usually hurts returns, it's extremely interesting and fun. If you are ever to wean yourself of this bad habit, therefore, the first step is to understand why it's so rarely successful. The short answer is that the *overall market* provides most investment returns, not particular stock picks, so most stock pickers get credit for gains that came merely from being invested in stocks generally. Second, competition among stock pickers is so intense that it is extraordinarily difficult for any one competitor to get a consistent edge. Third, although it is relatively easy to pick stocks that beat the market *before costs* (all else being equal, you have about even odds of doing this), it is much harder to do so [after costs](#). Even if you pick stocks well enough to boost your pre-cost return by a couple of points, the expenses you rack up along the way (research, trading, taxes, etc.) will usually more than offset your gain.

Most stock pickers believe that they are among the tiny minority of investors who can beat the market after costs, and, for inspiration and encouragement, they point to legends such as Warren Buffett and Benjamin Graham. What such investors often don't know is that even Buffett has said that the best strategy for most investors is to buy low-cost index funds and that the great Benjamin Graham eventually changed his mind about the wisdom of traditional stock-picking. Graham, you may remember, is considered one of the greatest stock pickers of all time, the man who, in the 1930s and 1940s wrote two classics on intelligent investing and whose security-analysis techniques are still taught in most serious investment classes. But in 1976, shortly before his death, Graham told the *Journal of Finance* the following:

I am no longer an advocate of elaborate techniques of security analysis in order to find

superior value opportunities. This was a rewarding activity, say, 40 years ago, when [the bible of fundamental stock analysis, Graham and Dodd's *Security Analysis*] was first published; but the situation has changed. I doubt whether such extensive efforts will generate sufficiently superior selections to justify their cost.

What did Graham mean when he said that "the situation has changed"? Why did he conclude—more than three decades ago—that stock-picking practices that had defined intelligent investing in the 1930s were, by the 1970s, no longer worthwhile?

First, in the seven decades since Graham wrote *Security Analysis*, the stock market has gone from being a playground for amateurs to a battlefield dominated by full-time professionals. One result is that pricing errors that once might have gone unnoticed for months in Graham's day are now discovered and exploited instantly. Second, the amount of information available about the most obscure stock today dwarfs what was available about even the bellwethers a half-century ago, making it harder to dig up information that other investors don't know. The moment the information is released, moreover, it is dissected, discussed, and debated by thousands of analysts, until most reasonable conclusions that can be drawn from it have been. Today's technology also allows even part-time investors to screen tens of thousands of stocks in dozens of markets in the time it would have taken a [Graham-era analyst to compute the "net current assets" of a single company](#).

Third, inside information that used to be quite valuable is now illegal to trade on. And, finally, the establishment of research centers such as the Center for Research in Security Prices (CSRPs) has allowed analysts to study markets and investing in ways that the young Benjamin Graham could only have dreamed of—and, in so doing, to assemble a body of knowledge that makes much of the "investment wisdom" of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century seem as primitive and unscientific as bloodletting.

Benjamin Graham's "deathbed" quote is occasionally taken to mean that he completely repudiated his former work by suggesting that stock analysis is worthless. In fact, he just advocated a more diversified and high-level stock selection strategy. Specifically, Graham recommended screening stocks using simple valuation and fundamental criteria and then buying large groups of them, the same way a modern "passive" fund (such as a value-oriented index fund) does. What Graham did "recant" was the idea that by studying companies in detail, one could identify a few super-promising opportunities that could safely deliver market-crushing returns.

The stock-picking mystique is so deeply entrenched in our financial culture that it feels like heresy to suggest that it is, on

balance, dumb. The facts are clear, however. For the vast majority of investors—including professionals—stock-picking efforts waste both money and time.

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What are the "costs" of stock-picking? Research costs, transaction costs, taxes, opportunity costs, and, if you hire an investment adviser or fund manager, advisory fees. These sound small, but, taken together, they add up.

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When Graham and Dodd wrote *Security Analysis* in 1934, the lack of an Internet was the least of an analyst's worries. There were no spreadsheets, computers, or information databases. There weren't even any *calculators*. There were no company conference calls or quarterly earnings releases. There were few filing requirements, lax accounting rules, and little legal enforcement. There were only a handful of mutual funds, no hedge funds, and no computerized trading. There was no CNBC, no market radio, no Bloomberg, no Yahoo! Finance, no real-time quotes. There were *paper tickers*, for God's sake.

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## blogging the bible Is Jeremiah a Traitor?

Why this prophet bugs me so much.

By David Plotz

Friday, January 12, 2007, at 5:55 PM ET

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**From:** David Plotz

**Subject:** Jeremiah and the Lustful She-Camel

**Updated Friday, January 12, 2007, at 5:55 PM ET**

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I seem to be a moron times two. First, [my lazy speculation](#) that "the circle of the earth" means the Israelites thought the earth was round caught the attention of geometricians, historians, and cartographers—and not in a good way. Many, many, *many* of you observed that a circle is *not* a sphere. A circle is flat. Lots of ancient peoples believed the earth was shaped like a pancake (or, in the Hebrews' case, a latke). For a speedy tutorial on this, read [Chris Johnson's e-mail](#).

I'm apparently soft-headed about child sacrifice, too. [I pooh-poohed the idea](#) that any civilization, including Israel's enemies, ever ritually murdered its own kids. Readers bombarded me with articles, books, and Web pages about child sacrifices around the globe. (There's practically enough for a Travel Channel special: *The 10 Hottest Spots for Kid Killing!*) In particular, they directed me to strong evidence that the Carthaginians offered large numbers of their children to Baal.

Let's get back to the Bible, and a new book ...

### The Book of Jeremiah

Like [Isaiah](#), Jeremiah is not a kittens, rainbows, and spring flowers kind of guy. These two let-it-bleed prophets share a style (emphatic, metaphoric poetry) and a sensibility (gloom). But they're not identical twins—more like first cousins. Isaiah is bipolar, prone to wild mood swings, delightful when pleased, and a holy terror—truly, a *holy* terror—when angry. But he is also funny, in a vicious sort of way. You might not always like Isaiah, but he'd often be entertaining company, especially if you could get him to rip on the Babylonians.

Jeremiah, on the other hand—not the life of the party. (They don't call them "Jeremiads" for nothing.) He's plenty smart and eloquent, but he's a priggish prophet. He doesn't share Isaiah's occasional fondness for black irony.

### [Chapter 1](#) to [Chapter 3](#)

A century or so after Isaiah, God summons Jeremiah to serve Him. (When God orders Jeremiah to work, it surely marks the first use of this phrase: "Gird up your loins.")

Like Isaiah, Jeremiah's chief responsibility is to hector, nag, badger, noodge, and otherwise harass the increasingly unfaithful people of Judah to return to God's side before it's too late. Jeremiah ultimately fails, of course. He's living during the darkest of times—the final few years before Babylon conquers Jerusalem and exiles the Jews—and no one could have stopped the disaster.

What's most remarkable about Jeremiah is the depth of his rage, which can be explained by the hopelessness of his cause. His people don't share his sense of urgency, and it infuriates him. Jeremiah has the flaws that all whistle-blowers have. Almost without exception, whistle-blowers are mean, self-righteous, and

resentful. When they turn out to be right—and boy, does Jeremiah turn out to be right—everyone regrets not having listened to them to begin with. But the reason no one listens to begin with is that the message is so unpleasant and angry. Put yourself in the shoes of a Jerusalemite, sixth century B.C.: Would you pay attention to the cantankerous rageaholic shouting doom in the bazaar?

In Jeremiah's first speech, he unloads on the wild, heedless idolatry of the Israelites, describing them as: "a lustful she-camel, restlessly running about." Now I personally have never seen a lustful camel—of the she *or* he variety—but, wow, that is one vivid image!

It's not just the lusty camel that occupies Jeremiah's thoughts. Much more than Isaiah, he has sex on the brain. Wherever he turns, he sees it. Whenever he opens his mouth, filth spews out. A few verses before the she-camel, for example, he says that Israel "recline[s] as a whore." Chapter 3 begins with him frothing about Israel's "whoring and debauchery ... you had the brazenness of a street woman." In Chapter 5 he inveighs against the Israelites as "lustful stallions." (Are they camels? Are they horses?) A few chapters later, they're harlots. A few chapters later:

"I behold your adulteries,  
Your lustful neighing  
Your unbridled depravity, your vile acts ... "

His combination of scorn and sex is very Church Lady—at once prudish and obsessed.

#### Chapter 4

God's disappointment with us only increases, because we are not merely unfaithful, we're also morons. "My people are stupid ... They are foolish children. They are not intelligent." This may be Jeremiah's cruelest cut of all, since [we know how much the Lord values intelligence](#). God always rewards brainy people, even when they're wicked. This is the first time He has ever wondered if His people lack smarts. His disillusionment is somehow more disturbing than His dismay over idol-worshipping. Infidelity He expects, but stupidity He can't stand.

#### Chapter 5 and Chapter 6

Jeremiah suggests that his readers search Jerusalem for a righteous person: "You will not find a man; There is none who acts justly." Since the city is empty of worthy people, God has no reason to spare it from conquest. This harkens back to Genesis, doesn't it? It is essentially the same discussion that [Abraham and God have about Sodom and Gomorrah back in Genesis 18](#). God is planning to destroy those cities, but Abraham argues with Him, eventually persuading the Lord that He can't wipe out the towns if there are even 10 innocent souls in them. (Of course it turns out there are *no* innocents, so God offs the cities.) Jeremiah takes on the role of God here in the retelling:

Because there's not a single just person in Jerusalem, the city deserves its doom. (I wonder if the story of [Diogenes and the lamp](#) is ripped off from Jeremiah. Diogenes supposedly roamed the streets of Athens, carrying a lamp in broad daylight, searching for an honest man.)

#### Chapter 7

Here's a disheartening moment. The Lord tells Jeremiah to not even bother to pray for the people anymore because they're so unapologetically idolatrous. You know things are bad when God Himself gives up!

#### Chapter 8 and Chapter 9

Jeremiah laments the terrible fate of his countrymen. He's heartbroken, dejected, desolate about their suffering. He asks, looking out for his own misery: "Is there no balm in Gilead?" Yet Jeremiah's histrionic mourning for His people is somehow suspicious. He promises he would "weep day and night" for his people, moans at how heartsick he is over their suffering. But think about how much delight he takes in enumerating their sins and threatening them. He's clearly thrilled to be the bearer of bad tidings to Israel. So it's very disingenuous when he starts talking about how bad he feels about Israel. He's like the gossipy classmate who, with a long face and a big hug, tells you that she saw your boyfriend making out with your best friend. You can be very sure that her glee outweighs her sympathy.

Jeremiah's world is terrible for a new reason. It's not simply that the bond between man and God is broken. The bond between man and man is broken too. When you abandon the Lord, according to Jeremiah, you also unravel all that holds society and family together. In a society that has quit God, you must: "Beware of your neighbors, and put no trust in any of your kin." This is natural law theory taken to its utmost extreme. *All* manmade laws and *all* social bonds are tenuous, dependent on faith and God's will. There's no such thing as innate human decency, or innate family love—it's all contingent on the Lord.

#### Chapter 10 and Chapter 11

More of the usual idol chatter—those "no gods" are worthless, they didn't make heaven and earth like I did, etc.

#### Chapter 12

Jeremiah interrogates God like a lawyer on cross-examination: "Let me put my case to You: Why does the way of the guilty prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?" Great questions, prophet! Will the witness please answer?

So, dear Lord, why do the good and faithful often suffer while the wicked grow fat and rich? As Jeremiah and Isaiah make clear, God *will* deliver his comeuppance eventually either on earth (Babylon sacks Jerusalem) or later. But that is not the answer God makes to Jeremiah's question. If I am untangling the metaphors in Verse 5 correctly, He says He's making life tough for the faithful to harden them. This life is just boot camp for a



more rigorous world to come. You'll thank Drill Sgt. Jehovah later.

### **Chapter 13**

A curious episode in which God orders Jeremiah to buy a loincloth, wear it for a while, and then hide it in a rock by the Euphrates River. Jeremiah is instructed to return to the loincloth some days later, at which point he discovers it is ruined. This loincloth, God tells us, is Judah. It was supposed to cling to God, the way the cloth clings to the loins—no boxer shorts back in the day, I guess—but because it has been ruined by sin, it's now just a worthless rag.

The Judahites can't save themselves from their terrible fate because they have become evil to their core. God asks, famously, "Can the Cushite change his skin or the leopard his spots?" This is another example of a famous Biblical phrase that isn't quite what I remember it to be. Did you know that the leopard was paired with a person? I didn't. *Cushite* is a Biblical term for Ethiopians or Nubians. The reference complicates the passage for modern readers. It's not that referring to Cushites means the verse is racist—it's clearly meant to be descriptive of skin color rather than derogatory. But it does muddy it. I'm not surprised that the phrase that we use today only includes the leopard. Can you imagine saying "Can the Ethiopian change his skin color?" in conversation? It would be awkward to explain.

*"Blogging the Bible" takes a hiatus next week. I'm going on a work trip to Israel. I'll try to snap some pictures of famous ancient spots—"Photographing the Bible"—and post them when I return.*

*Thoughts on Blogging the Bible? Please e-mail David Plotz at [plotzd@slate.com](mailto:plotzd@slate.com). (E-mail may be quoted by name unless the writer stipulates otherwise.)*

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**From:** David Plotz  
**Subject:** Why This Prophet Bugs Me So Much  
**Posted** Friday, January 26, 2007, at 10:44 AM ET

My [Israel trip](#) turned out to be less biblical than I had hoped. I learned an awful lot about the [West Bank security barrier](#) but very little about the walls of Jericho. (There was one delightful Bible-blog moment, which occurred during a meeting with [former Prime Minister Shimon Peres](#). [Click here for details](#).)

### **The Book of Jeremiah**

#### **Chapter 14 through Chapter 16**

Anyone who's ever been in a bad relationship knows the

Doctrine of Pre-emptive Cruelty: Before you go through the torture of dumping a boyfriend, you act meaner than you feel toward him. (This usually goes on at an unconscious level.) Boyfriend understandably bristles and retaliates. This makes the actual leave-taking much easier. You get to lighten your own guilt by blaming the dumpee for being such a jerk.

This appears to be God's strategy. As He prepares to hammer Judah with the Babylonian invasion, He gets more and more rageful. It's anticipatory cruelty—trying to make the breakup a little bit less traumatic for Him. (Remember, this is a thousand-year-old covenant he's ending!) He spends a lot of these chapters, and much the whole Jeremiah book, making Himself out as the victim—betrayed by idolatry, false prophets, sexual misbehavior. This helps Him justify the punishment He's about to deliver. It's unfair to say He's taking pleasure in the impending doom. But He's dwelling obsessively on the details. (How they'll be attacked by swords, dogs, birds, and wild animals; how some will starve, some will be enslaved, some will die in battle—and there shall be no mourning for the dead.) It's almost as though He's thinking out loud, trying to explain Himself to Himself. He's half-triumphal, half-heartbroken as He declares, "I have destroyed my people ... their widows became more numerous than the sands of the sea."

### **Chapter 17**

As I mentioned [last time](#), one of the key themes of Jeremiah is that there is no intrinsic human morality. We are capable of goodness and love *only* thanks to our faith. This Jeremiaic view contrasts with other parts of the Bible, particularly Genesis, where moral behavior can exist in parallel with faith, not dependent on it. (The most vivid example is [Abraham rebuking God for his eagerness to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah](#).)

Anyway, there's one sentence in this chapter that beautifully, and starkly, encapsulates that challenge to humanism: "The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse." (Human emotion is fickle and untrustworthy—unlike God!)

God dispatches Jeremiah on the first of several prophetic suicide missions. Like Charlie in *Charlie's Angels*, or M in the James Bond movies, the Lord is sending out his most capable warrior against impossible odds. Here, the Lord tells Jeremiah to stand at the gate of Jerusalem and harangue the king and others about the Sabbath, reminding them if they don't obey it, they'll be destroyed. Later, God will send him to harass the king in his court, barge into the Temple, and badger all the kings of the region. In each case, Jeremiah risks his life by preaching this horrible message: You're doomed, and nothing you do can save you.

Random question: Why was [Jeremiah a bullfrog](#)?

### **Chapter 18 through Chapter 20**

New mission: to take a clay jug to the gates of Jerusalem and announce that God is going to "make this city a horror," and that

the Jerusalemites will "eat the flesh of their sons." Then shatter the jug, because this is what God will do to Jerusalem. The top priest, unsurprisingly, is perturbed and throws Jeremiah in the stocks. This does not deter Jeremiah one bit. He curses the priest, telling him he will die in captivity.

Jeremiah is curiously ambivalent about his job. On the one hand, he delights in denouncing the priest and cursing Jerusalem and foretelling death and destruction. On the other hand, he's genuinely hurt that no one likes him. As soon as he finishes damning the priest, he chants a self-pitying lament, cursing the day he was born. He moans that he has become a laughingstock ("everyone mocks me"). He complains that whenever he's around, he hears people whispering, "Let us denounce him!"

C'mon, Jeremiah! You must be kidding! You show up at capital city, tell everyone they're going to be cannibalizing their kids in a couple years and that there's nothing—*nothing*—they can do to prevent it. And then you're surprised that they don't like you!

### **Chapter 21 and Chapter 22**

King Zedekiah asks Jeremiah to intercede with the Lord against the Babylonian invaders. "Perhaps the Lord will perform a wonderful deed for us." Jeremiah, rather than offering Karl Roveian strategic advice or even a few kind words, disses the king. There's no chance the Lord will intervene, Jeremiah says: Jerusalem will be sacked—some will die from plague, others from violence, and others will be enslaved.

Oops, I just spilled a Fresca on my Bible.

### **Chapter 23**

I must admit that Jeremiah is not the jolliest way to spend an afternoon. The string of major prophets—Isaiah and Jeremiah, with Ezekiel on the horizon—is the Bible's Murderer's Row. Their books are dreadfully long—*longer* than the entire Torah, in fact! They're also repetitive, gloomy, and very hard to read. I need some encouragement. Please tell me it gets better when I'm done with these guys.

Along comes a funny scene to brighten things up. God is irritated by the false prophets who are contradicting Jeremiah's morbid predictions. These prophets, like President Bush's Iraq war advisers, see only the bright side: God still loves us! The Babylonians will be defeated! (Actually, they're *exactly* like Bush Iraq advisers, who also insist the Babylonians will be defeated.) The Lord knows they're selling a bogus product—a counterfeit DVD of prophecy. God challenges the prophets who claim to be delivering His words, sarcastically mocking them for saying He came to them in a vision. "I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!' " (Can't you just hear God doing a little falsetto as he mimics the false prophets?)

### **Chapter 24 and Chapter 25**

The Bad Food and Drink section. Chapter 24 is all about bad figs. (Metaphor alert: bad fig=bad Jerusalemites). In Chapter 25, Jeremiah forces all the kings of the world to drink from the Lord's "wine of wrath." Not just drink, actually, but chug it. "Drink, get drunk and vomit, fall and rise no more." This wrath-wine bender represents God's judgment against the whole wicked earth.

### **Chapter 26 through Chapter 28**

Jeremiah's most alarming adventure yet. The Lord instructs him to wear a yoke and visit the kings of Moab, Tyre, Edom, and Judah. There he tells them that they must submit to the yoke of the Babylonians, or else be annihilated. Let's linger on this for a minute, because this is the passage where I finally recognized why Jeremiah bugs me so much. He's a [Quisling](#), a [Tokyo Rose](#)! Jeremiah feels no loyalty to his land or his people—he's so traitorous that he's prodding them to surrender to their mortal enemy!

He's doing it for God, of course. (In this way, he reminds me of the extreme, ultra-orthodox rabbis who, for scriptural reasons, believe the state of Israel is an abomination that is preventing the return of the true Messiah. They're so nuts that they do things like [attend the anti-Holocaust conference in Teheran](#).)

In hindsight, Jeremiah proves to be right. The Babylonians did sack and slaughter, and the Jews were marched off into exile. The lesson in his betrayal of his country is this: All our quotidian bonds—to family, nation, and tribe—are nothing compared with our connection with God. (God made this point emphatically back in Chapter 16 when He denied Jeremiah a wife and children.)

But this doesn't comfort me! I am not strong enough in my faith to set aside family and country for God. And I don't want to be. Jeremiah is a righteous prophet, but I can't help feeling that he's also a terrible traitor.

*Thoughts on Blogging the Bible? Please e-mail David Plotz at [plotzd@slate.com](mailto:plotzd@slate.com). (E-mail may be quoted by name unless the writer stipulates otherwise.)*

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Chris Johnson writes:

You asked, in reference to Isaiah 40's term "The Circle of the Earth," whether this implies that the ancient Israelites believed

the world was round. I'm not a "historian, archaeologist, or scientist," but I am a cartography enthusiast, and I think I can answer the question.

Mapmakers of the ancient world (see Wikipedia's entry on "History of cartography" at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_cartography](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_cartography)) usually depicted the earth as a flat disk, like a dinner plate, with the ocean around the rim. Kinda like Terry Pratchett's Discworld, but without A'Tuin or the elephants. It's most likely that this flat disk is the "Circle of the Earth" the prophet is referring to. The basic round shape of the earth (whether flat or spherical) could be inferred by observing the earth's shadow on the moon during an eclipse. The Greek Eratosthenes (second century B.C.) may have been the first with empirical evidence of the spherical shape of the Earth (see the first episode of Carl Sagan's *Cosmos* for a nice demonstration). Others like Pythagoras (sixth century B.C.) and Aristotle (fourth century B.C.), also believed the earth was spherical. However, this Isaiah lived well before all these highfalutin' Greeks.

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I spent a week in Israel on a media junket sponsored by the American Israel Education Foundation, a nonprofit arm of the American Israel Political Affairs Committee. They arranged meetings with prominent politicians and journalists, sent us on a helicopter tour of the West Bank and Golan Heights, dispatched us to military bases, gave us gold-plated tours of archeological sites and museums, wined and dined us, and generally arm-twisted us to sympathize with Israel.

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When one of my fellow travelers asked Peres for his vision of Israel's future, he offered this reply (you'll have to imagine his heavily accented, Kissingerian English):

*"What will the future look like for Israel? I can only tell you what I hope it will look like: a combination of the Bible and the Internet."*

The Bible and the Internet? Mr. Peres, meet ... Blogging the Bible.

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## chatterbox

### Bush's Baby Einstein Gaffe

The president lionizes a mountebank.

By Timothy Noah

Wednesday, January 24, 2007, at 6:56 PM ET

In his Jan. 23 [State of the Union address](#) (click [here](#) for the video), President Bush paused briefly to pay tribute to a few everyday American heroes who'd been brought to the Capitol to sit beside his wife during the speech. It's a State of the Union tradition that began in 1982, when Ronald Reagan [saluted Lenny Skutnik](#), a federal employee who, two weeks earlier, had plunged into the icy Potomac during a snowstorm to rescue the survivor of an airline crash. For the succeeding 25 years, every January some hapless White House functionary has been called upon to find a few new heroes to park next to the first lady in the House visitor's gallery. The supply was bound eventually to run a little thin, but whoever chose Julie Aigner-Clark, founder of the [Baby Einstein Co.](#), should have done a little more research.

There she was, sitting with [Wesley Autrey](#), who leapt in front of a New York City subway train to rescue a complete stranger, and [Army Sgt. Tommy Reiman](#), who repelled an enemy attack in Iraq with two legs full of shrapnel and bullet wounds in his arms and chest. Aigner-Clark's presence was, to say the least, incongruous. Here is how Bush summarized her achievement:

After her daughter was born, Julie Aigner-Clark searched for ways to share her love of music and art with her child. So she borrowed some equipment, and began filming children's videos in her basement. The Baby Einstein Company was born, and in just five years her business grew to more than \$20 million in sales. In November 2001, Julie sold Baby Einstein to the Walt Disney Company, and with her help Baby Einstein has grown into a \$200 million business. Julie represents the great enterprising spirit of America. And she is using her success to help others—producing [child safety videos](#) with John Walsh of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Julie says of her new project: "I believe it's the most important thing that I have ever done. I believe that children have the right to live in a world that is safe." And so tonight, we are pleased to welcome this talented business entrepreneur and generous social entrepreneur—Julie Aigner-Clark.



[That's](#) high praise for a businesswoman who (if I may be permitted a cynical moment) gave not a dime either to Bush or to the Republican National Committee during the last four election cycles.\* What is Aigner-Clark's achievement? She got rich marketing videos to infants. No one told the president, I presume, that this profit-making scheme ignores advice from the American Academy of Pediatrics that children under 2 years of age [shouldn't watch TV](#). One [recent study](#) went so far as to suggest, plausibly, that too much TV at so early an age can be a risk factor for autism. (See the Oct. 2006 *Slate* piece, "[TV Might Really Cause Autism](#)" by Gregg Easterbrook.)

Baby Einstein is part of what Alissa Quart, in an August 2006 piece in the *Atlantic* ("[Extreme Parenting](#)"), called the Baby Genius Edutainment Complex, an industry that preys on the status anxiety of neurotic parents who, until Aigner-Clark and others told them otherwise, didn't sweat the meritocratic rat race until it was time to place their pint-sized strivers in preschool. That changed in the mid-1990s, when Don Campbell, extrapolating wildly from earlier research involving *college students* that, Quart writes, *has never been duplicated*, trademarked the slogan "Mozart effect" and used it to market classical-music CDs for infants. Aigner-Clark followed suit with her Baby Einstein videos in 1997.

"Essentially," Harvard Medical School psychologist Susan Lynn [told](#) the *Chicago Tribune* "Media Mom" (and occasional *Slate* contributor) Nell Minow in December 2005,

the baby video industry is a scam. There's no evidence that the videos are educational for babies, and a review of the research on babies and videos concludes that while older babies can imitate simple actions from a video they've seen several times, they learn much more rapidly from real life.

In May, a child-advocacy nonprofit filed a [complaint](#) to the Federal Trade Commission about Aigner-Clark's creation, alleging that claims made on the videos' behalf (example: With *Baby DaVinci*, "your child will learn to identify her different body parts, and also discover her five senses ... in Spanish, English, and French!") are deceptive and false. Filed with the complaint were letters of support from the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) and the [American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry](#). "The reality," wrote the American Academy of Pediatrics, "is that parents play the videos to give themselves some time to do other household chores, like cooking dinner or doing laundry. However, they shouldn't be led to believe that it helps their baby."

There's a sucker born every minute, but only a select few get to be president of the United States.

[Clairification](#), Jan. 25: As usual, my problem isn't that I'm too cynical but rather that I'm not cynical enough. A reader alerts me that although Julie Aigner-Clark didn't contribute to Bush or the Republican National Committee during the last four election cycles, her husband and business partner, William E. Clark, [gave \\$5,150 to Bush and the RNC](#) during the 2004 cycle. ([Return](#) to the piece.)

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## chatterbox

### The Academy's Fatty Problem

Why didn't Richard Griffiths get nominated for *The History Boys*?

By Timothy Noah

Tuesday, January 23, 2007, at 7:44 PM ET

The most moving film performance that I saw a male actor give in 2006 was [Richard Griffiths](#) as Hector, the teacher/hero of [The History Boys](#). Yet in a year of relatively undistinguished leading-man performances, Griffiths failed to receive an [Oscar nomination](#) for best actor. Maybe Griffiths got overlooked because the academy disdains film adaptations of stage plays (though that doesn't seem to have hurt *Dreamgirls*, which got eight nominations). Maybe Griffiths lost the Anglophile vote to Peter O'Toole, nominated for his performance in *Venus* (though the academy's use of [proportional voting](#) in its nominations, a system [beloved by the left](#) because it gives smaller groups greater power, is supposed to minimize such scenarios). I suspect a different handicap. Griffiths is very fat.

My admiration for Griffiths' performance in *The History Boys* is not some quirky and embattled opinion. Griffiths has been widely praised for his performance in the film, and when he played the same role on stage he won a [best actor Tony](#) on Broadway and a [best actor Olivier](#) in London. All major roles in the film were played by the same actors who originated them at London's National Theater, where I saw the play in 2004, and on a subsequent world tour that finished up this past fall in New York. With the exception of Clive Merrison's manic turn as the opportunistic headmaster, every performance translated beautifully from stage to screen. Griffiths' performance acquired, if anything, a deeper resonance when seen in close-up. (On the whole I preferred the film to the stage play, for reasons extraneous to my argument here. I've related them in a "Spoiler Special" [podcast](#) with *Slate* film critic Dana Stevens.)

Why no academy nomination? Looking back over a complete list of previous winners in the [best actor](#) and [actress](#) categories, I can locate only one fat person. That was Charles Laughton, who won [playing Henry VIII](#) in 1933. And even Laughton wasn't all that fat compared both to Griffiths and to the [mountainlike presence](#) Laughton would become later in his career. A few other best actors and best actresses might at worst be called "somewhat beefy." I'm thinking of Emil Jannings, Marie

Dressler, Victor McLaglen, Broderick Crawford, Ernest Borgnine, Rod Steiger, John Wayne, George C. Scott, Kathy Bates, Anthony Hopkins, and Philip Seymour Hoffman. The categories of best *supporting* actor and actress are more hospitable to endomorphs, just as they're more hospitable to the handicapped and members of minority groups. (It's OK to be fat or black or the wearer of a prosthetic device, apparently, so long as you don't hog the whole picture.) Consequently you have [Jane Darwell](#) fatly playing Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*, [Thomas Mitchell](#) in *Stagecoach*, [Charles Coburn](#) in *The More the Merrier*, Burl Ives in *The Big Country*, and [Margaret Rutherford](#) in *The V.I.P.s*. [Hattie McDaniel](#) won a best supporting actress award for *Gone With the Wind*, and she was both African-American and fat! Sixty-eight years later, Jennifer Hudson, also African-American and fat, gave what is said to be a wonderful leading-role performance in *Dreamgirls* (haven't seen it myself) but got slotted into the ghettoized category of best *supporting* actress.

It is well-known that audiences don't especially like directing their gaze at people who fail to conform to their notions of normality and physical attractiveness. This is nowhere so true as at the movies. But it's a tad dismaying to learn that even the film professionals who decide on academy nominations are susceptible to this small-mindedness. Hell, even *critics* are susceptible to it; in his *New Republic* review, Stanley Kauffman opined, apropos of nothing, that Griffiths had "the most grotesquely obese figure I can remember in an actor." (Kauffman liked the performance but weirdly downplayed its significance, saying the role was "a piece of cake for Griffiths, as it would be for any competent actor.") Fat people are subjected to particular scorn and discomfort, because they are often thought (usually mistakenly) to have gotten that way through self-indulgence. This is a particularly inapt view in Griffiths' case, because his obesity came about as a result of an ill-considered radiation treatment when he was 8 years old—for being too skinny, of all things. Griffiths told Joyce Wadler of the *New York Times* that within 12 months of the treatment, his body weight increased by 60 percent. Of course, Griffiths' weight is entirely irrelevant in any case. Alan Bennett, who wrote the play and the movie, included in his text no reference to the size of Hector, the teacher whom Griffiths plays. (The fellow [currently playing](#) Hector on London's West End is of average size.) What matters is not the size of the actor, but the size of the performance. In that sense, Griffiths is, I believe, too large to ignore.

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## chatterbox

### O.J., Volume 2

The new memoir he's peddling is far more obscene than the first.

By Timothy Noah

Monday, January 22, 2007, at 6:57 PM ET

The public reaction to O.J. Simpson's literary endeavors continues to beggar sense. A book that no one should have protested was shouted down, and the book that everyone should be protesting is raising nary a peep.

Let's review.

*Round 1.* Word that Simpson has penned (with ghostwriter and Simpson prosecution witness Pablo Fenjves) a memoir/confession titled *If I Did It* causes a public uproar so severe that Rupert Murdoch, chairman of News Corp., whose HarperCollins unit is to publish the book, [cancels publication and deep-sixes a taped Fox interview with Simpson conducted by the book's editor, Judith Regan](#). Simpson is finally [ready to confess](#) (albeit "hypothetically") to murdering Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman, a gesture that, double jeopardy notwithstanding, couldn't possibly be in his legal interest. (Simpson's lawyer, Yale Galanter, [has said](#) that Simpson kept him in the dark until it was a *fait accompli*, and that had he known he would have told Simpson that even a "hypothetical" confession was too risky.)

Regan says the book's key chapter ("The Night In Question") amounts to a [real confession](#). ("This is an historic case, and I consider this his confession.") So, more elliptically, does [Fenjves](#). ("I was sitting in a room with a man I knew to be a murderer, and I let him hang himself.") So does the working title (*I Did It*) that Simpson bestows and later withdraws in favor of the more cautious *If I Did It*. So does [Newsweek's Mark Miller](#). ("A seeming confession in Simpson's own voice.") So does [Vanity Fair's James Wolcott](#) ("a shameless yet ingeniously opaque cockteaser of a cash-in confessional"), though Wolcott makes the error of attributing "poetic license" to Fenjves, which is what [Simpson alleges](#), when in fact Fenjves has [made clear](#) to me that any poetic license in Simpson's account would be Simpson's alone. ("He thinks I wrote that chapter. He also thinks he didn't kill Nicole and Ron.")

But I digress.

The point is that a consensus emerges that this is a real murder confession. Yet an outraged public tells Simpson it *does not want to hear* his confession, which conceivably could provide prosecutors an opportunity to put Simpson behind bars. (To be sure, not for murder. He beat that rap. But there are [other avenues](#).)

Result: Simpson gets most of HarperCollins' blood money anyway (as I read the [book contract](#), Simpson received \$655,000 to \$750,000 of his \$1.1 million advance; Goldman's family, which has a [\\$33.5 million civil judgment](#) against Simpson, is suing to recover these book payments). Yet Simpson won't have to publish his self-incriminating book after all. The book's nonpublication also moots HarperCollins' hosing Simpson—who

in addition to cutting out Galanter seems to have eschewed the services of an [experienced literary agent](#)—on the schedule for royalty payments. Why care about the royalty payments now that there aren't going to be any?

Round 1 to Simpson.

*Round 2.* Galanter starts peddling a [second Simpson book](#), this one an account of Simpson's life with Nicole, and this time Simpson has taken his lawyer's advice and left out the murder. Almost certainly this second book is simply *If I Did It* minus "The Night In Question," repackaged as a new book. And guess what? This time out, the public does *not* go into an uproar. In fact, it scarcely notices. Galanter tells ABC News that his phone is "ringing off the hook" with offers. After HarperCollins canceled *If I Did It*, not even the sleaziest bottom-feeding publishers dared express interest. Now, according to Galanter, "Everybody ... is interested."

The new book will not generate cheap thrills by recounting the night of the murder. Presumably that's why it passes muster. But minus a murder confession, any account by Simpson of his life with the wife he physically abused and then finally killed lacks any shred of redeeming value. The portions of *If I Did It* relating Simpson's relationship with Nicole are apparently quite ugly. Here's Wolcott's description (he's read the entire book):

She's the instigator, the initiator, the catalyst, the live wire, the active volcano, the electric cattle prod. ... He's trying to keep it together and get on with his life, and she's cat-and-mousing him, mind-gaming him, tugging on the hook. As he tries to move forward, she's stuck in self-destructive reverse, acting and dressing like a teenager with her twat in a snit and, rumors reach him, hanging with a bad crowd.

"[S]ince dead blondes tell no tales, her side of the story isn't available for airing," Wolcott notes. One might further add that a man who murders his wife in a jealous rage will surely go the extra mile to demonize the victim. This "new" book, then, will be a continuation of the abuse that Simpson subjected Nicole to while she was still alive. That really *is* obscene and indefensible. Whoever publishes *If I Did It*-lite will become Simpson's accomplice in [spousal battery](#). Why isn't the public outraged about *that*?

Round 2 to Simpson.

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## corrections

### Corrections

Friday, January 26, 2007, at 12:01 PM ET

In a Jan. 26 "[Today's Papers](#)," Daniel Politi incorrectly identified the writer of a *Los Angeles Times* column on Baby Einstein products and the State of the Union address as Ruth Marcus. The writer is Rosa Brooks.

In a Jan. 25 "[Has-Been](#)" blog entry, Bruce Reed incorrectly wrote that the television show *Psych* airs on Fox. It airs on the USA network.

In a Jan. 20 "[Today's Papers](#)," Ryan Grim erred in his analysis of a *New York Times* piece, "Armenian Editor Is Slain in Turkey." Contrary to the *Slate* assertion, the *Times* treats the Armenian genocide as fact, not historical interpretation. The newspaper's decision to mention the Turkish government's official stance—that "the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Armenians resulted from hunger and other suffering in World War I"—does not amount to an acknowledgment of that view's legitimacy.

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## culturebox

### Women in Love

On Patty Marx, Christopher Hitchens, and funny women.

By Laura Kipnis

Wednesday, January 24, 2007, at 4:47 PM ET

Life is long and the world is small—so much so that you occasionally encounter one of your former boyfriends turning up as a thinly disguised character in one of his previous girlfriend's satiric novels. Or so a swirl of prepublication rumor led me to believe. Naturally, I was most eager to get my hands on a copy of Patricia Marx's rather weirdly titled [Him Her Him Again The End of Him](#), the book-cum-poison-pen-letter in question. Wouldn't you be?

Additionally, there's the fact that Marx is a former writer for *Saturday Night Live*, was the first woman elected to the *Harvard Lampoon*, and now writes occasional comic pieces for *The New Yorker*, meaning that she's been certified by various arbiters of American humor as "a funny woman." This is an exceedingly rare genus, at least according to a recent Christopher Hitchens throw-down in *Vanity Fair*, titled "Why Women Aren't Funny." Clearly, when it comes to sexual politics, Hitchens likes to get the ladies hoppin'. His argument is that men are simply more motivated than women are to be funny since men want sex from women (whereas we can all get it any time, on demand). And if a guy can get a girl to laugh, real open-mouthed, teeth-exposed, "involuntary, full and deep-throated mirth ... well then, you have

at least caused her to loosen up and to change her expression." You know what he means. *Deep throated*. Women also aren't funny because women are the ones who have to bear the children, these children might die, and you can't really make jokes about that.

Now, this is a rather fascinating portrait of female nature and relations between the sexes, though it's unclear to which decade it applied—it has the slightly musty air of [1960-ish Kingsley Amis](#), wrapped in nostalgia for the merry days when sexual conquest required an arsenal of tactics deployed by bon-vivantish cads on girdled, girlish sexual holdouts. "*Oh Mr. Hitchens!*" you imagine one of the potential conquests squealing at an errant hand on nylon-clad knee.

By contrast, the unnamed heroine of Marx's *Him Her Him* Again *The End of Him* is pathetically eager to have sex whenever possible with a man possessing absolutely no sense of humor whatsoever. The "him" is Eugene Lobello, a philosopher and academic Lothario who relieves the inexperienced protagonist of her unwanted virginity at the advanced age of 21, while both are postgraduates at Cambridge. Not only is Eugene not funny, he's utterly charmless, except—inexplicably—to the insecure and self-deprecating heroine. Her friends all think he's a pretentious twit who's jerking her around, but having bestowed her virginity on him, she's apparently able to forgive him any form of churlish behavior. All she really wants is for the purportedly brilliant and infinitely narcissistic Eugene to think she's smart: Thus she develops a subspecialty in the erudite quip, a source of the book's funnier moments. On William Empson: "Don't you think a better title would be *Seven or Eight Types of Ambiguity?*"

There's nothing more alluring than an unreliable boyfriend, and Eugene plays the role to the hilt, not least when he dumps the heroine to marry and impregnate the annoying and sniffly Margaret. (Quips the abandoned protagonist: "Hypochondriacs make me sick.") Her creative solution to Eugene's romantic flight is to rent the apartment directly above the newlyweds, where she can smell the curry odors wafting up from the dinner parties they don't invite her to. Clearly, Marx is sending up the overly familiar terrain of *Women Who Love Too Much*—and you'd definitely like to get this girl on Dr. Phil for one of his tough-talking butt-kickings—though the humor ends up being far more at the heroine's expense than at Eugene's. Eugene may be the ostensible target—saddled with lines like "Your kisses are so recondite, my peach, that they are almost notional"—but she's the one who relentlessly loves such a buffoon. These characters live in different comedic universes: He's cartoonish, obtuse as an Oxbridge Homer Simpson, whereas her self-reflections often have the ring of real human pondering. She's not unaware that Eugene doesn't love her, and that arguing and pleading and phoning a lot is a good way to "make someone who was hitherto lukewarm really detest you." Unfortunately, the less he loves her, the more convinced she becomes that "he and I could have been just the thing."

And remains convinced. Seven years later, Eugene turns up in New York, where our still terminally insecure heroine now lives, having landed and been fired from a number of jobs (including one as a writer on a *Saturday Night Live*-like TV show called *Taped But Proud*), and she readily takes up with him once again. Eugene is in training to become a psychoanalyst (as a philosopher, he'd specialized in ego studies), and, though still married to Margaret, he lures the heroine into an affair that drags on for years. As a shrink, he's no more reliable than as a boyfriend: His pillow talk consists of divulging all his patients' secrets, and in the end it turns out he's been sleeping with one of his more attractive analysands, for whom he—yet again!—summarily dumps the heroine.

If there's humor to be milked from the (tragically, all too common) situation of loving someone who doesn't love you back, or from the variety of self-abnegating female behavior on display here, let's call it the humor of painful recognition. The comedy hinges on a willingness to recognize the element of truth in the parody. But the humor of painful recognition is also an inherently conservative social form, especially when it comes to conventional gender behaviors, because it just further hardens such behaviors into "the way things are." The laughter depends not only on our recognizing the world as it supposedly is, but on our leaving it that way; it questions nothing. Consider, by contrast, someone like [Sarah Silverman](#), whose scabrous humor, delivered in that faux-naive girly voice, leaves exactly nothing the same. When Silverman takes on female abjection—most famously, "I was raped by my doctor. Which is such a poignant experience for a Jewish girl"—the clichés are demolished, not upheld; the world as it was is turned on its ear. The laughter isn't from painful recognition, it's the shock and pleasure of smashing conventions instead of toadying to them.

If Hitchens is right and women are less funny than men, this insight applies to the public sphere alone. Women can be scathingly funny in private, especially when it comes to finely honed observations about the romantic conduct of men. And here Marx is a particularly keen observer. I must say that I was disappointed not to recognize more of my own ex in Eugene, apart from a few superficial similarities—that is, until I came to one small moment between Eugene and the heroine, after he re-enters her life. All that happens is this: The two of them are on the couch; he looks at her intently, makes a beckoning gesture with his forefinger, and says, "Come here."

That *did* have an awfully familiar ring to it. Back when I was on the receiving end of the move, I remember thinking that it seemed a bit Cary Grant-ish. But it never actually occurred to me that I was getting recycled material. I also admit that it never really occurred to me how funny it was. All I can say is that if even our most intimate moments turn out to be pre-scripted, well, obviously these can be anxious endeavors: Failure hovers, rejection looms. I suppose there's a small buffer of security in playing a part, or relying on what worked before. To the extent



that women generally refrain from publicly mocking male seduction techniques (despite the comedic gold mine of material), I'd say that a bit of social gratitude is in order. It's not that women aren't funny, we're merely being polite—perhaps too polite. But then where would heterosexuality end up if we weren't?

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## culturebox

### Men Without Tights

Comics that reinvent the superhero genre.

By Dan Kois

Monday, January 22, 2007, at 6:36 PM ET

NBC's series *Heroes*, about a group of ordinary people who suddenly acquire extraordinary abilities, is among the year's biggest hits—it attracted [16 million viewers](#) for one episode during November sweeps. The show returns Monday night, as the heroes attempt to avert a nuclear explosion in New York. *Heroes* is but the latest example of a superhero story becoming popular outside the comics medium; movies like *Spider-Man* and *X-Men* and TV shows like *Lois & Clark* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* have all given their protagonists extraordinary powers and achieved success.

Tim Kring, the creator of *Heroes*, admits to enjoying comic-book storytelling without having a deep background in the genre. He's proudly [declared](#) that his series diverges from comic books by presenting character-driven stories in which superpowers merely play a supporting role. But starting in the 1980s, many comic books embedded superpowers in recognizably real people and their superheroes in the real world. The progenitor of the trend is generally considered to be Alan Moore, whose *Watchmen*, written in 1986, was one of the first comics to seriously consider the dilemmas caped crusaders might face. In the 1990s and 2000s, comics creators have been even freer with the superhero tradition, doing away entirely with capes and tights, or mashing up the hero genre with comedy, coming-of-age, or romance. *Heroes* doesn't have a monopoly on humanizing the superhero story, or wrestling with the practical and ethical quandaries of superpowers; many contemporary comics are doing the same.

Click for a slide show on some of the most inventive superhero comics.

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## day to day For Their Consideration

Tuesday, January 23, 2007, at 3:50 PM ET

**Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2007**

### Movies: Academy Announces Oscar Nominees

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has announced this year's Oscar nominees. The best-picture nominees are *The Departed*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Babel*, *Letters From Iwo Jima*, and *The Queen*. Dana Stevens talks with Madeleine Brand about the selection. [Listen](#) to the segment.

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## dear prudence Time Bomb

When do I tell a suitor about my dangerous condition that could affect our future?

Thursday, January 25, 2007, at 7:18 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](mailto:prudence@slate.com). (Questions may be edited.)

### Dear Prudence,

I'm a professional woman in her 30s doing very well in life, except for the fact that I just got diagnosed with a brain condition that requires dangerous surgery. I exhibit no signs, look and act quite healthy, and must wait to have the surgery anywhere from three months to 20 years, depending on how my condition progresses. My parents, family, and friends are always introducing me and setting me up on dates, but I'm just too concerned about my life and future to make someone suffer. I sabotage dates because I don't want to tell them my condition and think it's unfair to put a burden on someone like that if I kept it a secret. I know that if I meet someone I like, I have to take a chance and let them know about my condition before moving forward to any serious relationship, and hope they don't run. But I also must tolerate the rumors about still being single with silence from family and friends whom I don't mean to offend. I feel so stuck.

—Brain Drain

### Dear Drain,

Please join a support group, either in person or online, for people who share your condition. The uncertainty about the progression of disease must be intensely anxiety-provoking, and you will be helped by talking with others who are going through this. It's also perfectly understandable that figuring out how to make sense of what you're facing is taking all your energy, and you're disinclined to pursue new relationships. Gradually, your



condition will just be one fact of your life, not the main fact, and you will feel ready again for romance. No one wants to have an "I need to tell you something about myself" conversation, but you already know that it's one you'll need to have with the right person (that is, someone you're interested in, and who is interested in you). So, discussing your medical condition is not something you have to do on the first (or second, or third) date. There is no rule for when to tell, but you will know you're ready when you feel you're unfairly withholding information. And as for telling, it sounds as if you haven't told your family and closest friends. Don't you think this is something those who care about you the most should know?

—Prudie

**Dear Prudie,**

Two of my good friends are engaged, and the wedding is planned for later this year. They are genuinely satisfied with and committed to each other, and I want to see both of them happy. Problem is, I've been smitten by the bride-to-be ever since I met her. At the time, I was in another relationship, but by the time that ended, her relationship with my buddy had blossomed. As the wedding date approaches, I can't help feeling like I need to say something before all opportunity fades. I know I should just get over her, but even after dating others, my mind's eye comes back to her. To top it all off, they want me to be the best man. I feel increasingly dishonest by omission, but I don't want to sabotage two meaningful friendships. Should I tell her? Should I tell anyone? Or should I do what I've done for the last few years and just keep my mouth shut?

—Not-Quite-Best Man

Dear Not,

I hope you are not planning to re-enact the final scene of *The Graduate* and abscond with the bride (if you do, at least don't take a bus). Your two friends have made their decision. Maybe the bride-to-be has even picked up over the years that you are sweet on her, but was relieved you never did anything about it. Continue not doing anything about it. Since they are your friends, and you are happy for them, keep a smile on your face during the ceremony—your duties as best man are not so onerous that you can't fake your way through the day. You can, however, start exploring now why you would put your romantic life in limbo for someone (even if you think she's the one) you can't have. Could it be that not being able to have her is an essential ingredient of her allure?

—Prudie

**Dear Prudence,**

Something has been eating away at me and I don't know what to do. I am an executive at a large company. About a decade ago, when I was just getting started, I became acquainted with a manager at this company who seemed interested in taking me

under his wing. He was a terrific mentor, and I owe much of my current success to the knowledge and insight he passed along to me in those early years. He was also married with children. I was young, attractive, and single. As we grew closer, I became aware that he was separated and seeking a divorce. You can probably guess that eventually our relationship became sexual. This lasted a few months, and then he broke it off. I knew it was not right at the time, but I was naive and inexperienced, and I really believed he was in the midst of a divorce (not that that's any excuse). Now I am older, wiser, married to a wonderful man, and have a child. I still work at this company, as does my former mentor, but we don't see each other much. I am plagued with guilt about this past relationship! Our affair was a profound betrayal of his wife and family (by the way, he never did get divorced) and I can't believe we did that to them. I don't regret meeting him, but I deeply regret our affair. What I can do?

—Guilty

Dear Guilty,

I have a suspicion you are not the only young woman to have thought Mr. Mentor was in the middle of a divorce. It shows your maturity that you now regret getting involved with him, but the offense is mitigated by the fact that you were misled into believing his marriage was over. Why are you "plagued" by something you did long ago and did not repeat (as he likely has)? Is it because now that you have a family of your own, you understand what would be lost if you or your husband committed adultery? You have beaten yourself up sufficiently over a youthful lapse. If you can't let it go, then you should talk to a therapist to figure out why this short-lived event continues to have such a hold on you.

—Prudie

**Dear Prudence,**

My wife and I are expecting our first child, who will be the first grandchild for her parents and my widowed mother. They couldn't be happier, and we are excited to share the experience with them and the rest of our families. The problem is that I'm at a crossroads in my career. My education and training are in a very specialized field. I have searched in vain for positions located near our families, who live close to each other in the rural Midwest. I have had more than one amazing job offer far from home. Remaining close to our families would mean settling for much less in the career department. Although my mother would never say it, I know her heart would be broken if we moved to the East Coast with her newborn grandchild. Neither of our families has enough money to make frequent visits by airplane. I realize that either choice involves sacrifice. Is life too short not to spend time with family, or too long not to be concerned about job satisfaction?

—Unsure

Dear Unsure,  
Growing up with your grandparents in the same town is a wonderful thing. Growing up with a father who's increasingly frustrated that he settled for a job he doesn't care about and gave up his dream career for is not. Put your education to use and take that fabulous job. But don't think of it as getting on a ship and saying goodbye to the old people in the old country, never to be seen again. It's true your child can't hang out with grandparents every weekend, but it only costs a few hundred dollars to fly from the Midwest to the East Coast. If that job is fabulous enough, you should be able to get a place with a guest room so the grandparents can come for long visits. As your children grow up, think how they'll love the adventure of summer vacations in the country. And if, in the end, the pull of home is too strong, you can always buy one of those cheap family fares and move back.

—Prudie

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## dvd extras

### Replaying Brando

How DVD adds new depth to his greatness.

By Stanley Crouch

Thursday, January 25, 2007, at 4:02 PM ET

Marlon Brando's peers, imitators, and most extreme fans mistake him when they claim that he was the greatest film actor we have ever seen. Misled, they push this perspective primarily because of Brando's mumbling, posing, raging, and pouting—influential moves that were copied because they constituted a style perfect for expressing men with adolescent limitations. Yet Brando used these techniques only for certain characters and found other ways to lift his roles into life. While it's understandable that Brando would be celebrated for his visceral portrayal of adolescent limitations at a time, after World War II, when that archetype began to overtake American society, that wasn't Brando's principal talent. The aesthetic fact of the matter is that Brando's main achievement was to portray the taciturn but stoic gloom of those pulverized by circumstances. He was one of our finest cinematic poets of defeat.

As William Carlos Williams pointed out, our culture tends to confuse a tragic figure with a *loser*. This means that the admission and rueful acceptance of having been beaten by life form the grand personal tragedy in the American context. With so few examples of how well this sensibility can be articulated, the American actor of sensitive instincts soon realizes that the expression of defeat or of tragedy is one of the hardest things to do and still remain beyond sentimental overstatement. But Brando was capable of making extreme sentimentality part of a character's temperament, and the actor's facility in the dangerous

world of emotional pathos granted him some of the supreme moments in American cinema.

We can now understand *On the Waterfront* (1954) as a foreshadowing of the deepest meanings of the nonviolent tactics of the civil rights movement. Brando is most heartbreaking in the scenes with Eva Marie Saint, when he expresses through Terry Malloy a feeling of impotence and complicity in murderous corruption. Brando, so aware of how much Malloy wants the girl to respect him, brings a masterfully subtle and meek tone of apology to the voice, face, and gestures of a young man who can no longer try to be tough and unconcerned in the face of debasing mob rule.

In those scenes, Brando individuated the universal common man under the thumb of ruthless power, a type of individual whom we saw rise to bring change in the colonial, the capitalist, and even the totalitarian worlds given so much debilitating day-to-day detail by writers like Milan Kundera. Almost any good actor could have portrayed Terry Malloy in his rageful and anarchic moments, which we have seen many times, in everything from Westerns to crime stories. The excruciating shame that Terry feels for having hidden his abundant fear behind a bluffing mask of false worldliness could have been given such stinging three-dimensionality by only a few, and Marlon Brando was one of them.

Don't believe the hype: Brando's Terry Malloy did not come out of nowhere. His was an extension of the American blues within the context embodied by Gary Cooper in *Meet John Doe* (1941), Henry Fonda in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), and Jimmy Stewart in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), all of whom had a heroic gripe with some aspect of the system. What Brando actually did was bring the new urban harmonies necessary to whisper and belt out the blues created by the gangster forces in the shadow world of the city. Almost no such moments are contained in *The Marlon Brando Collection* of DVDs. It is an unrepresentative collection of the actor at the height of his intimately provocative talents, but it *does* contain two masterpieces of performance so different from one another that the breadth and certitude of Brando's range is bracing.

One is Brando's Fletcher Christian in *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1962), a character he interprets as a high-toned British fop who is more than mildly reluctant to face the sadistic inclinations of Trevor Howard's finely drawn Capt. Bligh—a leader who mistakes sadism as a substitute for firm but inspirational command. Brando has a superb understanding of how much it takes for a witty, charming, and insubstantial man to stand up against the very order that guarantees his position in the world. But his finest moment is the point at which Christian asks if he is going to die. The question quakes with a soft but desperate tone devoid of privilege or mannered cultivation. When told his

wounds are fatal, the leader of the mutiny responds with a timeless look of doomed recognition that stands with the best.

The other masterpiece is Brando's tragically repressed homosexual in *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1967), which has scalding moments of self-realization that might equal in visual eloquence the darker mirrors into which Shakespeare's characters peer. That might sound like a mediocre instance of contemporary toadying to a legendary star, but let me explain. In the theater, an actor's voice and body communicate to the audience most fully because many of those in the seats cannot make out facial expression to any great extent. Film made the face, rather than the voice, the actor's ultimate solo instrument and the close-up into a cinematic cadenza through which unprecedented facial expression was possible. When a master of Brando's talent is at work, a picture that is equal to the words of Shakespeare becomes a moving phenomenon, and prodigious levels of revelation are available to the eye.

The replays made possible through DVD now give film performances a quality akin to the book in which one can read a passage over and over for enjoyment, for understanding, or for the discovery of how technique functions. So, today's viewer experiences a film far differently than audiences did in the past. As we all know, one can not only buy and take home a film, one can leap forward or backward to a favorite or a puzzling scene, and even change the visual velocity, revealing much that the eye can't see at the original speed. A given scene can be played back like a favorite aria or a jazz improvisation in recorded performance. While the reductive aspect of this technology makes many special effects far less special, it also clarifies that an actor of Brando's caliber is the most remarkable special effect that film can provide.

*Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1967), like any superior film, benefits greatly from the DVD format and the revisions it makes possible. The inclusion of the experimental gold and sepia tone, which was removed from the print shortly after the film was released, allows the audience of our moment to see a film that most did not when it was available in theaters. We now have director John Huston's vision intact. We also have Brando in one of the boldest performances ever given by an actor on screen. What validates that last claim is the exemplary courage of Brando's egoless deep sea dive into his character, Maj. Penderton, whose desperate and arrogantly veiled pathos tellingly overflows twice. The character's central problem is his feeling of inadequacy, of being less than he should, and his terrible loneliness because of the difficulty of handling his attraction to men.

Brando reaches a nearly matchless desolation in the first instance of overflowing when his attempt to secretly equal his wife's control of her stallion is thwarted by the horse's power, which he cannot meet with the necessary combination of confident ease

and equally confident force. When the stallion smells his fear, it is spooked into running through blueberry bushes that tear the animal's flesh and cut the face of the rider. The humiliation felt by a man facing the terrible pain of his limitations is far more intimate than cutting embarrassment—Brando evokes a moment of horrifying pathos. One thinks of Olivier's well-remembered theater cry after Oedipus has plucked his eyes out, for which the actor used the image of a seal shrieking when its tongue is stuck to the ice until it's clubbed to death by hunters. In the case of Brando's Maj. Penderton, the feeling is banked neither by having a tantrum nor by brutalizing the stallion with a tree branch; the violent action only deepens his sorrow to such a degree that the failed horseman slowly descends into apologetic sobs that cannot be held down. If a more shattering moment is available on film, I would like to know what it is.

The performance is not at all perfect, but its successes are so enormous that mistakes of tone and imposed intent become insignificant. Small are the number of actors who have been able to so perfectly express a man on the verge of collapsing under the weight of his anguish the way Brando does when Maj. Penderton tries to explain a formidable leader's qualities—all of which the major feels that he lacks himself—to a military class of young men who sense that something is wrong, but don't know what. Brando also does something else that proves his unavoidable position among the very finest performers. Without benefit of makeup and through some almost magical understanding of his facial muscles, he is able to nearly remove all handsomeness from himself and take on the look of a pretentious martinet, so much so that Pauline Kael described his officer as "ugly" when putting on skin-tightening cream and looking for a self who is not there in the mirror the way he would like it to be.

Jazz bassist Ray Brown once said, "They'll call a dog a genius today for bringing back a stick, but that doesn't mean the real thing doesn't exist." The ability that Marlon Brando had to tell us what a character felt, thought, and sensed through his body language, his facial expressions, his vocal nuances, and his gestures pinned the badge of genius through his skin. The actor's tragedy was that he lost faith in his talent, which sometimes seemed so, so far beyond talent, and wallowed in despair and bitter eccentricity for most of his life. Our luck is that this magnificent virtuoso of the endless manifestations of human feeling arrived when, through modern technology, he could be captured acting on a level so profound at its best that we will never be able to exhaust all that he gave.

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## explainer

### USC Loses the Championship!

What will happen if Reggie Bush is declared ineligible?

By Daniel Engber  
Thursday, January 25, 2007, at 6:58 PM ET

The federal government may have [new, taped evidence](#) that former USC football star Reggie Bush accepted cash and gifts while he was still a student. If so, he could be [declared ineligible](#) retroactively, in which case USC might have to forfeit its 2004 national championship as well as all its victories from the 2004 and 2005 seasons. Does it hurt a school to lose a game after the fact?

Only indirectly. The National Collegiate Athletics Association can impose several types of [penalties](#) when a college team breaks its rules. For example, a program may lose the right to grant athletic scholarships or play in the postseason. When it comes to light that a school used ineligible players for games that have already been played, the punishment often includes an order to "[vacate](#)" the results. That means the team must treat those games as if they never happened—they're stricken from the record. (In rare cases, the NCAA may demand a "forfeit," in which case the contested games are marked down as losses.)

The school's athletic department must revise all of its official publications to reflect this change, which can be costly. If the team had to vacate a league or conference championship, it would have to pull down commemorative banners and throw out any other associated publicity materials. Recruiters and fund-raisers would have to eliminate all mention of the retroactively erased season from their printed materials.

A university might also be asked to give back some of the money it earned from the vacated games. A football team might have to turn over its television revenue from any bowl games it played in. Basketball teams that make it to the NCAA tournament are generally required to forfeit 90 percent of their earnings. When the University of Michigan got caught using ineligible players in the 1990s, the program was forced to take down its championship banners and give up revenue from three tournament appearances. The program did, however, get to keep the [millions of dollars](#) it made selling Michigan merchandise during the period.

The decision to alter the historical record can lead to [confusing discrepancies](#). In general, the school that gets penalized must erase all of the affected games from its overall tally of wins and losses. (Ineligible players have their individual records cleared as well; teammates get to keep their stats.) But the team's opponents are under no obligation to update their records. This sort of fuzzy [bookkeeping](#) became a [source of controversy](#) as Texas Tech's Bob Knight approached the [all-time record](#) for Division I wins by a men's basketball coach.

**Bonus Explainer:** Will Reggie Bush have to give up his Heisman Trophy? The trustees who oversee the award [haven't](#)

[decided](#) yet—up to now, no winner has ever been asked to return one. The trophy itself would be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars to a collector. (The government seized O.J. Simpson's award from 1968 and auctioned it off for \$230,000.) But Bush won't be able to get that money no matter what happens: As of the late 1990s, all winners have had to sign away their right to sell the Heisman.

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

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## explainer

### Who Owns the Unabomber's Writings?

Does he have the copyright on his manifestos?

By Christopher Beam

Wednesday, January 24, 2007, at 6:55 PM ET

Federal prisoner Theodore Kaczynski, also known as the "Unabomber," is [suing](#) to keep the government from auctioning off his personal papers to raise money for his victims. Kaczynski wants to donate the manuscripts to the University of Michigan instead. Doesn't the Unabomber have control of his own writings?

Not anymore. When someone is convicted of a crime, they forfeit all sorts of rights. For example, a sex offender might lose his right to privacy and be required to wear an ankle bracelet. A prisoner loses his freedom from searches by prison guards. There are also restrictions on prisoners' freedom of speech: They often have their letters censored, and telephone access is limited. They may have to forfeit their property rights as well. In general, the government can take a convict's contraband, as in a drug case, or any other "fruits and instrumentalities" of a crime, like a getaway car. (Prisoners keep other basic rights, such as the freedom from cruel and unusual punishment.)

The government didn't seize Kaczynski's writings because they were instruments of his crimes, though—they did it to settle debts. Kaczynski owes his victims a total of \$15 million to pay off a restitution order handed down by a federal judge. The government has proposed an online auction of his personal property to raise that money.

The Unabomber's lawsuit focuses on the seizure and sale of his writings: Just because the government has decided to seize a bunch of documents doesn't mean it owns their contents. As the creator of the writings, the Unabomber automatically owns their copyright—which gives him the right to distribute them to the public.

Does the government get the [copyright](#) when it seizes a prisoner's personal writings? Some legal scholars think it does,

although Kaczynski is arguing otherwise. Even if the feds couldn't transfer the copyright on Kaczynski's writings, they'd probably be able to sell them. That's because they're not trying to reproduce them; instead, they're selling the papers as physical objects, along with other items he owned. (The fact that the seizure is nondiscriminatory—and targets all his assets—strengthens the government's case further.)

Kaczynski is arguing that the auction of his work violates First Amendment rights that he has not forfeited as a prisoner. He's challenging the restitution statute itself as unconstitutional, claiming it gives the government too much discretion in which papers to seize and sell. He may also argue that seizing his writings has a chilling effect on free speech—what's to say the government wouldn't confiscate his future writings? This would be difficult to prove, though, since the government is not stopping him from writing any new manifestos.

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

*The Explainer thanks Vincent Blasi of University of Virginia, and Paul Goldstein and Robert Weisberg of Stanford University.*

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## explainer

### Is Dakota Fanning in Kiddie Porn?

Children having sex on the silver screen.

By Torie Bosch

Tuesday, January 23, 2007, at 7:13 PM ET

*Hounddog* premiered at the Sundance Film Festival Monday, despite [controversy](#) over its depicted rape of a character played by 12-year-old Dakota Fanning. Online petitions have demanded the arrest of [Fanning's mother and agent](#), alleging that the film could be [considered](#) child pornography and asking federal prosecutors to investigate the matter. Is *Hounddog* kiddie porn?

No—it's free speech. According to [federal law](#), you're not allowed to show anyone under the age of 18 engaging in a sexual act. You're also forbidden from creating a scene that even *appears* to depict a real kid having real sex; in legalese, you're in trouble if "an ordinary person viewing the depiction would conclude that the depiction is of an actual minor engaged in sexually explicit conduct." (Similar rules can be found in the penal codes for [California](#), which governs most big-budget Hollywood productions, and North Carolina, where *Hounddog* was filmed.) *Hounddog* does contain a sex scene involving a real-life minor. But for the film to run afoul of the law, an average viewer would have to think that Dakota Fanning really did engage in sexual intercourse on the set during production.

A prosecutor hunting for a kiddie porn conviction would have to make this argument despite the fact that most people know that sex acts in mainstream movies are [almost](#) always mimed. Furthermore, the controversial "rape" in *Hounddog* takes place off-screen: [According](#) to writer/director Deborah Kampmeier, "you have a child yelling 'Stop it!' and only when you put that next to an image of a boy unzipping his pants do you see that it's rape."

If the filmmakers had included a very explicit sex scene—showing on-screen penetration, for example—they'd be in trouble. The movie would be illegal even if they used consenting adult actors and then digitally superimposed Fanning's face onto the woman's body. As long as the average viewer might be duped by the special effect, the scene would be child pornography. (The law doesn't apply to a child character that's 100-percent computer-generated—a la JarJar Binks or [SlmOne](#)—as long as it's not supposed to look like a real, identifiable kid.)

A prosecutor might take a different tack and go after the film for the scenes in which Fanning appears to be nude on-camera. But that would be illegal only if the filmmakers intended the naked scenes to be sexy and stimulating. In any case, the film never shows Fanning in the nude; she always wore a flesh-colored suit while on set, and her genitals were never on display for any reason, prurient or not. Fanning's vocal defense of the film might also be taken into consideration: Child pornography laws are meant to protect children from exploitation, and she does not consider herself a victim.

Because *Hounddog* wouldn't be considered child pornography under federal law, a prosecutor could try to prove that it's obscene under the [rules](#) set out by the 1973 case [Miller v. California](#), in which a pornographer appealed his conviction for distributing obscene material on First Amendment grounds. The Supreme Court ruled that a work is obscene only if it offends community standards, appeals to prurient interests and lacks "serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value." Since *Hounddog* deals with poverty and child abuse, it would be difficult to call it bereft of serious artistic value.

Similar uproars surrounded Brooke Shields' portrayal—at age 12—of a child prostitute in [Pretty Baby](#), and Adrian Lyne's 1997 [remake of Lolita](#). Actress Natalie Portman turned down the title role in Lyne's film, [saying](#), "I don't think there needs to be a movie out where a child has sex with an adult." Lyne ran into [further problems](#) when potential distributors fretted over a 1996 law that contained more strict rules against simulated child sex. (You couldn't show any character appearing to be a child, real or not, in any sexual situation meant to be arousing.) The Supreme Court declared those rules unconstitutional in 2002.

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



Explainer thanks Clay Calvert of Penn State University.

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## family

### Hitting Bottom

Why America should outlaw spanking.

By Emily Bazelon

Thursday, January 25, 2007, at 6:16 PM ET

Sally Lieber, the California assemblywoman who proposed a ban on spanking last week, must be sorry she ever opened her mouth. Before Lieber could introduce her bill, a poll showed that only 23 percent of respondents supported it. Some pediatricians disparaged the idea of outlawing spanking, and her fellow politicians called her crazy. Anyone with the slightest libertarian streak seems to believe that outlawing corporal punishment is silly. More government intrusion, and for what—to spare kids a few swats? Or, if you're pro-spanking, a spanking ban represents a sinister effort to take a crucial disciplinary tool out of the hands of good mothers and fathers—and to encourage the sort of permissive parenting that turns kids ratty and rotten.

Why, though, are we so eager to retain the right to hit our kids? Lieber's ban would apply only to children under the age of 4. Little kids may be the most infuriating; they are also the most vulnerable. And if you think that most spanking takes place in a fit of temper—and that banning it would gradually lead more parents to restrain themselves—then the idea of a hard-and-fast rule against it starts to seem not so ridiculous.

The purpose of Lieber's proposal isn't to send parents to jail, or children to foster care, because of a firm smack. Rather, it would make it easier for prosecutors to bring charges for instances of corporal punishment that they think are tantamount to child abuse. Currently, California law (and the law of other states) allows for spanking that is reasonable, age-appropriate, and does not carry a risk of serious injury. That forces judges to referee what's reasonable and what's not. How do they tell? Often, they may resort to looking for signs of injury. If a smack leaves a bruise or causes a fracture, it's illegal. If not, bombs away. In other words, allowing for "reasonable" spanking gives parents a lot of leeway to cause pain.

Who should we worry about more: The well-intentioned parent who smacks a child's bottom and gets hauled off to court, or the kid who keeps getting pounded because the cops can't find a bruise? This U.N. [report on violence against children](#) argues that "The de minimis principle—that the law does not concern itself with trivial matters" will keep minor assaults on children out of court, just as it does almost all minor assaults between adults. The U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child has been urging

countries to ban corporal punishment since 1996. The idea is that by making it illegal to hit your kids, countries will make hurting them socially unacceptable.

The United Nations has a lot of converting to do in this part of the world. Its report cites a survey showing that 84 percent of Americans believe that it's "sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a good hard spanking." On this front, we are in the company of the Koreans, 90 percent of whom reported thinking that corporal punishment is "necessary." On the other side of the spanking map are 19 countries that have banned spanking and three others that have partially banned it. (Here's the [list](#).)

The grandmother of the bunch is Sweden, which passed a law against corporal punishment in 1979. The effects of that ban are cited by advocates on both sides of the spanking debate. Parents almost universally used corporal punishment on Swedish children born in the 1950s; the numbers dropped to 14 percent for kids born in the late 1980s, and only 8 percent of parents reported physically punishing their kids in 2000. Plus, only one child in Sweden died as the result of physical abuse by a parent between 1980 and 1996. Those statistics suggest that making spanking illegal contributes to making it less prevalent and also to making kids safer. On the other hand, reports to police of child abuse soared in the decades after the spanking ban, as did the incidence of juvenile violence. Did reports rise because frustrated, spanking-barred parents lashed out against their kids in other ways, or because the law made people more aware of child abuse? The latter is what occurred in the United States when reports of abuse spiked following the enactment of child-protective laws in the 1970s. Is the rise in kids beating on each other evidence of undisciplined, unruly child mobs, or the result of other unrelated forces? The data don't tell us, so take your pick.

A similar split exists in the American social-science literature. In a 2000 article in the *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, Dr. Robert Lazelere (who approves of spanking if it's "conditional" and not abusive) reviewed 38 studies and found that spanking posed no harm to kids under the age of 7, and reduced misbehavior when deployed alongside milder punishments like scolding and timeouts. By contrast, a 2002 article in *Psychology Bulletin* by Dr. Elizabeth Gershoff (not a spanking fan) reviewed 88 studies and found an association between corporal punishment and a higher level of childhood aggression and a greater risk of physical abuse.

This is the sort of research impasse that leaves advocates free to argue what they will—and parents without much guidance. But one study stands out: [An effort by University of California at Berkeley psychologist Diana Baumrind](#) to tease out the effects of occasional spanking compared to frequent spanking and no spanking at all. Baumrind tracked about 100 white, middle-class families in the East Bay area of northern California from 1968 to 1980. The children who were hit frequently were more likely to

be maladjusted. The ones who were occasionally spanked had slightly higher misbehavior scores than those who were not spanked at all. But this difference largely disappeared when Baumrind accounted for the children's poor behavior at a younger age. In other words, the kids who acted out as toddlers and preschoolers were more likely to act out later, whether they were spanked occasionally or never. Lots of spanking was bad for kids. A little didn't seem to matter.

Baumrind concluded that it is "*reliance* on physical punishment, not whether it is used at all, that is associated with harm to the child." The italics are mine. While Baumrind's evidence undercuts the abolitionist position, it doesn't justify spanking as a regular punishment. In addition, Baumrind draws a telling distinction between "impulsive and reactive" spanking and punishments that require "some restraint and forethought." In my experience as a very occasional (once or twice) spanker, impulsivity was what hitting my kid was all about. I know that I'm supposed to spank my sons more in sorrow than in anger. But does that really describe most parents, especially occasional spankers, when they raise their hand to their children? More often, I think, we strike kids when we're mad—enraged, in fact. Baumrind's findings suggest that occasional spankers don't need to worry about this much. I hope she's right. But her numbers are small: Only three children in her study weren't spanked at all. That's a tiny control group.

Baumrind argues that if the social-science research doesn't support an outright ban on spanking, then we shouldn't fight over the occasional spank, because it diverts attention from the larger problems of serious abuse and neglect. "Professional advice that categorically rejects any and all use of a disciplinary practice favored and considered functional by parents is more likely to alienate than educate them," she argues. The extremely negative reaction to Lieber's proposed ban is her best proof.

It's always difficult and awkward—and arguably misguided—to use the law as a tool for changing attitudes. In the case of corporal punishment, though, I'm not sure we'd be crazy to try. A hard-and-fast rule like Sweden's would infuriate and frustrate some perfectly loving parents. It would also make it easier for police and prosecutors to go after the really bad ones. The state would have more power over parents. But then parents have near infinite amounts of power over their kids.

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## sidebar

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According to Thomas Nazario, a law professor at the University of San Francisco, Finland, Norway, Austria, Cyprus, Italy, Croatia, Latvia, United Kingdom, Denmark, Israel, Germany, Greece, Portugal, Sweden, Bulgaria, Iceland, Romania, Ukraine, and Hungary have outright bans against corporal punishment of children. Canada, Switzerland, and Belgium have limited bans that depend on a child's age.

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## fighting words

### Guilty Bystanders

Michael Devlin's neighbors make their excuses.

By Christopher Hitchens

Monday, January 22, 2007, at 6:14 PM ET

Some newspaper stories quite simply write themselves. This is especially true of the ones that call for comment to be made on predictable occasions. Thus, raging narcissists, when awarded Oscars, will take a brief courtesy break from their egomania to bestow praise on anyone but themselves. Defeated politicians, asked if they might consider running again, are expected to reply that they neither rule it out nor rule it in. (If they don't say it the first time, they will be asked, "Do you rule it out or rule it in?" until they *do* say so.) Discredited politicians will say that they wish to spend more time with their families. Press secretaries taken by surprise will answer that they haven't yet seen the full text. Gaffe mongers will complain that their words have been "taken out of context." And the neighbors of serial killers, kidnappers, and child molesters feel duty-bound to say that this has come as a great shock, not to say a complete surprise, and that the guy next door seemed perfectly decent—if perhaps a little inclined to "keep to himself."

Actually, a few years ago, there was a brief disturbance in the natural order, when those living next to Jeffrey Dahmer were interviewed and said that they had been complaining about the yells and the smells for some time to no avail, and that their neighbor seemed like a dangerous, unconfined nut case. But tradition soon regained her throne, and the custom of printing the time-honored quotes on all such occasions has been faithfully followed ever since.

I searched feverishly through the *New York Times* on Sunday, fearing for a moment that the apprehension of Michael Devlin—a single man who had doubled the size of his informal adolescent brood in a single day—might have been the occasion for another rupture with reportorial protocol. But no—[there it was, all right](#), in the fourth paragraph of page 17:

The charges carry the possibility of life in prison for Mr. Devlin, who was known among

his neighbors as a stickler for parking rules, and for little else other than keeping to himself.

Of course, as the story necessarily went on to say, the good people of this section of Kirkwood, Mo., are now slightly kicking themselves for failing to spot their neighbor's uncanny ability to produce full-grown male children without having a woman on hand. One particular resident, reminiscing at the kitchen table about all the times she saw young Shawn Hornbeck frisking around, even sounded faintly aggrieved. "That's why we moved here," she said, "because it's the type of place where you don't have to worry about some crazed person bothering you."

This journalistic tendency probably stems from a famous *New York Times* story in March 1964 about the murder of Kitty Genovese. This young lady was attacked not once but twice, the second time lethally (and a third time, it seems, sexually and near-posthumously) by the same man, in the Kew Gardens district of Queens, N.Y. She had several occasions to scream for help, and took them. But it did her no good. The night was cold, people didn't feel much like opening their windows, and it was written that no fewer than 38 residents had heard and ignored her cries. The most commonly given reason for this apathy on the part of the witnesses was that they "didn't want to get involved." Later reports suggested that it hadn't really been that bad, and that very few people could have located the source of the screams, let alone witnessed the butchery of Ms. Genovese. But the original article set off a national soul-searching and became the basis of many stories and movies, as well as a mordant song by folk singer Phil Ochs titled "Outside of a Small Circle of Friends."

The inhabitants of Kew Gardens were living next to the victim, not the perpetrator, which alters things a bit. You don't have so many chances to react, or to be observant, so you don't need so many excuses. Nonetheless, I think the Genovese precedent made a real difference. I live in an upscale building that abuts a not-quite-so-upscale neighborhood, and when I heard blood-chilling female screams one night, I know I had the story in mind as I caught up a kitchen knife and ran downstairs. I was almost abashed by the number of my fellow residents outside on the street before me. (The assailant ran off, and we were able to comfort the girl until the cops came—and more than one person alluded to the Genovese case.) But to find that you have been passively watching a crime, or crimes, in slow motion, must make you feel stupid as well as cowardly. This might help explain the slightly plaintive and defensive tone adopted by some of the local Kirkwoodians, such as the lady I cited above who had moved there just to avoid this kind of unpleasantness. "A lot of us are down on our luck and living paycheck to paycheck," observed Harry C. Reichard IV, who occupied the apartment above Devlin's. "When you're just trying to survive, you don't pay a lot of attention to people around you." This justifiable emphasis on one's own priorities extends apparently

even to the avoidance of idle gossip—as in, "I see the guy downstairs has just had another teenager." If the cops hadn't come, looking for something else entirely, the whole bizarre Devlin menage might have kept on burgeoning, until it either achieved a ripe old age or was forced by pressure of sheer population growth to relocate to a nicer neighborhood where the locals would be even less curious and where such things were noticed even less. And when it was finally uncovered, by some lucky accident, do you know what the reporters would have recorded, no later than the third or fourth paragraph? Of course you do.

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## foreigners

### Gone but Not Forgotten

*Why we should take exiles seriously.*

By Anne Applebaum

Tuesday, January 23, 2007, at 7:14 AM ET

"And who's going to start a revolution in Russia? Surely not Herr Bronstein sipping coffee over at the Café Central!" With those quite possibly apocryphal words, the Austrian foreign minister of the time is alleged to have scoffed at the news of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia—not realizing that Herr Bronstein, better known to the world as Leon Trotsky, was about to become considerably more famous than himself.

It's one of those stories that has now passed into tourist-guidebook folklore (along with the Viennese waiter who supposedly remarked, "I knew Lev Bronstein would go far but never thought he'd leave without paying for the four café moccas he owes me"). But it reflects pretty accurately what most politicians inside governments usually feel about politicians outside governments who are in political exile. A few years ago in an auditorium on Capitol Hill, I heard a group of North Koreans tell their utterly harrowing stories of arrest, starvation, labor camp, and escape. The audience, mostly junior congressional staff, listened politely at first. But the exiles rambled, the translation was terrible, and the microphones blurred their not-entirely-relevant speeches. Quietly, and perhaps understandably, the staff members one by one slipped out the door at the back of the auditorium.

The trick, of course, is to avoid the mistake of the Austrian foreign minister and to recognize the importance of exiles, however pathetic and incomprehensible they may seem, before they suddenly take power again. Or at least to take note of what they say, since it may reflect arguments that are going on within a closed society but can't yet be spoken aloud.

That's the thought that leads me to draw your attention to a statement written by a group of Iranian exiles, printed this week

in the *New York Review of Books* (read the whole thing [here](#)). Titled "On the Holocaust Conference Sponsored by the Government of Iran," the statement is a response to the bizarre gathering of Holocaust deniers that [took place in Tehran last month](#) under the aegis of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad and that was mostly accepted without comment in the Muslim world. Disturbed by this silence, more than 100 Iranians living in the United States and Europe, including writers, journalists, film directors, historians, scientists, and human rights activists—people with a very wide range of political views—have signed a statement designed to show the world that there are some Iranians, at least, who abhor their government's attempt to "falsify history."

"We the undersigned Iranians," the statement begins, "notwithstanding our diverse views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict" and "considering that the Nazis' ... campaign of genocide against Jews and other minorities during World War II constitute[s] undeniable historical facts," deplore the way that the "denial of these unspeakable crimes has become a propaganda tool" of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The statement goes on to recall that the current Iranian government has "refused to acknowledge, among other things, its mass execution of its own citizens in 1988" and concludes by paying homage to the "memory of the millions of Jewish and non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust."

What does it mean? Maybe nothing: After all, these 100-odd exiles speak for no one but themselves. They do not represent a hidden group of pro-Western or pro-American Iranians living in Iran, let alone a hidden group of Israeli sympathizers. In fact, they do not represent anyone in Iran at all. The organizers of the group statement did not ask Iranians in Iran to sign it, since they didn't want anyone inside the country to be arrested. That makes their effort especially easy to dismiss as an unimportant effusion of exiled coffeehouse intellectuals.

On the other hand, in an era too often overprone to mass stereotypes and demonization, maybe it's better not to ignore this kind of effort either. If nothing else, it demonstrates that there is in fact another Iran: an Iran that admires neither Ahmedinejad nor the Islamic "establishment" that now opposes him, an Iran that believes in open engagement with the West and an open discussion of history. The intellectuals who signed that statement are sufficiently connected to their country to care what happens there, yet sufficiently independent to oppose the anti-Semitism currently fashionable across the Islamic world and the Holocaust denial that is now official Iranian government policy. They are politically independent—many disliked one or another element of the statement—yet dedicated to the idea of historical truth-telling for its own sake.

If nothing else, their names will travel to Iran, via the Internet, where they hope their statement will inspire debate. We should

take them and their effort to inspire discussion in their country seriously: Who knows? Maybe they will succeed.

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## history lesson

### How Vietnam Really Ended

Events abroad—not domestic anti-war activism—brought the war to an end.

By Gideon Rose

Monday, January 22, 2007, at 11:14 AM ET

With the Iraq war going badly and a hostile Congress looking for the exit, [comparisons](#) to [Vietnam](#) are [all the rage](#). Accounts of that war's endgame have generally been spun politically or distorted by hindsight, however.

Congressional anti-war activism, for example, was neither a heroic reining in of a runaway government (as the left claims) nor a perfidious stab in the back (as the right charges). It was simply the predictable epilogue to a drama that had largely played itself out years before. And while domestic politics established the broad guidelines within which different administrations operated, White House officials had substantial leeway to set policy as they wished. The real constraints, then as now, lay not in what was saleable at home but in what was achievable abroad.

From the start, the United States was fighting not to lose in Vietnam, rather than to win. In the 1960s, U.S. leaders believed that the fall of South Vietnam to communism would have terrible consequences, so they decided to prevent such an outcome by whatever means necessary. At first, this meant providing U.S. aid and advisers; then it meant facilitating the overthrow of President Ngo Dinh Diem; then, bombing North Vietnam; and, finally, sending U.S. ground troops to fight Communist forces directly. During the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, the toughest question—whether to accept the true costs of victory or defeat—was avoided. By gradually increasing the scale of the American effort, it was hoped, the Communists could be persuaded to cease and desist.

Once the patience of the American public wore thin, such an approach was no longer feasible. The [Tet Offensive](#) soured much of the establishment on the war and inclined them toward disengagement. Johnson himself, unwilling either to withdraw or to escalate, chose instead to renounce his re-election attempt, cap the war effort, and hunker down. He never accepted defeat, but the limits he set on American operations became political facts that restricted the choices available to his successor.

Coming into office in January 1969, Richard Nixon and his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, understood that part of their mandate was to end the war in some way, and they



wanted to do so for their own geopolitical reasons, as well. Still, they had no intention of "losing" the war outright or of abandoning South Vietnam under pressure from the enemy. So, they tried at first to achieve an old goal—an agreement formalizing simultaneous American and North Vietnamese military disengagement—with various new means, buying breathing space at home with token troop withdrawals. But the effort failed, and the war dragged on.

By late 1969, the Nixon team settled on a new approach combining gradual withdrawal, temporary protection of the regime of South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu, and intense diplomacy to enshrine these elements in a negotiated settlement. In the spring of 1969, there were almost 550,000 American troops in Vietnam. By the spring of 1970, there were over 400,000; by the fall of 1971, 180,000; by the spring of 1972, 65,000. The troop withdrawals undermined the Thieu regime's long-term security, but Washington took other measures (such as the [Phoenix Program](#) and assaults against Communist sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos) to help protect it over the short term.

The administration did something similar at the negotiating table, formally protecting the Saigon government while ultimately agreeing to conditions that lowered its chances of survival. In September 1970, for example, Kissinger agreed that Northern troops could remain in the South after a settlement. Such a "cease-fire in place" would allow the Communist forces to renew their offensives with ease once the Americans had left; any agreement based on it would make an eventual Communist victory extremely likely. The North Vietnamese were unmoved, however, and persisted in demanding the one concession American leaders refused to make: a direct and immediate betrayal of Thieu and his government.

In the spring of 1972, the North Vietnamese launched a massive attack against the South (the "Easter Offensive") that gained ground at first but was eventually halted by South Vietnamese resistance, American tactical air support, and American strategic bombing. The Nixon administration's courting of the North's key patrons began to pay off, meanwhile, as Russia and China now sought to dampen the flames rather than fan them.

So, negotiations began to move forward, and by mid-October Kissinger and his North Vietnamese counterpart worked out a draft agreement that called for the removal of the remaining U.S. troops and the return of U.S. prisoners of war while deferring ultimate decisions about the South's political future. Kissinger knew it was the best deal available, but he also knew that it stacked the odds against the long-term survival of the Saigon regime. To bypass South Vietnamese objections, therefore, he decided to keep his negotiations secret until the last minute and then force Saigon to accept the final product.

But Thieu balked when presented with the *fait accompli*, pleading in tears for the Americans to hold out for better conditions. Nixon refused to force Thieu into line, so Kissinger had to tell the North Vietnamese that the signing of the agreement would be postponed. They retaliated by publicly revealing the deal (and the American commitment to it). This was the point at which Kissinger, desperate to keep the momentum moving forward, declared at a press conference that "peace is at hand."

The American presidential election came and went, but the negotiating deadlock remained. Tantalized and frustrated by the settlement at their fingertips, Nixon and his advisers decided on a final stratagem to end the war. To allay Thieu's fears, they ordered a massive quick infusion of aid to the South and promised to continue support after the agreement was signed; meanwhile, to get the North Vietnamese back to the table, they ordered devastating airstrikes.

The "Christmas bombing" succeeded in compelling Hanoi's assent while helping to cover up Washington's insistence that Saigon accept an agreement similar to the one negotiated in October. Thus pulling along a reluctant ally and enemy, the United States signed the [Paris Accords](#) on Jan. 27, 1973, formally extricating itself from the Vietnam War.

Nixon's private guarantee to Thieu in November had been clear: "You have my absolute assurance that if Hanoi fails to abide by the terms of this agreement it is my intention to take swift and severe retaliatory action." He repeated the pledge in January. Later on, he and Kissinger argued that they had always intended to carry out these promises and fully expected they would be able to do so—but they could not because Congress barred the way.

"Soon after the agreement was signed," Kissinger wrote in his memoirs, "Watergate undermined Nixon's authority and the dam holding back Congressional antiwar resolutions burst." He claimed, "The war and the peace ... won at such cost were lost within a matter of months once Congress refused to fulfill our obligations."

It is true that Congress restricted U.S. operations and cut aid to the South, and these moves did indeed facilitate the eventual Northern victory. But these events were entirely predictable; the settlement the Nixon administration negotiated left the South vulnerable to future attacks. To the American public, the most important fact about the Paris Accords was that American troops and prisoners came home; it was precisely because a guarantee of renewed U.S. military intervention would have been so controversial that Nixon had to make his promises to Thieu in secret.

After January 1973, as before, Vietnamese belligerents on both sides kept up military pressure and prepared for a final



showdown. But the American public tried to blot the war out of its consciousness—and largely succeeded. A consensus formed that the United States should not re-engage and should reduce its remaining involvement still further. Reflecting this, in June 1973, Congress ordered all U.S. military operations in Indochina to cease by the end of the summer, and in November it passed the [War Powers Act](#).

Congress also cut U.S. aid to Saigon, from about \$2.3 billion in 1973 to about \$1 billion in 1974 and still less after that. Together with the 1973 oil crisis, which crippled what remained of the South Vietnamese economy, this made it difficult for Saigon to use the expensive high-tech war machine it had been given. So, even if Watergate never occurred, it would have been difficult for the Nixon administration to counter Northern attacks in any substantial way. That said, the developing Watergate scandals did eliminate whatever freedom of action the administration had left.

In late 1974, the North Vietnamese leadership calculated that American re-entry to help the South was unlikely, and they launched a campaign to win the war once and for all. Their initial victories in the spring of 1975 came easily. At this point, Kissinger, now Gerald Ford's secretary of state, recommended a final desperate burst of U.S. help, but the new president acquiesced to public and congressional objections.

On April 23, Ford told a cheering crowd of students that national pride could not "be achieved by refighting a war that is finished as far as America is concerned." Thieu outlasted Nixon by eight months; on May Day 1975, Communist soldiers hoisted their flag above the erstwhile capital of South Vietnam, now Ho Chi Minh City.

It has been said that history doesn't repeat itself, but it rhymes. On the Vietnam timeline, in Iraq today the Bush administration is roughly where the Nixon administration was in 1969-70: Washington has been unable to find or create a strong and dependable local ally, the American public has lost faith, and working-level officials are desperately casting about for ways to pull off a retreat instead of a rout. One key difference, however, is that Bush himself seems to be stuck where Johnson was back in 1968—unwilling to accept that his war is in fact lost or that the game is not worth the candle. He has two years left on his personal clock. With another electoral season fast approaching, his Congressional counterparts and would-be successors have less.

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## hollywoodland

### The Empty I.M. Pei Building

A Los Angeles real estate mystery.

By Kim Masters  
Thursday, January 25, 2007, at 2:30 PM ET

**Men in Black:** Creative Artists Agency has just moved into its formidable new digs (our friends at Defamer have already [noted the terror that struck](#) a Century City denizen who observed an incursion of agents into a shopping-mall food court).

The new location presumably will be quite comfortable once they get the air-conditioning trouble straightened out. Meanwhile, CAA's rivals can content themselves with the image of CAA agents, for once, sweating.

But what of CAA's old home at the intersection of Santa Monica and Wilshire Boulevards? The gleaming I.M. Pei-designed monument to CAA co-founder Michael Ovitz's lofty dream? It seems just yesterday that ground was broken there with a feng shui ceremony and a flight of white birds.

Well, the feng shui seems to have worked well for the agency, which dominates the industry. But it didn't do much for the chi between the former CAA partners who own the now-empty building.

Last May, the Los Angeles Times speculated that after CAA departed, the building would become "the most expensive Beverly Hills office space in memory." A tenant would ante up about \$6 million a year—or a pricey \$5 a square foot—for this influential address. But no one has stepped up.

The building is owned by Ovitz and erstwhile partners Ron Meyer (the head of Universal Studios), producer Bill Haber, and former CAA Chief Financial Officer Robert Goldman. CAA has rented the building from them since 1995 and—according to at least one source with firsthand knowledge of the situation—is still paying rent.

And the building—with its giant, custom-made Roy Lichtenstein painting still in the lobby—is standing vacant. More than a year ago, the owners hired the Cushman & Wakefield brokerage firm to lease the building. But then, nothing happened. "It's the weirdest thing," says veteran Beverly Hills real estate agent Gary Weiss. "All of us don't understand it."

Maybe it's not so weird after all. The building has a curving facade, and the space inside is idiosyncratic and difficult to reconfigure. With its soaring atrium, a tenant would be paying a lot for space that can't be put to use. When Ovitz was working on the plans, Weiss says, "I don't think they paid much attention to whether it was efficient or not."

Then there's the question of what to do with the Lichtenstein. The canvas is gigantic—the artist worked on it in situ—so it's not something that could hang in one's living room or even in an

ordinary office lobby. It would be a problem, in fact, to get it out of the building. Sotheby's has apparently advised that it can't be removed from its stretcher without damaging it. "You tell me how you move that," says a longtime CAA partner.

The former CAA partners who own the building (and the painting) put Ovitz in charge of it back in the late 1980s, when it was conceived, and that's the way it is today. Meyer has since said that at the time, he was like an abused spouse in a trance. He could hardly have imagined the acrimony that would follow when the marriage split up, as it did in 1995. (When Meyer landed the job at Universal—a position that Ovitz had sought for himself—Ovitz's incredulous response at learning that Meyer had gotten the offer was enough to sour the relationship. Matters didn't improve when Ovitz later tried to purchase land in Malibu that Meyer had picked out for his dream house.) Now Meyer must wait for Ovitz to rent, sell, buy—do something with the building.

One CAA agent said he'd heard a rumor that Ovitz may want to turn the space into a museum. Through a spokesman, Ovitz dismissed that idea. Certainly Ovitz has a big, expensive collection of modern art (not to mention an ego that could use a new monument, following his ill-fated tenure at Disney and the failure of his management company). And Lichtenstein is already there. Ovitz didn't respond to queries about what he intends to do with the building. ([link](#))

**Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2007**

**The Field Shapes Up:** This year's race for the best picture Oscar is starting to resemble the 2008 presidential campaign: so many contenders but no one compelling choice.

By now, you know that *Dreamgirls* pulled in the most nominations—eight—but was snubbed for best picture and best director. It is fascinating to imagine how this news is being received at Paramount headquarters, where *Babel* (from the studio's Vantage label) got seven nominations, including the big ones.

All has turned out well for studio chief Brad Grey. He got to issue a press release proclaiming that his studio led with 19 nominations, knowing that his friends at his DreamWorks "label" were left to lick their gaping wounds.

Yes, this was a bad day for DreamWorks (though not for composer Henry Krieger, who appears to be the single most nominated individual, with three best song nods for *Dreamgirls*).

Clint Eastwood, having been snubbed by the Directors Guild, the Writers Guild, the Producers Guild, and the Screen Actors Guild, had to be at least a little surprised to be running another victory lap with his best director nod for *Letters From Iwo Jima*.

"When it comes to the Academy, never overlook an old guy who can do it and do it well," chortled one voting member.

The academy showed a healthy respect for diversity. African or African-American actors got five of 20 nominations (Forest Whitaker, Eddie Murphy, Will Smith, Jennifer Hudson, and Djimon Hounsou). And the academy recognized all three of the three amigos—Alejandro González Iñárritu for *Babel*, Guillermo del Toro (for best foreign-language nominee *Pan's Labyrinth*), and Alfonso Cuarón for writing and editing *Children of Men*.

As the dust settles, little light has been shed on the eventual best picture winner. Some think that since only *Babel* and *The Departed* were nominated in the influential editing category, the race comes down to those two. Others point out that a contingent of academy voters hates *Babel* and dreads nothing more than seeing it become this year's *Crash*. Another group seems inclined to go only so far for Scorsese—and especially for this movie, which seems to have a number of endings.

So, if you need help with this year's office pool, don't call us. There are a lot of factions out there—making for mathematical possibilities too weird to contemplate. ([link](#))

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**hollywoodland**

## **Please Don't Make Me See *Babel***

*Will it become this year's *Crash*?*

By Kim Masters

Thursday, January 25, 2007, at 1:18 PM ET

**Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2007**

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### **Thursday, Jan. 18, 2007**

**Time To Improvise:** Here's an interesting note: Two of the Writers Guild's nominations for best screenplay this year honor movies that didn't have screenplays.

There was *Borat*, of course, which lists Sacha Baron Cohen along with Peter Baynham, Anthony Hines, and Dan Mazer as writers. According to Fox's production notes, they drafted an outline, but the film had no script. "The movie is an experiment—a new form of filmmaking for an age in which reality and entertainment have become increasingly intertwined," the notes say. "Real events with real people push the film's fictional story, and when scenes played out in unexpected ways, Baron Cohen and his colleagues had to rewrite the outline."

Thanks to a quirk of guild rules, *Borat* is nominated as best adapted screenplay because the film was based on a character previously seen on *Da Ali G Show*.

In the best original screenplay division is *United 93* with director Paul Greengrass listed as the writer. But according to those familiar with the situation, there was no screenplay for this movie, either. It was heavily improvised. When Greengrass pitched the film to Universal, he turned in a lengthy treatment—one executive involved calls it a "scriptment"—that did not include dialogue but gave a sense of the characters and action. (Greengrass had already lined up the *United 93* families to ensure their cooperation. And Universal, of course, was interested in having him direct another installment of the *Bourne Identity* series, so committing about \$15 million to let him make a passion project seemed fair enough. The studio could not have been expecting a big return. But despite the difficult subject matter, the film has grossed more than \$75 million worldwide, so that bet's paid off financially and been one of the few bright spots in Universal's generally bad year.)

The rules for the Writer's Guild awards don't require submission of a script. A guild spokesman was surprised to learn that *United 93* lacked a screenplay but observed that HBO's *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, which also includes lots of improvisation, won for best comedy series last year. He added that even when there's no script, writers shape the story. "You don't just show up with cameras and a crew and make a movie," he observed.

It might seem that members of a writers guild would recoil from screenplay-free movies. But the guild is trying to expand its jurisdiction to reality shows. The production companies say those shows have no writers but the guild counters that those who shape the stories are in fact writers and deserve to be compensated as such. So, perhaps Fox should demand that Cohen withdraw *Borat* from consideration. Accepting a writing award for a film that is made for "an age in which reality and entertainment have become increasingly intertwined" might suggest that the guild's argument has merit after all. ([link](#))

### **Tuesday, Jan. 16, 2007**

**Breathe Out:** If you heard a gentle "whoosh" last night as the name *Dreamgirls* was called at the Golden Globes, it came from the group that worked on the film as they finally exhaled. A loss could have been disastrous. Emerging with the most Globes, even if the total is just three, is much preferable. The result keeps *Dreamgirls* securely in the Oscar game. Obviously, the fact that the awards were spread about among contenders underscores how this year's race continues to be wide open.

With wins for *Dreamgirls* and *Babel*, the Paramount party was a hot ticket. Genuine Supreme Mary Wilson turned up there, and how cool is that? Held in a cavernous space that long ago was a Robinsons-May department store, the bash offered enough space for everyone to breathe. That's just as well, because, despite the many hugs, there was a bit of tension in the room.

Paramount should perhaps be renamed *Paramounts*. The studio is like a collection of city-states. The DreamWorks camp, which has *Dreamgirls* in contention, doesn't trust the main-studio camp, with *Babel* in the race. And vice versa. The intrigue thickens if you consider that Paramount chief Brad Grey is also a producer of *The Departed*, released by Warner Bros. So, which movie is he voting for? To add even more spice to the soiree, ousted studio President Gail Berman, fired just last week, put in an appearance. Game girl.

Planning a strategy for hitting at least a few of the many Golden Globes after-parties is a tricky business. You want to start at a party that's going to attract interesting talent. If you don't get in early, the fire marshals may be blocking doors. But by the time you wrest yourself free to move on, other doors may be blocked, or the wave may have crested anywhere else you go.

You have to give credit to the Weinsteins. Despite having nothing in contention, unless you count *Bobby*, they threw a party that stayed packed far longer than it should have. Aside from all sorts of stars, Rupert Murdoch dropped by, having spent an appropriate amount of time at the party thrown by his own studio. (The Fox celebration had its share of heat with Sacha Baron Cohen, Meryl Streep, and Forest Whitaker, but it had waned by the time Murdoch made his way to the Weinsteins' still-jammed event.)

Murdoch seated himself in a snug banquet with Harvey, and we cocked a curious ear but only caught Harvey apparently suggesting a visit to the Bahamas. Later we sidled up to another player at the table who had been sitting and nodding during the conversation. We asked what had been discussed. With the music thumping away, he yelled back, "Couldn't understand a fucking thing!" Thinking that he hadn't heard the question, we repeated it. "No!" he said. "I couldn't understand a fucking thing Murdoch said! It's the accent!" ([link](#))

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## human nature Lucky Stroke

How brain damage cures smoking.

By William Saletan

Friday, January 26, 2007, at 9:52 AM ET

(For the latest **Human Nature** columns on lesbianism, made-to-order embryos, and shrinking people, click [here](#).)

**Smoking addiction can be erased by "knocking out" a tiny part of the brain.** It's called the [insula](#). In a study of brain-injured former smokers, half said their cravings had completely vanished. Three-quarters of this subset had suffered insula damage. "Smokers with damaged insulas were [136 times more likely](#) to have their addictions erased than smokers with damage in other parts of their brains." Excited reactions: 1) We can help people quit smoking by targeting the insula. 2) Maybe we can target alcohol, cocaine, and gambling addiction the same way. **Warning:** "Damage to the insula is associated with slight impairment of some social function." (For last week's update on cigarette makers increasing nicotine output, click [here](#).)

**China says it will modify its one-child policy and crack down on sex-selective abortions.** Government's statements: 1) The one-child policy has prevented a population disaster. 2) However, too many couples have responded by aborting girls so they can have a boy; to stop this, we'll get [tougher](#) on fetal sex tests and abortions of females. 3) We'll offer [financial rewards](#) to parents of girls. 4) Poor Chinese are angry that rich Chinese are buying their way out of the policy by paying fines, so we'll [lower fines](#) for poor parents. (For China's recent crackdown on sperm, eggs, and surrogate motherhood, click [here](#).)

The U.S. military demonstrated a **heat ray that inflicts disabling pain from one-third of a mile away**. It consists of electromagnetic millimeter waves, which can penetrate skin enough to cause pain but not damage. It was targeted at volunteering reporters. **AP** description: "While the 130-degree heat was not painful, it was intense enough to make the participants think their clothes were about to ignite." **Reuters** description: "The sensation from the exposure was like a blast from a very hot oven, too painful to bear without scrambling for cover." Military spins: 1) The ray has been tested on 10,000 volunteers, with "no injuries requiring medical attention." 2) Yet it forces people to run for cover. 3) Such "non-lethal" weapons will help us disperse crowds, stop checkpoint runners, and disarm enemy fighters without having to shoot people. Skeptical view: They'll also make it easier to inflict pain. (For Human Nature's take on the temptation of remote-controlled killing, click [here](#).)

Activists are [attacking research on why some rams are gay](#). Eight percent of rams show sexual interest only in other rams; a



researcher is studying the biological factors involved. Critics' allegations: 1) He's trying to "cure" homosexuality in rams through "prenatal treatment." 2) This could lead to "breeding out" human homosexuality. Researcher's rebuttals: 1) I'm studying rams, not humans. 2) I'm focusing on causation, not manipulation, of sexuality. 3) I'm against sexual eugenics in humans. 4) My research might help figure out which rams will breed. Refined criticism: The implications for manipulating sexuality in livestock and humans are obvious. Refined rebuttal: That's an argument for opposing unethical use of technology, not for blocking basic science. (For a previous update on gay animals, click [here](#). For Human Nature's take on gay parenthood, click [here](#).)

President Bush proposed a nearly **fivefold increase in "renewable and alternative fuels."** Political [translation](#): ethanol. [Bush's arguments](#): 1) It'll cut our dependence on Middle East oil. 2) It'll help the environment. 3) It'll fight global warming. [Complaints](#): 1) The proposal is too meager to make a difference. 2) It's too ambitious, as our corn supply can't meet it. 3) Corn ethanol yields lower mileage than gas does. 4) Making corn ethanol requires so much fossil fuel, it's a net loss. 5) It'll raise food prices by demanding all our corn. 6) The more mileage-efficient alternative, "cellulosic ethanol," is even more expensive to make. 7) "Alternative and renewable" is Bush's way of promoting liquefied coal, which is twice as bad as gas for global warming.

Doctors performed the **world's third face transplant**. The new tissue consisted of a mouth, nose, and chin. [Twist](#): The previous two face transplants were done to repair animal attacks; this one was done to repair effects of a genetic disease. [Rationales](#): 1) The patient "had such large, heavy tumors on his lips that it was difficult to speak or eat." 2) He "had undergone some 30 to 40 operations over 10 years to try to improve his face's appearance." 3) He still "could not get a job because of his appearance." His surgeon compared it to the [Elephant Man](#). Next: British and American doctors are preparing for full-face transplants. (For reports on the previous face transplants, click [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).)

**China conducted the first successful anti-satellite missile test in two decades.** The test alarmed the U.S. military, which uses satellites to relay communications and guide missiles. Chinese [talking points](#): 1) "It is purely catch up" with the U.S. and Russia. 2) China still "opposes the weaponization of space." Hawk theory: They're preparing to disable us so they can invade Taiwan. Dove theory: They're trying to scare us into negotiating a treaty limiting space weapons. (For previous updates on U.S. space militarization, click [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). For Human Nature's take on aerial military drones, click [here](#).)

**Stem-cell researchers are preparing to trade IVF discounts for human eggs.** The deal: We give you IVF at half the cost, and in exchange, we get half the eggs for research. The U.K. has

already authorized this as an experiment. [Objections](#): 1) It's commerce in human flesh. 2) It can be risky for the donor. 3) It exploits desperate women. 4) There are other ways to get eggs, such as frozen, unfertilized IVF leftovers. [Defenses](#): 1) Women are already paid to donate eggs. 2) People are paid to participate in experiments. 3) Some clinics already facilitate egg- and cost-sharing deals between clients. 4) Attempts to get women to donate eggs for free have failed. 5) It's not egg selling; it's "egg sharing." 6) Don't patronize women; they can choose for themselves. (For Human Nature's take on manufacturing and selling human embryos, click [here](#).)

**California lawmakers are debating a possible ban on spanking.** It applies only to children age 3 or younger. Suggested penalties range from parenting classes to a year in jail. Most states already ban corporal punishment in day care and schools. Ban-[supporters' arguments](#): 1) Spanking very young kids is cruel, since they don't know right from wrong. 2) It's useless, for the same reason. 3) It can lead to child abuse. 4) There are better ways to discipline kids. [Opponents' arguments](#): 1) It's government usurpation of parental discretion. 2) It's unenforceable. 3) The legislator pushing it doesn't even have kids. Human Nature's take: In war, executions, and parenting, nonviolence is making a comeback.

**High-definition video is embarrassing porn stars.** [Problems](#): razor burn, cellulite, wrinkles, pimples, visible veins, fake boobs. Remedies tried so far: diets, exercise, makeup, tanning spray, grooming assistance, cosmetic surgery, softening lights, changing sex positions, and airbrushing. Directors' attitude: HD is cool. Actresses' complaints: 1) The men in the industry are "willing to sacrifice our vanity and imperfections to beat each other" to HD. 2) "I'm having my breasts redone because of HD." (For a previous update on live, on-demand sex, click [here](#). For virtual-sex technology, click [here](#). For the average viewing time of pay-per-view porn, click [here](#).)

**Trans fats may cause female infertility.** [Data](#): "Each 2% increase in the intake of energy from *trans* unsaturated fats, as opposed to that from carbohydrates, was associated with a 73% greater risk of ovulatory infertility," even after adjustment for fertility risk factors. [Hypothesis](#): Trans fats disrupt a fertility-boosting "cell receptor involved in inflammation, glucose metabolism and insulin sensitivity." Next: Trans fats cause ADHD and herpes. (For Human Nature's take on banning trans fats, click [here](#).)

[Latest Human Nature columns](#): 1) The power to [shrink human beings](#). 2) The first human [embryo factory](#). 3) The bum rap on [cloned food](#). 4) Lesbians of [mass destruction](#). 5) The [Best of Human Nature 2006](#). 6) Unhealthy food [outlawed](#) in New York. 7) Food and sex [without consequences](#). 8) The eerie world of [policing cybersex](#).



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## human nature Girl, Interrupted

The power to shrink human beings.

By William Saletan

Saturday, January 20, 2007, at 7:06 AM ET

*With living creatures  
one must begin very early  
to dwarf their growth:  
the bound feet,  
the crippled brain,  
the hair in curlers,  
the hands you  
love to touch.*

—Marge Piercy, "[A Work of Artifice](#)"

Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Ashley. And she stayed little forever.

It's a true story. You can read it on her parents' blog, [ashleytreatment.spaces.live.com](#). Ashley's brain stopped developing at 3 months. Nobody knows why. She never learned how to roll over, sit up, or walk.

But Ashley's body kept growing. It was hard work lifting her and moving her around. When she was 6, her parents discovered something amazing. "We learned that attenuating growth is feasible through high-dose estrogen therapy," her mom [writes](#). "This treatment was performed on teenage girls starting in the 60's and 70's, when it wasn't desirable for girls to be tall, with no negative or long-term side effects."

Eureka. Ashley didn't have to reach her natural adult size. She could be "attenuated."

So Ashley's doctors reshaped her. Her parents call it the "Ashley Treatment." They lay it out in three steps:

1. Limiting final height using high-dose estrogen therapy.
2. Avoiding menstruation and cramps by removing the uterus (hysterectomy).
3. Limiting growth of the breasts by removing the early breast buds.

The first step alone can reduce a child's adult size by [2 feet and 100 pounds](#), according to Ashley's doctors. Other parents are [already asking](#) for the same treatment. We don't have to make the world fit people anymore. We can shrink people to fit the world.

Is this a good idea?

Ashley's parents think so. The less she weighs, the more she can be "held in our arms" and transported to stimulating activities, they argue. Without treatment, she would exceed her stroller's weight limit and "stop fitting in a standard size bathtub." And breasts would get in the way of her wheelchair straps.

That isn't the way Americans have traditionally dealt with size problems. We've made bigger stuff to fit bigger people. The average height of American men has increased by [2.5 inches](#) since the Civil War. The height of Chinese children has increased by nearly the same amount [since 1975](#). Cars and houses have [grown with us](#). A decade ago, the standard height of a ground-floor ceiling in a new American home was 8 feet. Now it's [9](#). Wheelchairs have widened, as have hospital [beds and doorways](#).

In the long run, however, economic and ecological forces are going Ashley's way. Smaller people consume fewer resources, [live longer](#), and are cheaper to transport. They can fit in a [Hyundai](#). Forty-five years ago, if you were 6 feet tall, you couldn't fly in a [NASA space capsule](#). Now, you can barely fly coach. Blessed are the short, for they shall inherit the earth.

In fact, we've already shrunk people—not to fit technology, but to fit our image of what a certain kind of person should look like. That's the second rationale offered by Ashley's parents: A prepubescent body fits her mental age. They call her "sweet," "pure," and "innocent"—their "[pillow angel](#)." The curious thing about these terms is that they're not cognitive. They're moral. Indeed, the parents removed Ashley's breast buds in part because "large breasts could 'sexualize' Ashley towards her caregiver, especially when they are touched while she is being moved or handled, inviting the possibility of abuse."

It's equally curious that the parents were inspired by the shortening of tall girls in the 1960s and 1970s. [Half the nation's pediatric endocrinologists](#) participated in that fad. They changed bodies to match a feminine ideal. Some parents shortened their daughters to fit the physical requirements of flight attendants or ballerinas. Most did it to fit the culture. When the culture shifted, size modification shifted with it. Three years ago, the Food and Drug Administration approved the use of growth hormone to make [short kids taller](#).

Everywhere you turn, people are engineering their bodies to fit in. Chinese people are [lengthening their legs](#) with surgery to raise their status and career prospects. American men are bulking up on [steroids](#) to look good in gyms. American women are getting [300,000 breast implants](#) a year. Some are having [toes trimmed](#) to fit fashionable shoes. Sexual development, too, is under arrest. The FDA is considering an implant to [delay puberty](#) in girls. The number of Americans getting laser hair

removal each year has surpassed [1.4 million](#). Many women are getting "[revirgination](#)" surgery to restore their hymens.

Ashley's parents say her treatment, unlike cosmetic procedures, offers important medical benefits. It prevents menstrual cramps, breast discomfort, breast or uterine cancer, and other diseases. "Ashley has no need for her uterus since she will not be bearing children," they write. "Ashley has no need for developed breasts since she will not breast feed."

But if those are good arguments for shrinking people, or at least for removing some of their tissue, why stop with Ashley? We're facing an epidemic of patients who are physically and cognitively incapacitated, hard to lift, extremely cancer-prone, extremely uncomfortable, and incapable of childbearing. They're called [old people](#).

Today, 7 percent of aging Americans have severe cognitive impairments. [Fifteen million](#) Americans have become caretakers for their parents. Most people with Alzheimer's disease live at home with help from family and friends. The age group most prone to Alzheimer's, people 85 or older, is the nation's [fastest-growing](#) bracket. Their reproductive organs are useless and dangerous. By age 75, most men get preliminary prostate cancer. By age 80, one of every 10 women gets breast cancer.

Ashley's parents aren't trying to mutilate old folks. They're trying to help them. That's why they want to make Ashley easier to bear. "The only additional care givers entrusted to Ashley's care are her two Grandmothers, who find Ashley's weight even more difficult to manage," the parents plead. But once you start changing people's bodies to make them easier to bear, it's that much easier to look at their caregivers the same way. So the bearers became burdens, and we lightened them. And they lived happily ever after.

*Human Nature thanks [Slate](#) intern [Mara Revkin](#) for research assistance with this article.*

*A version of this piece appears in the Washington Post [Outlook section](#).*

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## idolatry

### Blogging the New Season of *American Idol*

Cry me a river.

By Jody Rosen

Thursday, January 25, 2007, at 3:44 PM ET

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**From:** Jody Rosen  
**Subject:** In Melisma We Trust

**Posted Thursday, January 25, 2007, at 3:44 PM ET**

Season 6 of *American Idol* began on a triumphalist note, with a montage of past winners and images of a nation gone *Idol*-mad. "Together, we've created a phenomenon," said Ryan Seacrest, trying hard to sound stentorian, like the voiceover guy from NFL Films. "You caught McPheever, and turned [Katharine](#) into America's Sweetheart," he intoned. Did we really? I'm not so sure. Still, as the new season kicks off, *Idol*'s pop-culture preeminence is undeniable, as is its music-biz clout. (Among the astonishing statistics reeled off by Seacrest is the fact that *Idol* contestants have produced "over 100 No. 1 CDs.") The industry held its nose for the first couple of seasons, but now superstars vie to appear as guests on the show, and last year's finale, with performances by Prince and Mary J. Blige among others, felt like as much of an event as the Grammys. This year, producers are promising more A-list guest stars—[Mariah? Macca?](#)—and [big midseason twists](#). And while [highbrows continue to sniff at \*Idol\*](#), the show's track record of anointing worthy new talent is very solid indeed. Exhibit A in 2006 was Season 4 winner Carrie Underwood, whose debut, *Some Hearts*, was [an excellent country-pop record](#), not to mention the year's best-selling CD by a solo artist. Did I mention that an *American Idol* runner-up is [about to win an Oscar](#)?

None of which has much to do with Red. Red is the nearly toothless, flame-haired giant who croaked a pitiful version of "Bohemian Rhapsody" on last night's broadcast, a two-hour-long compendium of clips from *Idol*'s Seattle auditions. (Tuesday's show focused on the Minneapolis tryouts.) Red was mesmerizing—in a creepy, [hillbilly Charles Manson kind of way](#)—but in general I find the audition phase boring. Six years in, the formula is familiar: a parade of the freakish, the tone-deaf, and the delusional, interrupted, roughly every half-hour, by a talented singer who gets a ticket to Hollywood. Occasionally, the bad singers are funny and revealing. On Tuesday night, a lesson in the larynx-shredding aesthetics of post-grunge vocal style was supplied by a pimply young "rocker," whom Simon sent off to learn an Abba song. I laughed at (with?) the [big girl](#) who mumbled her way through the Pussycat Dolls' "Don't Cha"—and was excited beyond reason to learn that she'd co-authored an *Idol*-inspired "novella" with her mother. (Hello, publishing world? Where's Judith Regan when you need her?)

Overall, though, the freak show preliminaries are tiresome, and I find myself itching for the beginning of the competition proper. It's the post-William Hung effect: For every genuine would-be superstar, there's a would-be über-geek anti-star. Watching the first two episodes, you couldn't help but suspect that most of the "bad" singers were actually savvy performance artists, angling for a few minutes of airtime. Thus the [Jewel super-fan](#) (quite

possibly the last one on earth), who sang a wounded water buffalo version of "You Were Meant for Me" to a panel that included guest judge [Jewel herself](#); the [dude dressed up as Uncle Sam](#); the [fellow in the Apollo Creed outfit](#); the "[cowboy](#)" who mauled "Folsom Prison Blues"; the tiny Justin Timberlake wannabe, whom Simon cruelly (but accurately) likened to "one of those creatures that live in the woods with those massive eyes"; the "[urban Amish](#)" guy; the [juggler](#); the [girl with the pink arms](#); etc.

These acts mostly ring false, and when they don't, *Idol* veers into the icky, exploitative territory of lesser reality shows. (Last night, the program lingered for several uncomfortable minutes on a [fat kid](#) who was clearly developmentally disabled.) Really, how many more bug-eyed Simon Cowell reaction shots can we see before the joke ceases to be funny? On the other hand, I am enjoying the leitmotif of rejected contestants trying to exit through the wrong, locked door—a priceless bit of old-school slapstick punctuated, each time, by Simon's drawing, "Other door, sweetheart."

One of the big questions heading into Season 6 is: Will *Idol* get with 21<sup>st</sup>-century innovations in pop repertoire and vocal style? Back in Season 2, I wrote an article complaining about *Idol*'s domination by Mariah Carey wannabes, and the overuse of flamboyant Careyesque melisma in pop and R&B singing generally. What I didn't take into account was the groundbreaking new singing style—speedy and tensile, weirdly syncopated, clearly influenced by rap—that was being pioneered right then by [R. Kelly](#), [Usher](#), and, especially, [Beyoncé](#). In the years since, *Idol* has seen its share of country and rock singers, and even some old-fashioned crooners. But circa-1992 Mariah- and Whitney-style belting remains the most prevalent—this despite the fact that [Carey herself has moved on to channeling Beyoncé](#). Will Season 6 bring a post-hip-hop R&B vocalist, a singer representing the definitive contemporary style? When is someone going to step forward, braving the wrath of Cowell, to do a version of "[Ignition \(Remix\)](#)" or "[Ring the Alarm](#)"?

We'll keep an eye on that and other intriguing musical and sociological questions in this space, in addition to the more pressing issues—[Paula Abdul](#)'s fragile emotional state (she's been disappointingly sane and sober thus far), the smoldering sexual tension between Simon and Ryan, Randy Jackson's gratuitous mentions of his own session work with Journey and Mariah Carey. (The tally so far: 1.) In the meantime, my early votes go to the absolutely adorable Malakar siblings, [Shyamali](#) and [Sanjaya](#) (who killed "Signed, Sealed, Delivered" in his audition); to 16-year-old [Denise Jackson](#), who, we were informed in a heart-jerking interlude, was a "crack baby"; and to the extravagantly moussed beatboxer [Blake Lewis](#), who, despite his hair, came across as genuinely charismatic and talented. (You can sample his vocal stylings on [his MySpace page](#).) Then there's the developing singers-in-arms subplot, with two

members of the military already advancing to the next round. [Rachel Jenkins](#), an Army reservist from Minnetonka, Minn., whose husband is currently in Baghdad, might be the stronger vocalist of the two. But the smart early money is on [Jarrod Walker](#), a Naval intelligence specialist with a pleasant Andy Griffith air about him, who won the USS *Ronald Reagan*'s "Reagan Idol" competition, and sailed through to Hollywood, singing the Rascal Flatts weepie, "Bless the Broken Road." Might Americans purge their guilt about souring on the Iraq war by "supporting the troops" in the *Idol* competition?

Until next week: other door, sweetheart.

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**From:** Jody Rosen  
**Subject:** Cry Me a River

**Posted Thursday, January 25, 2007, at 3:44 PM ET**

For Episode 3 on Tuesday night, *American Idol* traveled to Memphis—back to the loamy Southern soil that has produced all of its winners. Through five seasons, region has proved the most significant *Idol* metric, far more than race, gender, genre, or anything else. There have been three white and two black Idols, three females and two males. Winners have included a straightforward pop singer (Kelly Clarkson), an R&B smoothie (Ruben Studdard), a soul belter (Fantasia Barrino), a country balladeer (Carrie Underwood), and a cuddly Adult Album Alternative type with a delusional Otis Redding complex (Taylor Hicks). But they've all been from Dixie—Carrie Underwood, from Checotah, Okla., is the closest we've seen to a Northerner. Most of the major runners-up (Clay Aiken, Bo Bice, Chris Daughtry) are also from the South. For those who like to [draw comparisons](#) between *Idol* and presidential politics, the regional question is compelling. Will Season 6 finally give us a champion from someplace north of the Mason-Dixon? If not, should the Dems think twice before nominating a Yankee like Hillary or Obama?

Tuesday's show—shortened to an hour because of the live broadcast of a [plaintive solo acoustic set](#) by 2000 *Idol* winner G.W. Bush—was a tad less shrill and "freak"-heavy than last week's Minneapolis and Seattle episodes. Did *Idol* producers re-edit the broadcast, in response to a week's worth of [criticism about the show's "meanness"](#)? (Lord help us if Rosie O'Donnell has such power.) The closest the Memphis episode came to the freak show was the usual [rejectee singalong montage](#). (Predictably, they chose an Elvis song, "Burning Love.") Then there was the totally endearing [Sean Michel](#), with very long hair and a stretching Old Testament beard, who (not unreasonably) compared his own look to Osama Bin Laden and Fidel Castro. The judges were clearly taken aback, but his rugged performance of Johnny Cash's "God's Gonna Cut You Down" made them

believers. Paula: "That was kind of shocking. I didn't expect to hear that." Simon: "We expected something about a revolution." Randy: "It don't matter what you look like, you can blow! Welcome to Hollywood, baby!" Here's hoping that Michel makes it through to the final 12, if only to see how the *Idol* stylists handle his makeover.

Memphis also gave us the two best singers thus far. First, there was the roly-poly fellow with the preposterous name of Sundance Head, whose father, Roy Head, had a No. 1 hit in 1965, "[Treat Her Right](#)." In the pre-audition interview, Head *files* claimed he was a better singer than his father, and sure enough, he [peeled back the judges' ears](#) with a roaring "Stormy Monday." (Simon: "He just blew Taylor out the park." Randy: "Dude, I'm seeing circles.") Next came [Melinda Doolittle](#), singing Stevie Wonder's "For Once in My Life." Doolittle is a professional background singer, and boy, can you tell: In terms of tone, timbre, and control, she has the best instrument of any *Idol* contestant I've heard, in any season. Mark my words: She'll make it all the way to the final three. At least.

No one nearly as great emerged from the New York auditions, but there were some cuties. Simon nearly dissolved into a puddle of drool [during the audition of best friends Amanda Coluccio and Antonella Barba](#). (A leering, totally gratuitous B-roll montage showed the pair romping on the beach in bikinis.) Paula was treated to her own hunk of cheesecake in the form of 16-year-old [Jenry Bejarano](#), who will almost certainly be co-starring with Tyson Beckford in a boxer-briefs advertisement within months. On the other end of the charisma spectrum was the sepulchral guest judge, songwriter Carole Bayer Sager, who brought the show to a screeching halt every time she spoke. At this point, isn't *Idol* bigger than B-listers like Sager? Can't [Simon Fuller](#) put in a call to [Max Martin](#) or something?

Oh yeah, some people cried. Check that: Nearly everybody cried. This isn't anything new—from the get-go, *Idol* has aimed for catharsis, prying open tear ducts with some of the most lethal weapons known to man: the soft-focus up-close-and-personal segment and Whitney Houston's "The Greatest Love of All." *Idol's* emphasis on hard-luck back-stories, and the preponderance of slow-boiling self-actualization anthems, virtually guarantees many weepy money shots, and sometimes these are quite affecting. Who can forget Fantasia Barrino's glorious diva moment in the *Idol* 3 finale, [belting out "I Believe" through streaming tears](#)?

But this season has upped the emotional pornography quotient; the show is veritably awash in tears. Tears of triumph, tears of defeat, tears of frustration. Mom's tears, Dad's tears, Little Sister's tears. In New York, Sarah Burgess cried before, during, and after her audition about her father's lack of support for her singing aspirations. (Father and daughter reconciled, in a tearful phone call.) Kia Thornton wept after getting sent through for a fine performance of Aretha's "Ain't No Way." When the judges

rejected tone-deaf [Sarah Goldberg](#), she flew into a tearful tirade. Then there was [Nakia Claiborne](#), who went from manically jovial to heartbroken in a span of a couple of minutes, proving that there is nothing sadder than the tears of a clown. I nearly shed a tear myself when she emerged, dejected, from the audition room. "They said no," she sobbed. "And sometimes you get tired of hearing no."

In truth, the raw emotions are understandable, given the intensely personal and expressive nature of singing itself. This is the heart of *American Idol*: Yes, it's a big, schlock-drenched, hyper-commercialized, exploitative spectacle. But the show is really about one of the most primal and moving human activities—the act of expelling air from your diaphragm and shaping it into music with your vocal cords—and this gives *Idol* a purity and grandeur that you just don't find on, say, *The Bachelor* or *Celebrity Fit Club*. There's often little difference between singing and crying in the first place—little wonder the tears flow.

Still, there are healthier ways to deal with an *Idol* rejection than bawling. Simon was right to call [Jan Benardo](#), who did a kind of Arnold Horshack rendition of Laura Branigan's "Gloria," "annoying ... Mr. Boring." But Benardo got the last laugh. "Hollywood is not even that great," Benardo said, marching off in a huff. "Hollywood is New Jersey with celebrities."

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## in other magazines

### Faddy Diets

*The New York Times Magazine* on "nutritionism."

By Christopher Beam

Thursday, January 25, 2007, at 2:20 PM ET

### *New York Times Magazine*, Jan. 28

The cover piece blasts "nutritionism," noting that as our dietary fads get more complicated, we get less healthy. Eating well is simple, the author argues: "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants." But since the 1980s, food industries like dairy and meat have benefited from an increased emphasis on nutrients that shifts the blame for health hazards away from the foods themselves. Instead of telling Americans to "reduce consumption of meat," a Senate Select Committee on Nutrition settled on a politically neutral alternative: "Choose meats, poultry and fish that will reduce saturated-fat intake." ... A piece suggests Iranian support for President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad may be waning. In last month's elections, reformists won an estimated two-fifths of city-council seats; then, nearly half of the parliament's members signed a letter criticizing Ahmadinejad's economic policies. Many Iranians also fear his rhetoric on the Holocaust could seriously cost Iran: "[H]e doesn't think about



the future or the consequences," says a man who voted for him. "He is a simple man."—C.B.

### ***Washington Monthly, January and February***

The cover piece exhorts Democrats to seize the "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" their new majority status grants them to introduce a public campaign-financing system. If Dems are serious about reforming Washington's "culture of corruption," they need to go after its roots: "Any system that uses corporate dollars to fund candidates' bids for office will, almost by definition, advantage the party that hews closest to corporate interests." But Democrats are reluctant to ask voters to foot the bill for campaigns—although some have suggested saddling lobbyists and political consultants with the fee—and some members of Congress fear it would advantage challengers over incumbents. ... A piece examines how psychologists—a largely liberal group of professionals—came to support U.S. interrogation techniques at Guantanamo Bay. Like any lobbying group, the American Psychological Association has policies it wants passed: The APA "has a vested interest in maintaining good relations with the Bush administration," said a former APA president.—C.B.

### ***The New Yorker, Jan. 29***

A piece examines the spate of assassinations targeting Russian dissidents. Thirteen journalists have been murdered in Russia since President Vladimir Putin came to power in 1999. But the killing of journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who reported on torture by pro-Russian squads in Chechnya, was particularly disturbing. The author calls her murder "at once unbelievable and utterly expected." Politkovskaya continued to report in spite of her family's entreaties: "We begged," her sister says. "My parents. Her editors. Her children. But she always answered the same way: 'How could I live with myself if I didn't write the truth?' " ... A profile of Tiki Barber shows the former New York Giants running back preparing for his post-football existence. Barber seems ready to become a broadcaster in the mold of Jim Brown. But transcending his accomplishments on the field won't be easy: "Sometimes you get trapped in your own greatness," says former Giants running back Frank Gifford.—C.B.

### ***Weekly Standard, Jan. 29***

The cover piece [blames](#) the Duke University faculty for facilitating the "scandalous rush to judgment" in the lacrosse rape case. District Attorney Mike Nifong mishandled the case—he called the lacrosse players "hooligans" and appears to have suppressed some evidence—but the faculty "enabled Nifong," in the words of one dissenting professor. "He could say, 'I can go after these kids because these faculty agree with me.'" Duke's arts and sciences professors "went to town," dissecting the case from the perspective of "race, gender, class, and white male privilege"—themes the media picked up, too. ... A piece

[examines](#) the recent revelation that the State Department covered up Yasser Arafat's responsibility for the murder of two American diplomats in Sudan in 1973. After the murders, the United States publicly blamed Black September, a Palestinian terrorist organization. But documents released under the Freedom of Information Act suggest that Fatah, a wing of Arafat's PLO, ordered the hit.—C.B.

### ***Newsweek, Jan. 29***

The cover piece [chronicles](#) the time Shawn Hornbeck spent in the captivity of Michael Devlin, who was arrested last week for kidnapping Hornbeck and Ben Ownby. In retrospect, Devlin's neighbors recall signs of foul play: loud music, cries of pain, shouting. But none of it seemed worth reporting, and Hornbeck never complained. Child kidnappers "know how to create a paralyzing sense of fear so even when the captor is not present, the child feels he is omnipresent," says a psychology professor from Saint Louis University. ... Attacks on aid workers in the Darfur region of Sudan could jeopardize the international aid effort, a piece [reports](#). If violence against relief organizations like Doctors Without Borders continues, "the humanitarian community cannot indefinitely assure the survival of the population in Darfur," the United Nations announced this week. The Khartoum government has pledged support but, according to some NGOs, frequently denies work visas and travel permits.—C.B.

### ***New Republic, Jan. 19***

In the cover piece, Nicholas Lemann reviews books about politics in the South, including new memoirs by Senate vets Jesse Helms and Trent Lott. Despite their journeys from lower-middle-class families to Washington power circles, both "manage to drain just about all the inherent interest from their life stories." When it comes to their records on race, including Lott's controversial praise for Strom Thurmond, both politicians offer "selective" histories: "That does not necessarily mean, however, that they are consciously hypocritical, that they sit around the family dinner table talking longingly about the days of segregation or even slavery," Lemann concedes. "Life is more complicated than that." ... An opinion piece [lambastes](#) conservative economist Alan Reynolds for rejecting claims of growing income inequality. As with subjects like global warming and evolution, supply-side economists argue there's not enough information available: "Their primary concern is that newspapers treat the question as a matter of dispute rather than a settled fact," the writer contends. —C.B.

### ***Time, Jan. 29***

The "Mind and Body" issue features a Steven Pinker [piece](#) on the science of consciousness. Last year, a woman in an apparent vegetative state showed signs of neurological activity, raising questions about treatment for unconscious patients: "If we could



experience this existence, would we prefer it to death?" Pinker wonders. Scientists break down questions of consciousness into the "Easy Problem"—figuring out the difference between conscious and unconscious states—and the "Hard Problem"—explaining subjective experience. ... A piece [examines](#) the rise of Democrats in the West. The casual style of politicians such as Colorado Gov. Bill Ritter and Sen. Ken Salazar stands in contrast to the "coastal, urban, legislative" manners of the Obama-Clinton-Edwards camps. Their agendas tend to include fiscal conservatism, a moderate stance on immigration—many of them must appeal to both Latino immigrants and local farmers—and a liberal attitude toward homosexuality and abortion. "[T]hat's the way it is out here in the West," said Barbara O'Brien, now lieutenant governor of Colorado. "People like their politicians independent."—C.B.

### **Economist, Jan. 20**

An editorial [assesses](#) the growing inequality wrought by globalization. Over the last 20, salaries for top American managers have soared from 40 to 100 times the average worker's wage. Workers' share of GDP has plummeted. "If globalisation depends upon voters who, as workers, no longer think they gain from it, how long before democracies start to put up barriers to trade?" the editors wonder. Economists aren't sure whether to blame technology or globalization, since the two are intertwined. Whatever the culprit, the editors contend, countries must create greater mobility for companies, workers, and investments before equality will become a reality. "The first rule is to avoid harming the very miracle that generates so much wealth," they argue. ... A special report [speculates](#) that Microsoft may have peaked. The upcoming release of its Vista operating system has generated little buzz compared to previous technology, and the spread of open-source programs and online software like YouTube has reduced consumers' dependence on Microsoft products.—C.B.

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## **jurisprudence**

### **Diagramming Sentences**

The Supreme Court's war on sentencing guidelines.

By Emily Bazelon

Tuesday, January 23, 2007, at 6:43 PM ET

Sentencing is supposed to be the straightforward moment in a criminal trial—easy arithmetic compared to the subjective assessments of jurors and attorneys. But ever since the Supreme Court got into the sentencing biz back in 2000, sentencing has been a mess. The court struck down federal mandatory sentencing guidelines in 2005, and some state guidelines have fallen as well. And in a 6-3 decision Monday, the justices killed the California sentencing guidelines.

The California case is the latest battle in a strange war that has turned natural judicial enemies into allies, set Congress against the courts, and given law professors a new life's work. Some of the justices probably have had their eye on easing the sentencing load on defendants, more and more of whom have been getting locked up for longer and longer periods. But the court can't make pro-defendant reform its explicit aim—that sort of policy decision is the legislature's job, after all, and in any case the cobbled-together majority behind the recent decisions would never hold together. So, for now, at least, the court's war on sentencing has enraged the lower courts and left the law in a shambles. These cases showcase destruction—this is what it looks like when the Supreme Court lays waste.

The 2000 case that got the court started, *Apprendi v. New Jersey*, seemed to unveil a new constitutional right. The court suggested that the Sixth Amendment's guarantee of trial by jury means that a defendant can't be sentenced above the maximum specified in a statute unless a jury finds the facts that justify the increase. What does that mean? According to this week's ruling, *Cunningham v. California*, for example, a legislature may not set the penalty for child sexual abuse at six to 12 years and then authorize a judge to send a sex abuser away for 16 years if the judge finds, for example, that the victim was particularly vulnerable or the abuser violent or dangerous. For one thing, those facts haven't been found by a jury. For another, they allow for a higher sentence based on a lower standard of proof than the one required for conviction: preponderance of the evidence, rather than guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

*Apprendi* and *Cunningham* have succeeded for two key reasons. First, at a time when judges have complained that federal and state laws have forced them to hand out unfairly long sentences, these cases hand power back to judges. Second, the cases are originalist, in that they arguably match the framers' 18<sup>th</sup>-century understanding of the right to trial by jury, when mandatory sentencing schemes didn't exist. For these reasons, the *Apprendi* cases have attracted an unusual combination of supporters: conservative originalists Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas, and, as of *Cunningham*, Chief Justice John Roberts; and moderate liberals Ruth Bader Ginsburg, John Paul Stevens, and David Souter. The justices in opposition are Anthony Kennedy, a former Sacramento lawyer; Samuel Alito, a former prosecutor; and Stephen Breyer, the midwife (as a staffer for Sen. Ted Kennedy) of the federal sentencing guidelines.

In *United States v. Booker*, the court's 2005 sentencing case, one five-justice majority tried to kill Breyer's baby. In a Stevens opinion, this majority struck down the federal sentencing guidelines—a complicated series of charts and calculations that specify sentencing ranges for every federal crime, and which Congress had required the courts to follow since the 1980s. The Stevens group said the guidelines were unconstitutional because they allowed judges rather than juries to hike up a sentence.

But Breyer, leading a second five-justice majority, swooped in to save the federal guidelines by saying that courts could treat them as "advisory." On the one hand, the charts were unconstitutional; on the other hand, they still mattered. Only one justice, Ginsburg, agreed both with Stevens and Breyer, and she didn't explain how to square their competing approaches. And *Booker* left hanging [other stray threads](#).

State and federal courts left to sort through the Supreme Court's contradictory and piecemeal directives often chose to ignore them. That's what California did in leaving its guidelines in place. With *Cunningham*, the Supreme Court told the states to start paying attention. California must have known its sentencing regime would fall. (The case also showed one new justice, Roberts, lining up with the Stevens-Scalia bunch and the other, Alito, with Kennedy and Breyer.)

Is it a good idea to toss out sentencing schemes like California's and the federal guidelines? That's a hard question. Guidelines and mandatory sentencing were supposed to bring order and uniformity to discretion-run-amok punishment, a world in which judges slapped one drug dealer with five years and another with 15 based on who they did or didn't like the looks of. Yet, in the past few decades, more uniform sentences have nearly always meant longer ones. Mandatory minimum penalties—five years for a certain number of grams of cocaine—have contributed. But so have sentencing guidelines. When legislatures set penalty ranges, they often don't seem to think about extenuating circumstances, or even, pragmatically, about the high cost of prison beds.

On the margins, at least, the *Apprendi* cases have helped loosen sentencing straitjackets. In their old mandatory form, the federal guidelines allowed judges to grant "downward departures"—sentencing breaks—for a small number of reasons. In the two years before *Booker*, only 6 percent of defendants got a lower sentence at a judge's behest. Since *Booker*, the rate of judge-instigated sentencing breaks has more than doubled to 13 percent. The rate of "upward departures"—higher sentences—also increased. But those numbers are much smaller—.78 percent before *Booker* compared to 1.35 percent afterward. So, the lesson seems to be that when judges have more discretion, they'll more often use it to curb the legislature's harsh impulses.

On the other hand, as federal appeals judge Michael McConnell argued last year in a law-review article, the Supreme Court's new approach may have derailed a push for broader sentencing changes. "Prior to *Booker*, there was a significant movement for sentencing reform," McConnell writes, citing support for reducing penalties from conservative groups like the [Heritage Foundation](#) and [Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship](#) as well as liberal ones like the [American Constitution Society](#). In the wake of *Booker* and now *Cunningham*, by contrast, Congress' attention "has reverted to whether federal judges have too much discretion and whether they will be soft on crime," McConnell

argues. He points out that the easiest way for lawmakers to reassert themselves is to pass more of the dreaded mandatory minimum penalties.

*Cunningham* is only the court's first word on the subject this term. In two cases to be argued next month, the court will fill in more detail about how much discretion federal judges actually now have. Doug Berman, law professor and sentencing blogger extraordinaire, thinks that both cases look like vehicles for additional change and leniency. In one, the defendant is a military veteran whose perjury crime looks more like a misunderstanding than a deliberate lie. In the second, an appeals court supplied the facts it relied on to reverse the sentencing break given by a trial judge. Get ready for more destruction.

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Judges rather than juries can still increase sentences based on a defendant's previous convictions—a big exception to the jury-sentencing rule.

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## kausfiles

### **Bold, Conclusive Disasters**

How "comprehensive immigration reform" is like the Iraq war!

By Mickey Kaus

Thursday, January 25, 2007, at 3:31 AM ET

**Bold, Decisive Disasters:** The conventional view of [Tuesday's State of the Union speech](#) is this: Bush's invasion of Iraq has turned nightmarish. He got beat in the midterms. He's reacted by changing his approach on the *domestic* front—reaching across the aisle to make bipartisan, centrist compromises on domestic issues like "comprehensive immigration reform."

But it seems to me the invasion of Iraq and "comprehensive immigration reform" actually have more in common than you might think. **Far from being a sensible centrist departure from the sort of grandiose, wishful, rigid thinking that led Bush into Iraq, "comprehensive immigration reform" is of a piece with that thinking.** And it's likely to lead to a similar outcome. Here are ten similarities:

**1. They're both ideas Bush had when he came into office.**

Bush speechwriter David Frum has written of his first Oval Office meeting with Bush, a few weeks into his presidency, at which the president explained his "determination to dig Saddam Hussein out of power in Iraq." At about the same time, Bush was meeting with Mexican president Vicente Fox to try to hammer out an immigration deal that would combine a guest worker program with some legalization of existing illegal Mexican immigrants. (Plans for such a broad deal were put on hold only after 9/11 made immigration a national security issue--but Bush diligently resumed pursuit of the deal, just as he diligently resumed pursuit of his pre-election plans for Social Security.)

**2. They both have an idealistic basis.** Bush was sympathetic to the way Middle East democrats had been frustrated by "realist" foreign policies, and he's clearly sympathetic to the problems of poor immigrants who come to the U.S. to work and feed their families only to be forced to live "in the shadows."

**3. They both seek, in one swoop, to achieve a grand solution to a persistent, difficult problem.** No "smallball"! The Iraq Project would begin the transformation of the Middle East, an area that had frustrated president after president. "Comprehensive" immigration reform would, as the name suggests, resolve in one bold bill the centuries-old immigration issue--including **a**) devising a way to keep out illegal workers while **b**) providing business with legal immigrant workers, plus **c**) deciding what to do with illegals who are already here. It would, as Bush said Tuesday, be "conclusive."

**4. In both cases, they envision a complicated, triple-bank shot chain of events happening just as Bush wishes it to happen.** Iraqis were going to be grateful to their American liberators, come together in peace and give us a stable "ally in the war on terror." Hispanics, in the happy Rovian scenario behind Bush's immigration plan, would be grateful to Republicans for bringing them out of the shadows, etc., ensuring a large and growing GOP Latino vote for decades to come.

**5. Both have an obvious weak spot, depending crucially on pulling off a very difficult administrative feat.** In Iraq, we had to build a nation in the chaotic vacuum of sectarian post-Saddam Iraq--which came to mean training a national army and police force from scratch with recruits who were often sectarian loyalists or insurgent infiltrators. "Comprehensive" immigration reform requires the government to set up an enforcement mechanism that can prevent millions of impoverished foreigners from sneaking across thousands of miles of unprotected borders--and prevent America's millions of self-interested employers from hiring them.

**6. In both cases, the solution has failed before.** We had failed to "stand up" a democracy in Vietnam. We failed to establish a stable, trans-factional governing structures in Lebanon and Somalia. Similarly, the grand, bipartisan Simpson-Mazzoli

immigration reform of 1986 had promised, and failed, to establish an effective immigration enforcement mechanism.

**7. Both were promoted by Bill Kristol!**

**8. In both cases, some Bush plan enthusiasts may not really mind a chaotic end result.** [Iraq war foes argue](#) that some important neocon supporters of the Iraq war weren't really bothered by the prospect of Sunni-vs.-Shiite warfare--even seeing divide-and-conquer advantages. (That might help explain the lack of attention paid to planning the post-war occupation.) Similarly, Kristol has said he isn't really bothered that the enforcement parts of the 1986 Simpson-Mazzoli law failed:

I'm not cavalier about illegal immigrants. ...[snip]... What damage have they done that's so great in 20 years? The anti-immigration forces said 20 years ago, there was an amnesty, which there sort of was, the Simpson- Mazzoli bill, which was pushed by the anti-immigration people, that Ronald Reagan signed. What's happened that's so terrible in the last 20 years? Is the crime rate up in the United States in the last 20 years? Is unemployment up in the United States in the last 20 years?...[snip] ... I am pro-immigration, and I am even soft on illegal immigration.

**9. In both cases, less grand--and less risky--alternatives are available.** Bush could have kept "Saddam" boxed up while he planned regime change through other means, built alliances and pursued the more manageable war in Afghanistan. ("Smallball" in 2002. Sounds good now!) Similarly, Bush could put "enforcement" mechanisms in place, and make sure they work, before he potentially stimulates a huge *new* wave of illegal immigrants by rewarding those illegals who already made it across the border. As a stopgap measure, he could establish a modest "guest worker" program and even enlarge the quota of legal immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries.

**10. In both cases the consequences of losing Bush's big bet are severe.** On Tuesday, Bush described the "nightmare scenario" his Iraq plan's failure (on point #5) has made plausible: The Iraqi government "overrun by extremists on all sides. ... an epic battle between Shia extremists backed by Iran, and Sunni extremists aided by al Qaida. ... A contagion of violence could spill out across the country. And in time the entire region could be drawn into the conflict." Plus Al Qaida would have a "safe haven" in Iraq that it hadn't had before.

The equivalent disaster scenario in immigration would go something like this: "Comprehensive" reform passes. The "earned legalization" provisions work as planned--millions of previously undocumented workers become legal Americans. But

the untested "enforcement" provisions (point #5) prove no more effective than they've been in the past--or else they are crippled by ACLU-style lawsuits and lobbying (as in the past). Legal guest workers enter the country to work, but so do millions of *new* illegal workers, drawn by the prospect that they too, may some day be considered too numerous to deport and therefore candidates for the next amnesty. Hey, ["stuff happens!"](#) The current 12 million illegal immigrants become legal--and soon we have *another* 12 million illegals. Or 20 million. As a result, wages for unskilled, low-income legal American and immigrant workers are depressed. Visible contrasts of wealth and poverty reach near-Latin American proportions in parts of Los Angeles. And the majority of these illegal (and legal) immigrants, like the majority in many parts of the country, are from one nation: Mexico. America for the first time has a potential Quebec problem,\*\* in which a neighboring country has a continuing claim on the loyalties of millions of residents and citizens.

In one sense, this second grand Bush plan failure wouldn't be nearly as disastrous as the first--tens of thousands of people wouldn't die. In another sense, it would be worse. We can retreat from Iraq. We won't be able to retreat from the failure of immigration reform--no "surge" will save us--because it will change who "we" are.

\*\*--Worse than a Quebec problem, maybe. At least France isn't on Canada's border. [12:06 A.M. link](#)

**Car name of the day:** They're unleashing the [Melling Hellcat!](#) ... [2:57 A.M.](#)

**Note:** A [giant, case-reinforcing update](#) has been added to the "Will Blacks Vote for Obama?" post below. ... [12:28 A.M.](#)

**NBC--House of Bland CW Hackery:** [Conor Friedersdorf disputes the "imperious" Tom Brokaw's "indisputable" points](#) about immigration, the residue of Brokaw's recent skiing tri ...sorry, *hard-hitting Murrowesque documentary* on illegals in, er, [Aspen and Vail](#). ... [9:52 P.M.](#)

### SOTU points:

**1) Shaping?** "It is still within our power to shape the outcome of this battle." **Modest!** Yes, the President also said "let us... turn events toward victory." But turning things *toward* victory isn't the same as .. victory. Rhetorically, was Bush setting the stage for a sloppy outcome--with the "surge" only making that outcome a bit better than it otherwise would be? Just asking! ...

**2) Stealth?** When Sen. Obama was queried by Anderson Cooper about the areas where the

Dems and Bush might cooperate productively, Obama ticked off energy and health care. He did not mention "comprehensive immigration reform." Perhaps this is a sign that "comprehensive immigration reform" is less popular among Democrats--at least Democratic voters, or Democratic *primary* voters--than some have assumed. ... That doesn't mean Bush's "comprehensive reform" (i.e. semi-amnesty) won't pass. Democratic leaders may still want a Bush-style bill. It does suggest that publicity--actually reminding voters what is on the table-- will be the enemy of Bush-style reform. Its best chance for passage would seem to be quietly, in the dead of night. **The more the MSM hypes immigration as a wonderful area of bipartisan cooperation, the less chance there is of that cooperation succeeding.** It will be interesting to see if respectable, Tancred-scoring, pro-comprehensive reporters and editors get with the program and start downplaying the immigration issue. ...

**3) The Clash:** Still too much talk about the "decisive ideological struggle ... generational struggle ... the defining struggle of our time" against the "Islamist radical movement." I would think Bush's best strategy for shoring up war support would be to calm things down while Gen. Petraeus does his work, not to remind voters he hears an apocalyptic tocsin they don't. Certainly this isn't new rhetoric. If voters even notice the "struggle of our time" save-get phrase anymore, I suspect it will rightly alarm them, starting with Peggy Noonan. ...

[7:58 P.M. link](#)

Tom Maguire of [JustOneMinute](#) flags the **First Plame Bombshell**--at least what passes for a bombshell in mediacentric circles. ... NBC's David Gregory, whose appeal has always escaped me--he never says anything!!--could **have some 'splainin' to do.** ...

\*\*--Maybe he's good on *Imus*. I haven't heard him there. But on the *Nightly News* and *Chris Matthews* he's an opinionless Prof. of the Obvious. ... [3:20 P.M.](#)

**Can Barack Obama Appeal to Blacks?** I wanted to write an item a few weeks ago predicting--after Stanley Crouch wrote a [widely-derided Barack's-not-black-like-me column](#)--that Obama would in fact have trouble appealing to many African-Americans in the primaries because **he's not a "native" African**



**American who can trace his roots through slavery, the South, emancipation, Jim Crow, civil rights, etc.. He's an African African American.** His family journey from Kenya to Harvard was recent and shortcutted a lot of American black culture and politics. ... I got zero positive feedback for this thought from my friends and dropped it. But there's at least some possible support for the theory in [this Newsday report](#) on the ABC-*WaPo* poll:

Clinton now holds a commanding 41-17 percent lead over the Illinois senator among Democrats and Democrat-leaning Independents, according to an ABC News/Washington Post poll taken before her announcement, and after Obama's Jan. 16 campaign kickoff.

**Strikingly, Clinton did even better among black Democratic voters, amassing a 26-point lead over Obama.** [E.A.]

In other words, Obama does better among whites than blacks. Maybe Crouch was on to something. ... There are other possible explanations for the discrepancy, of course--e.g. black Democrats are especially loyal to Hillary's husband, they have fewer doubts that she can win, etc. Still ...

**Update:** Several emailers note that the difference between the Hillary-Obama margin among blacks and among whites would seem to be within the ABC-*WaPo* poll's margin of error. That may be true, but you'd expect Obama to be actually winning among blacks, no? However, **I've looked further into the issue, and the case for differential black hesitance about Obama isn't as strong as I'd thought. It's stronger!** For one, [as \*Mystery Pollster\* has noted](#), Hillary's differential advantage among blacks is larger than my original post suggests. Here are the numbers from the [full ABC release](#):

Hillary over Obama among whites: 35 to 17

Hillary over Obama among blacks: 53 to 27\*\*

In other words, Hillary's 26 point lead among blacks compares with a mere 18 point lead among whites. More important, the ABC result [has now been confirmed in a second, CBS poll](#), which included an "oversample" of blacks to minimize error. The CBS result: **Obama's losing by 14 points among whites but by 24 points among blacks.** ...

*Mystery Pollster* favors a relatively mundane explanation for Obama's failure, so far, to capture the black Democratic vote: loyalty to Hillary plus lack of knowledge of Obama. *MP* speaks from experience:

Having polled for one of Obama's primary opponents in 2004, I can tell you that **whatever doubts Illinois African-Americans may have had about Obama prior to the 2004 primary race, they faded fast as he began to run television advertising, move in the polls** and receive routine coverage on media outlets (read local TV news) that reached real voters. The same could happen nationally should he score an early victory in Iowa or New Hampshire.

For a contrary view, see Debra Dickerson's [tumultuous and near-profound Obama-isn't-black essay](#), which makes about a half dozen fresh, difficult points while seeming to try to have it both ways on whether black leeriness of Obama is a good or bad thing:

Obama isn't black.

"Black," in our political and social reality, means those descended from West African slaves. Voluntary immigrants of African descent (even those descended from West Indian slaves) are just that, voluntary immigrants of African descent with markedly different outlooks on the role of race in their lives and in politics. At a minimum, it can't be assumed that a Nigerian cabdriver and a third-generation Harlemite have more in common than the fact a cop won't bother to make the distinction.

Dickerson has great fun mocking the civil-rights establishment's forthcoming attempt to put Obama in their debt. ("Never having been 'black for a living' with protest politics or any form of racial oppositionality, he'll need to assure the black powers that be that he won't dis the politics of blackness (and, hence, them) ..."). She only veers off the rails when, after explaining how Obama's lack of slave ancestry hurts him among blacks, she tries to flip the blame and "point out the continuing significance of the slave experience to the white American psyche; it's not we who can't get over it. It's you." How's that?

Ben Smith has a nice, nasty anti-Obama quote from an unnamed "Clinton adviser" that dovetails with Dickerson on a shallower level: "He's not built to be the black candidate. ... His youth and inexperience play against him in that world -- he's the **young whippersnapper who didn't pay his dues.**" [E.A.]

See also [this 2004 NYT piece](#) on the divide between African-Americans and *African-Americans*. ... [Thanks to readers *EV*, *JS1*, *JS2*, *TM*] 3:54 P.M. [link](#)



**Raise the Titaaron:** Aaron Sorkin [seems to have responded to critics](#) of his now-rejiggered *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* with the same wit and class he [displayed responding to Rick Cleveland](#). ... 2:55 P.M.

### Monday, January 22, 2007

**Not Another Mommy:** [Anne Kornblut on Hillary](#)--

Instead of campaign rhetoric, Clinton focused on the specific theme of health care for children, locking hands with a little girl who joined her onstage. In so doing, she signaled that she will use her uniqueness as a woman -- and more specifically as a mother -- to stake out her ground in the crowded presidential field at a time when Democrats across the board are putting children at the center of their imagery and message.

It's not clear that Mommyism is the best antidote to Hillary's image as a scold who knows what's good for us and is willing to use government to make us do it. Is state maternalism any less annoying or demeaning than paternalism? ... **Update:** Dean Barnett [blames George Lakoff](#). ... My own attack on Lakoff's **conflation of politics and parenting** is [here](#). ... [via [Driscoll](#)] 2:07 A.M.

**The Cafe Milano Candidate:** Would he make a good pick for the VP slot? Bill Richardson [skirts the issue](#)! ... **Update:** Steve Clemons [brings up a "touchy" subject](#). .. 1:33 A.M.

**Big problem for pollsters:** The rapid [growth of cell-phone-only households](#). ... It's less clear that, if polls are increasingly suspect, it's a problem for the rest of us. ... 1:05 A.M.

### Sunday, January 21, 2007

Former U.S. senator George Smathers died on Saturday at age 93. Wasn't there a rather famous non-public photo of Smathers and JFK on a fishing boat somewhere? Do we ever get to see it? *WaPo* might ask Ben Bradlee. ... All the [A.P. obit](#) says is:

He and Kennedy, who was elected the same year, shared similar affluent backgrounds, wartime experiences and a passion for golf -- and women.

Monkey business? ... 2:08 P.M.

**Missing from the Kremlin Wall:** Andrew Sullivan, in a typical [self-deprecating post that leaves you convinced you've gotten the full story](#), discloses his departure from *Time* for *The Atlantic*. He

**sucks up to everyone in sight at both magazines--except Ana Marie Cox.** ... Hmmm. ... 12:30 P.M.

### Saturday, January 20, 2007

Mohammed of *Iraq the Model* [thinks the surge has a chance](#), and he lives there. But some of his suggestions\*\* might not please the Iraqi chapter of the National Rifle Association. ...

\*\*--"Yes, having a weapon for defensive use is a justified need at this time but registering those weapons is of great importance to security." 4:16 P.M.

Doesn't Bill Kristol know that at this point he's a negative brand? **That is, if he endorses something that makes other people less likely to endorse it.** The headline of his latest co-bylined editorial--"[All We Are Saying ... Is Give Petraeus a Chance](#)"--roughly reflects what I think. But I'll be damned if I'm going to agree with someone who's been so wrong\*\* and caused so much damage! And [not just on the war](#). ... It would help Kristol's causes if he just stopped writing for a couple of years. Maybe a world cruise? The next [subscriber-fleeing Weekly Standard voyage](#), just leave him on board and pick him up in 2008. ... **P.S.:** If the goal is to remove Kristol from the public eye, and if he can't quit completely, signing him to write a column for *Time* seems like a plausible Plan B. ...

\*\*--See, e.g., [this 2003 NPR interview at the 9:18 mark](#). ... 2:15 P.M.

### Friday, January 19, 2007

**Time to cash out of the Bush administration?** [Jenna's doing it](#). The [owner of Impeachbush.com is doing it](#). One more and it's a trend. In a few months, after all, people might not care. ... 10:54 P.M.

**Too Good to Check:** [Rent-a-demonstrator](#). ... **Update:** Alert reader T. claims this is [nothing new](#). ... But now it's *online!* ... And these European demonstrators are "good looking," identifying themselves by

skin color and "appearance type," which can be for example "European," "African," "South American," or "Asian."

[according to Spiegel Online](#). ... They're not cheap, though, by U.S. protest-rental standards. ... 9:39 P.M.

**"Oklahoma Professor Calls for Immigrant Voting Rights,"** which apparently includes both documented and "undocumented" immigrants. This from the [Aztlán News Network](#), which promises to be a reliable provider of **backlash-**

**inducing pro-immigrant immoderation** in the months ahead. If you are Tom Tancredo, you want to bookmark this site. ...  
3:10 P.M.

**Those Iranian Election Results in Full:** *NY Post* columnist Amir Taheri [doesn't seem to be reporting on the same local Iranian elections](#) we read about last month in the U.S. press. Yes, they were a rebuke of President Ahmadinejad, but the resemblance ends there:

Dissatisfaction with Ahmadinejad was partly reflected in the recent local government elections and elections for the Assembly of Experts, where candidates closely identified with the president did poorly.

Overall, however, the radical factions of the Khomeinist movement (of which Ahmadinejad is a product) did very well. **In the local elections, the radicals ended up with 83 percent of the votes; they also did well in the Assembly of Experts' voting.**

In other words, although Ahmadinejad's personal brand of radicalism suffered a setback, the **Khomeinist movement as a whole remains in radical mode.** [E.A.]

**P.S.:** Here's how a *NYT* editorial ("Saner Voices in Iran") characterized those same results:

The main gainers came from two very different opposition groups, one aligned with former President Ali Rafsanjani, an **establishment conservative**, and the other with remnants of the **cautious reform movement** led by former President Mohammad Khatami.

Someone would seem to be cocooning, or spinning. 12:32 P.M.

**Thursday, January 18, 2007**

**More on Barbara & Condi & Laura:** Compare Barbara Boxer's line of attack on Condoleezza Rice last week with [Charles Peters' seemingly similar Washington Monthly attack](#) on the insulation of the powerful. First, Peters:

Many of those making between \$100,000 and \$500,000, especially those who live in large cities, worry far more about getting their children into the right private schools or into an elite university than they do about fixing the public schools. And almost all of them,

like the congressmen, have generous health insurance of their own that means health care for others doesn't tend to be one of their imperatives. Finally, **because their sons and daughters, with rare exceptions, are not in the armed forces, they could support sending other people's children into the war in Iraq.** [E.A.]

And here's Boxer:

"Now, the issue is who pays the price. Who pays the price? I'm not going to pay a personal price. My kids are too old and my grandchild is too young. You're not going to pay a particular price, as I understand it, with an immediate family. So who pays the price? The American military and their families."

See the problem? As Peters points out, even those who have sons and daughters are usually insulated from the costs of war *because we have a volunteer military*. Boxer's riffing about her children and grandchildren (and Rice's lack of "immediate family") isn't relevant to whether, as Boxer later put it, those who make Iraq policy "will pay the price for this escalation" because **people who have military-age children don't pay the price for war either** unless those children volunteer. And most don't.

So why did Boxer bring up her irrelevant children and grandchildren? Why not simply point to the insulating effect of the volunteer army? I don't know. But if I were **a) allergic to poll-tested liberal rhetoric, and b) slightly paranoid**--two small "ifs"--I might note that **Boxer's illogical detour allowed her to not-so-subtly advertise her motherhood in line with the reigning mommy-rhetoric of the Pelosi Era, in which "the gavel" is in "the hands of America's children."**

The "it's all about children" meme must focus-group really well, because Democrats keep trotting it out (most famously to justify welfare payments for "children," even though it's adults who get the checks). I don't remember Mommyism winning any national elections, though--especially during a war.

Boxer also managed to leave the implication that if only her children *were* of the right age, they would of course be volunteering to serve their country in the military. I don't know Boxer's children, but I'm skeptical.

**Verdict:** Guilty, guilty, guilty!

**P.S.:** In my earlier post, I also characterized Laura Bush as unfeminist for asserting that "[y]ou need a very supportive family and supportive friends to have this job" [of President], after Bush

noted that Rice "is single, her parents are no longer living, she's an only child." Technically, of course, Bush was suggesting that **both single women and single men would have a hard time being president**. That may still be objectionable. It may also contain a germ of truth. But isn't it possible for singles--even single only children, and even single only children whose parents are deceased--to build networks of "friends" that do the work of a family? I know people who've managed that. The snarkiest dimension of Laura Bush's comment, then, isn't the reasonable argument that it helps to have a network at your back, but the apparent assertion that Rice has no "supportive friends." ... 12:21 A.M. [link](#)

### Wednesday, January 17, 2007

**What Liberal Liberalism?** Eric [Alterman comes out against race-based affirmative action](#). (He'd base preferences on class, [Kahlenberg-style](#)). **If Alterman, a man of the left, author of *What Liberal Media?*, blogger for "progressive" site *Media Matters*, is now against race preferences, who's for them again?** Aside from the entire establishment, I mean. ... P.S.: Alterman even suggests that [Martin Luther King would have settled on class-based preferences](#) had he lived. ... 12:47 A.M. [link](#)

### Tuesday, January 16, 2007

#### **Pelosi=Amnesty Update:**

"The new Democratic-controlled Congress is likely to give President Bush the immigration legislation he wants, congressional leaders of both parties said."

That's from the [Chicago Sun-Times](#).\*\* Meanwhile, the border fence that Congress passed last year is in jeopardy, according to the [CQ Middy Update](#) [email](#):

House Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer, D-Md., said the House will reconsider a plan to build a fence along the southwestern border between Mexico and the United States.

"I think the fence will be revisited," Hoyer told reporters today.

\*\*--In fact, Hoyer [didn't quite say this in the Fox interview cited](#). Do Democrats who just won seats in marginal or populist districts really **want legalization of illegals (in exchange for untested border controls) to be the new Dem majority's [signal](#) achievement?** ... 3:13 P.M.

**Scooter-Scoop Reminder:** As the [Libby trial opens](#), the major drama of course is watching to see **a) if *kausfiles'* big scoop**

about [what "Scooter" Libby told Tim Russert](#) gets vindicated, and **b) if it's vindicated, how will the MSM handle the touchy subject matter (charges of anti-Semitism)?** ... **Early indicators:** You won't even find Russert listed in MSNBC's interactive roster of key "players," though he is one. ... And the [Washington Post publishes the following](#):

The plainspoken Russert will be a star government witness. He has told Fitzgerald that Libby fabricated parts of a conversation with him. He has said that when he spoke with Libby in mid-July, Plame never came up as Libby complained that MSNBC host Chris Matthews had an **antiwar** slant. [E.A.]

Er, no. **Not "anti-war," unless "anti-war" and "anti-Semitic" are now synonymous** (if reporting on the prestigious *kausfiles* blog [is to be believed](#)). No doubt the "plainspoken Russert" will eschew such controversy-avoiding euphemisms. ...

**P.S.:** Everyone expects Tom Maguire to be the [Go-To-Blogger on Libby](#). Those sorts of expectations can be a burden. What if he's gotten tired of Plamegate? **Update:** [Not to worry](#). ...

**P.P.S.:** I second Maguire's transpartisan (even trans-Plame) statement of [support and best wishes](#) for relentless *firedoglake* blogger Jane Hamsher, who's [about to undergo cancer surgery](#). ... 2:50 P.M. [link](#)

Paparazzi catch hot Buick [wearing see-through bra!](#) ... 12:25 A.M.

### Monday, January 15, 2007

Did [Laura really say that about Condi like Nora says?](#) It seems [she did](#):

"Dr. Rice, who I think would be a really good candidate [for President], is not interested. Probably because she is single, her parents are no longer living, she's an only child. You need a very supportive family and supportive friends to have this job."

Yikes. Single women can't be president! Move over, Barbara. ... **P.S.:** Does Laura Bush's intra-party sneer [get Sen. Barbara Boxer off the hook?](#) Or--by suggesting some **powerful subconscious urge of married mothers to condescend to single women**--does it make it even clearer that Boxer is guilty? Bush's comment certainly doesn't make the Boxer incident seem like a *better* episode for feminism. ... 1:04 A.M.

### Sunday, January 14, 2007

**Against the War, For the Surge:** I was throwing out some newspapers and came across something I'd forgotten: [Michael Gordon's November 15 NYT piece](#) describing how General Anthony Zinni, a trenchant and consistent critic of the decision to go to war in Iraq and of the prosecution of the war, supports something that looks an awful lot like President Bush's surge:

Anthony Zinni, who used to head the U.S. Central Command and was among the retired generals who called for the resignation of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, argued that the reduction of American forces was more likely to accelerate the slide to civil war than avert it.

"The logic of this is you put pressure on Maliki and force him to stand up to this," Zinni said in an interview, referring to Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, the Iraqi prime minister. "Well, you can't put pressure on a wounded guy."

"There is a premise that the Iraqis are not doing enough now, that there is a capability that they have not employed or used.

"I am not so sure they are capable of stopping sectarian violence."

Instead of taking troops out, Zinni said, it would make more sense to consider deploying additional American forces over the next six months to "regain momentum" as part of a broader effort to create more jobs, foster political reconciliation and develop more effective Iraqi security forces.

Logic says we should be able to separate support for the war from support for or opposition to the surge, as [H. Kurtz has noted](#). But politics seems to often dictate surge-bashing as a sort of **emotional and political make-up call for failure to oppose the decision to go to war in the first place**. (Just watch Hillary!) I find [Michael O'Hanlon](#) persuasive on the surge issue:

Critics rightly argue that it may well be too little, way too late. But for a skeptical Congress and nation, it is still the right thing to try -- as long as we do not count on it succeeding and we start working on backup plans even as we grant Bush his request.

**P.S.:** I wonder how much of the blame for the "too late" part will turn out to fall on Karl Rove. It seems highly likely that Bush knew many months ago that a new Iraq plan was needed, but delayed for fear of disrupting his overconfident Republican

strategist's flat-footed midterm election strategy--even though, it seems clear now, declaring this new initiative seven months ago might have *saved* the Republicans in the election. ... 10:43 P.M. [link](#)

**Friday, January 12, 2007**

**It's the Hassle:** *Washington Monthly's* Charles Peters [mocks the "new proletariat" of Americans in the "\\$100,000-\\$500,000 income range](#)," especially their agitation against the Alternative Minimum Tax. ... My impression is the main complaint against the AMT is not the extra tax it extracts but the extra paperwork hassle it imposes on those who essentially have to calculate their tax two times, using different sets of rules (or, almost as annoying, pay an accountant to do it for them) ... I would think the anti-bureaucratic *Wash. Monthly* would join in the fraternal struggle against unnecessary government-imposed complications--realizing that **Washington could probably collect a lot more tax money, indeed more money from the complaining top 20%, and if only it did so with less hassle**. ... Similarly, I think the hassle factor--the hassle of figuring out which insurance company is going to screw you in what way, of reading the fine print and artfully filling out forms and switching plans and negotiating with gatekeepers and getting pre-op approval and worrying about treatments that won't be covered--is why even the well-insured 'new proletariat' will ultimately care about universal health coverage (contrary to what Peters suggests in his last item). ...

**Update:** Ann Althouse, who uses Turbo Tax, [says it's the money, not the hassle](#). ... [Instapundit wonders](#) "if Turbo Tax isn't a friend of Big Government." [link omitted] ... I wonder **a**) if the AMT effectively eliminates the tax benefits of the home mortgage deduction and **b**) more and more affluent Americans are going to be subject to the unindexed AMT, then **c**) the resulting decline in utility of the tax deduction will produce a corresponding fall in the price of high-income homes. ... **Update/Correction:** AMT payers still get the mortgage deduction if it's [for buying, building or improving a home](#). But they [don't get to take it for home equity loans](#). [Thanks to reader J.L.]

**P.S.:** My anti-hassle argument is simply that we shouldn't have to do two tax calculations. I'm not saying there's not a good argument that, of the two, we should [keep the AMT and ditch the deduction-riddled regular tax code](#). That may be where we are headed already--as more Americans are obviously going to have to pay the AMT, they eventually may not bother with the regular tax code calculation at all, no? Result: Back-door slow-motion tax reform. ... 10:26 P.M.

**Hagel's Hyperbole:** Like most people--including, perhaps, most supporters of the "surge"--I don't expect it to work. But (assuming we don't initiate a new war with Iran or Syria) I don't quite understand why, if it fails, the U.S. will be in all that much



worse a strategic position than it is now in Iraq. This doesn't seem like a doubling down. It seems more like raising the bet 15%. So when Sen. [Chuck Hagel calls Bush's latest plan](#)

"the most dangerous foreign policy blunder in this country since Vietnam, if it's carried out"

that seems a bit odd. **If the surge fails, surely the 'most dangerous foreign policy blunder' will be not the surge but the initial invasion of Iraq. Hagel voted for that, remember.** ... Perhaps not just publicity-seeking political ambition but guilt is at work behind Hagel's hyperbole. ... **P.S.: [On Charlie Rose, Hagel equivocates, Kerry/2004 style](#)**, not quite being able to bring himself to say he was wrong on the Iraq war vote. He also defends his hyperbole, citing both the strains of increased troop deployment and the possibility of conflict with Iran and Syria. But note that Hagel's own plan, as he outlines it, would involve putting our troops on Iraq's borders with Iran and Syria, which might not exactly *reduce* the possibility of conflict ... **8:08 P.M.**

**Thursday, January 11, 2007**

**Auto Snow: Not So Fast, Comrade Kuttner!** [*Note: It may actually save you time to watch the [accelerated video version of this rant](#).*]

The shift lever [falls readily to hand for one R. Kuttner](#), who road tests the Pontiac G6. He doesn't like the door-lock releases. Or the steering. Kuttner concludes the problem with GM isn't its workers--or unions--it's GM's incompetent designers and executives:

You might blame GM's woes on poor American workmanship or the cost of American labor. But Japanese total labor costs are comparable, even with Detroit's higher health insurance costs. Increasingly, Japanese cars are being assembled in the USA, and the quality holds up just fine.

So what's wrong with GM? The cars. GM is famous for being run by bean counters and ad men. Toyota is run by engineers.'

This is a common viewpoint, I've found, among my Democratic friends--Jon Alter, this means you!\*\*\*--**who would never actually buy a Detroit product but who want to believe the UAW can't be blamed.** The argument seems to be roughly this: **a)** American cars are now reliable enough, having closed the gap with the Japanese brands, so **b)** the workers are doing their job; therefore **c)** if Detroit cars like the G6 are still obviously inferior--tacky and cheap, with mediocre handling--it must be because they're designed badly by white collar professionals, not because they're built badly by blue collar union members.

The trouble with this comforting liberal argument is labor costs. When Kuttner says "Japanese total labor costs are comparable, even with Detroit's higher health insurance costs," he is--as is so often the case--talking through his hat. Look at [this chart](#). GM pays \$31.35 an hour. Toyota pays \$27 an hour. Not such a big difference. But--**thanks in part to union work rules that prevent the thousands of little changes that boost productivity--it takes GM, on average, 34.3 hours to build a car, while it takes Toyota only 27.9 hours.** \*\* Multiply those two numbers together and it comes out that GM spends 43% more on labor per car. And that's *before* health care costs (where GM has a \$1,300/vehicle disadvantage).

If you're GM or Ford, how do you make up for a 43% disadvantage? Well, you concentrate on vehicle types where you don't have competition from Toyota--e.g. big SUVs in the 1980s and 1990s. Or you build cars that strike an iconic, patriotic chord--like pickup trucks, or the Mustang and Camaro. **Or--and this is the most common technique--you skimp on the quality and expense of materials.** Indeed, you have special teams that go over a design to "sweat" out the cost. Unfortunately, these cost-cutting measures (needed to make up for the UAW disadvantage) are all too apparent to buyers. Cost-cutting can even affect handling--does GM spend the extra money for this or that steel support to stabilize the steering, etc. As Robert Cumberford of *Automobile* magazine has noted, Detroit designers *design* great cars--but those aren't what gets built, after the cost-cutters are through with them.

Look at the big [Ford Five Hundred](#)--a beautiful car on the outside, based on the equally attractive Volvo S80. But thanks to Ford's cost-cutters it debuted with a tinny, depressing interior that would lose a comparison with a subcompact Toyota Scion. Ford [wants \\$30,000](#) for the Five Hundred. Forget it!

Is it really an accident that **all the UAW-organized auto companies are in deep trouble while all the non-union Japanese "transplants" building cars in America are doing fine?** Detroit's designs are inferior for a reason, even when they're well built. And that reason probably has more to do with the impediments to productivity imposed by the UAW--or, rather, by legalistic, Wagner-Act unionism--than with slick and unhip Detroit corporate "culture."

**P.S.:** If Detroit can only be competitive when the UAW makes grudging concessions, isn't it likely the UAW will only concede enough to make GM and Ford *survive*, but never enough to let them actually *beat* the Japanese manufacturers? I try to make this point [here](#).

**Update:** But UAW President [Ron Gettelfinger is right](#) about Ford's botch of the Taurus. ...

\*\*\*--Non-union Toyota's productivity, in terms of hours per car, has actually been growing faster than GM's, according to the



Harbour report [cited by NPR](#). So--thanks in part to Toyota's lack of work-rule bottlenecks?--GM is not catching up. It's **falling further behind**.

\*\*\*--**Update:** Alter denies the charge that he'd never buy a Detroit product. He says he "had a Taurus a few years ago." And he doesn't remember the conversation--about the relative culpability of the UAW vs. Detroit design--that I remember. ... 1:57 P.M. [link](#)

**Wednesday, January 10, 2007**

**Who's Surge Is It, Anyway?** In [this video from](#) AEI, Frederick Kagan and Gen. Jack Keane, [originators of the "surge" strategy](#), **make it as clear as can be that they do *not* intend for surging U.S. or Iraqi troops to go after on Moqtada al-Sadr's Shiite Mahdi Army** or to attempt to enter and clear out the vast Shiite neighborhood of Sadr City.\*\* Yet in his [speech](#) tonight, President Bush said (without mentioning Sadr's name) that Iraqi prime minister al-Maliki had given U.S. forces the "green light" to do just that--and news accounts played up the [anti-Sadr angle](#). ... Either Bush's surge is **some other kind of surge from the Kagan/Keane surge**, or there's some Kabuki goin' on (e.g., [al-Maliki doesn't really mean it](#), and perhaps the Bush administration *knows* al-Maliki doesn't really mean it, but wants a) Iraqi Sunnis, b) Americans, c) Sadr or d) himself to think he means it). ...

**P.S.:** Kagan and Keane [also wrote](#):

It is difficult to imagine a responsible plan for getting the violence in and around Baghdad under control that could succeed with fewer than 30,000 combat troops beyond the forces already in Iraq.

Bush is sending "roughly 20,000" additional U.S. troops, [according to the NYT](#). ...

**Update:** Juan Cole [has an idea what the Kabuki is](#):

[I would suggest that PM Nuri al-Maliki's warning to the Mahdi Militia to disarm](#) or face the US military is in fact code. He is telling the Sadrist to lie low while the US mops up the Sunni Arab guerrillas. Sadr's militia became relatively quiescent for a whole year after the Marines defeated it at Najaf in August, 2004. But since it is rooted in an enormous social movement, the militia is fairly easy to reconstitute after it goes into hiding.

**But if this is the case, is that a problem for the U.S. strategy, or the key to its implementation--i.e., if "lie low" means the Mahdi Army stops sectarian killings without the U.S. having to attack it?**

\*\*\*--Kagan and Keane want the troops to patrol "Sunni and mixed Sunni-Shiite neighborhoods," in part to convince Shiites they don't *need* Sadr's militias, which is different from taking them on. Attacking Sadr in Sadr City, Kagan says, would be a "very bloody operation" that would "look something like Fallujah." (See [video](#) at 9:58.) While we would "win," he argues that it would have the political effect of "driving all of the Shia parties together to oppose us." 11:27 P.M. [link](#)

**The old Pelosi is back:** How do you go in a week from appearing to be a [moon-faced 45-year old](#) to [looking your age \(66\)](#). I'm still mystified. ... 10:24 P.M.

**Tuesday, January 9, 2007**

**"It's Over:"** Kate Hudson's people must be paying *US Weekly* to [feature her breakup on the cover](#). I contend nobody actually cares about Kate Hudson's romantic life. Do you? She's no Ron Burkle! ... 5:21 P.M.

**Looking in a crowd for friends:** Supporters of welfare reform have seen caseloads drop dramatically and a employment rise, but we're still looking for unmistakable signs of a dramatic improvement in the culture of ghetto poverty, especially for black men. Jill Leovy's [Salon piece on the murder rates for black men](#) seems to offer a potentially significant bit of evidence:

The reality is that blacks in 1976 were almost twice as likely to die from homicide as blacks in 2004, and the disparity between black and white rates was 20 percent higher than today.

What's more, Leovy notes, "[s]ignificant progress has happened very recently. Over the last dozen years or so, the nation has seen a startling crime drops ... and black rates have dropped especially steeply." Hmm. What happened a "dozen years or so" ago? I [can't remember](#). ... Leovy doesn't discuss the possible welfare-reform explanation,\*\* though maybe she should. ...

\*\*\*--In fact, she credits the continuing *breakup* of the black family with a decline in the murder of men by "battered wives, trapped and desperate," although she notes that this can't account for the whole drop. ... 4:58 P.M.

**Give me 15 more inches of BarryAchenbachStein:** Ezra Dyer's [auto-show blogging](#) comes in on the good end of Hearty Hack. ... 2:12 P.M.

**Catching Up With ... NCLB!** The [estimable Eduwonk notes](#) that today's [NYT coverage](#) of the debate over the No Child Left Behind Act sees the story through **the hack pre-neoliberal prism: "more money, less money, Republicans against Democrats."** In fact, *Eduwonk* notes,

the NCLB tension evidenced in this story is less Republican and Democrat than differences between the Democratic committee chairs on the House and Senate education committees *and their leadership*. The money issue can be resolved in the context of a deal, the bigger problem is that **while Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid thinks NCLB is punitive, George Miller and Ted Kennedy don't.** [E.A.]

Does Sen. Kennedy mind that the *Times* cluelessly ignores his non-hack, non-anti-Bush role? Probably not, since the perception that he's in there fighting Bush for more money is what gives him the street cred\*\* to play his non-hack role of warding off the education bureaucracies, including unions, that want to water down the law's standards. ...

**P.S.:** Meanwhile. former NCLB enthusiast Mike Petrilli thinks the bold, risky Bush push into education is FUBAR and advocates [withdrawal to the Kurdish stronghold](#). ...

**P.P.S.:** As a non-eduwonk, I would think if the NCLB were working we'd see the results by now in positive test scores--and if it isn't working, we should **abandon the perestroika-like attempt to whip the education bureaucracy into shape with testing and "sanctions"--and move on to the dissolution of that bureaucracy** through a proliferation of charter schools. But *Eduwonk* says, via email, that it's too soon to tell whether the NCLB will improve test scores, since the "law was passed in January of '02, states only had the testing really implemented last year and this year ..." ...

**More:** For some broader *Eduwonk* takes--but **still not the one-stop what-to-think-about-NCLB piece concerned citizens demand**--see [here](#) and [here](#). ... Also note this comment on the power of the anti-NCLB teachers' unions to reshape (i.e. gut) the law:

A Democratic majority doesn't hurt them but doesn't help them all that much either because there are bad feelings on both sides of the aisles about how the unions, especially the NEA, have approached the law since its passage. ...[snip] ... But if things start to look scary for Dems in 2008, the unions stock goes up.

\*\*--that would be the "liberal street," otherwise known as Iowa. 1:29 P.M. [link](#)

**Monday, January 8, 2007**

**NPR seems to have a new feature:** "Pointless Stories from the Civil Rights Era." Apparently they've run out of the good ones. [Enjoy!](#) 2:39 P.M.

**Stupidest sentence in the LAT's big Gates Foundation takedown:** After noting that Gates invests in oil companies in the Niger Delta, the *Times* team declares--

Indeed, local leaders blame oil development for fostering some of the very afflictions that the foundation combats.

**Oil workers, for example, and soldiers protecting them are a magnet for prostitution,** contributing to a surge in HIV and teenage pregnancy, both targets in the Gates Foundation's efforts to ease the ills of society, especially among the poor. [E.A.]

Presumably it helps Nigeria's economy to have an oil industry, and it helps Nigeria's workers to have jobs in that industry. If the oil workers (or soldiers) then see prostitutes, what exactly are the oil companies the Gates Foundation invests in supposed to do to stop it that they are not doing, short of pulling out of Nigeria? ... Maybe there *is* something, but the *Times* doesn't say, leaving the impression it's ready to blame Gates for ills that are an indirect byproduct of the sort of ordinary economic development most people would regard as legitimate and beneficial. ... [*Many conflicts here:* Gates' Microsoft used to own *Slate*. Former *Slate* editor Mike Kinsley, a friend, is married to a Gates Foundation official, etc. Still! ] 12:12 A.M.

**Sunday, January 7, 2007**

**Great Moments in Public Employee Unionism:** Two L.A. traffic engineers [have been charged with "sabotaging intersection signal lights"](#) on "the eve of a two-day job action by members of the Engineers and Architects Assn., which represents 7,500 city workers," according to the *LAT*. The *Times* says the two allegedly rigged computers to disrupt\*\* signal lights at "four busy intersections."

Union officials were unavailable for comment Friday. Robert Aquino, executive director of the Engineers and Architects Assn., did not return repeated calls. But in an Aug. 21 interview with *The Times* about the pending two-day strike, Aquino noted: "**Los Angeles is not going to be a fun place to drive.**" [E.A.]

**P.S.:** There is *some* logic to paying private sector employees according to how much disruption they can cause during a strike (which is roughly what U.S.-style collective bargaining does). There's a lot less logic to paying government employees according to how much disruption they can cause--that disruption is often immense, even when strikers don't resort to extralegal means. ... [via [L.A. Observed](#)]

**\*\*--Correction:** Text originally said "disconnect." The [Times now reports](#):

They didn't shut the lights off, city transportation sources said. Rather, the engineers allegedly **programmed them so that red lights would be extremely long on the most congested approaches** to the intersections, causing gridlock for several days ... [E.A.]

9:57 P.M.

**Nancy is to Hillary as Arnold is to \_\_\_\_\_:** Just as Hillary Clinton should maybe be worried that a poor performance by Speaker Pelosi will sour voters on women leaders,\*\* should "maverick" Republican presidential candidates like John McCain and Rudy Giuliani worry that **Arnold Schwarzenegger's example will sour GOP primary voters on maverick Republicans?** ... In Pelosi's case, the worry (for Hillary) would be that she would flop. In Schwarzenegger's case, the worry (for McCain and Giuliani) would be that he'd be *successful* at implementing non-conservative reforms like his [plan to provide guaranteed health care to all children](#) in California [including immigrant children in the country illegally](#). The message, for those conservatives who might be tempted to overlook McCain's semi-Democratic domestic ideas (like his pro-legalization immigration plan and campaign-finance schemes) for the sake of his muscular foreign policy, would be that a **maverick Republican is much more likely to get those semi-Democratic ideas enacted than an actual Democrat.** ... **To Be Sure:** This alarmist message might be distorted (the California legislature Schwarzenegger deals with is much more liberal than Congress) and wrong (Schwarzenegger's centrist health initiative, aside from the illegal immigrant part, seems worthy). But that doesn't mean Republican primary voters won't be alarmed. ... [Thanks to alert reader S.A.K.]

**\*\*--CW today, but not [last October!](#) 9:27 P.M. [link](#)**

**Page C5:** The *NYT* [sells moneymaking TV stations](#) to refocus on "synergies" between its struggling newspapers and "digital businesses." .... "Synergies." Where'd I hear that word recently, in a media context? ... [Now I remember.](#) ... **P.S.:** Stock down 14%. Sell off of profitable assets. We're only just beginning to glimpse Pinch's visionary plan for victory! ... 8:22 P.M.

**Naked cars:** We read *Autoblog* for the pictures. The writing is hackwork--even worse than *Road and Track*, which is saying something. Today, *Autoblog* [sneers at the new Ford Focus](#), without bothering to explain why it "falls short." ... Maybe they're upset that it's [built on the old Focus chassis and not the newer "C1" platform](#) used in Europe and shared with Mazda. But the tinny old American Ford Focus ZX3 hatch is [fun to drive](#). The C1-based Mazda 3 [isn't](#), at least at normal speeds (I think because so much of the design's weight is way up at the front). ... 7:22 P.M.

**[Saturday, January 6, 2007](#)**

**What You Mean "They," Kemo Sabe?** Sen. McCain [woos the GOP base!](#)

"I'll build the goddamned fence if they want it."

[Thanks to reader R.H.] ... 1:58 P.M.

**[Friday, January 5, 2007](#)**

Some [old-fashioned schmoozalism on Obama, Hollywood and Hillary.](#) ... 3:12 A.M.

**[Thursday, January 4, 2007](#)**

Capt. Jamil Hussein, controversial AP source, [seems to exist](#). That's one important component of credibility! ... [via [Lucianne](#)] 4:48 P.M.

Are photo editors just choosing different shots, or has Nancy Pelosi changed her appearance? I can't figure it out. In [this picture](#) for example, she seems almost unrecognizable, based on the photos I've seen previously. But [some old photos of her](#) look similar. ... 4:40 P.M.

**Don't Leave with the One That Brung Ya:** [Andrew Sullivan says](#) a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq would

doubtless lead to genocide and ethnic cleansing on a hideously cruel scale

but he's for it! ... 1:19 A.M.

**The [Sadr-Sunni Paradox:](#)** Juan Cole [responds to kf's confusion and explains the](#)

abiding paradox of contemporary Iraq that the Mahdi Army and the Sunni Arab guerrillas are slaughtering each other daily, but that **young Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr (the leader of**

**the Mahdi Army) has a better political relationship with Sunni Arab MPs and leaders than any other Shiite.** [E.A.] \*\*

Cole's post is concise--I won't try to condense it further here. It would seem to have some possible pessimistic implications (are we backing the wrong Shiite in trying to form a "moderate" coalition between Sadr's rival, al-Hakim of SCIRI, and Sunni MPs?) and some possible positive implications, the main one being this: If the Sadrist Shiites and the non-Sadaamist Sunnis can cut some sort of stable deal, then **maybe we can withdraw from Iraq without triggering a Shiite vs. Sunni bloodbath.** Cole addresses this possibility as well. ...

**\*\*P.S.--**It's more paradoxical than even Cole points out, given that the Mahdi army seems to be behind the killing, not just of Sunni Arab guerillas, but of [ordinary Sunni civilians in mixed Baghdad neighborhoods](#). ... 12:16 A.M. [link](#)

**Wednesday, January 3, 2007**

It's going to be a [long "100 Hours."](#) 10:24 P.M.

A [WSJ-Harris "interactive" poll](#) purports to measure public support for various "issues that might be on the agenda of the new Congress." Here is how one of those "issues" is described:

Immigration reform to make it more difficult for immigrants to enter the U.S. and to stay in the U.S. for a prolonged length of time.

Huh? Which legislation, exactly, is this describing? (a) A proposal the Pelosi/Reid Democrats are actually planning to push? (Does it include legalization of many illegal immigrants already "in the U.S. for a prolonged length of time," thereby allowing them to stay a much longer time?) Or (b) the old enforcement-only Sensenbrenner bill? Sounds more like (b). ... The tough-sounding plan got 76% approval. ... 3:29 A.M.

Juan Cole [relays non-critically an Iranian report](#) that has the main parliamentary Shiite bloc on in the Iraqi parliament in negotiations with Muqtada al-Sadr

intended to forestall an **alliance of the Sadrists with Sunni Arab parties**, which would have the effect of dividing the Shiites. [E.A.]

I obviously don't understand Iraq: Aren't the Sadrist militias the ones ethnically cleansing Baghdad by killing Sunnis? (I know Sadr has tried to make alliances with Sunnis in the past, but you'd think it would be beyond that point now, especially after the Sadrist mocking of Saddam on the gallows.) **Update:** See Juan Cole's [explanation](#). ... 2:44 A.M.

**Tuesday, January 2, 2007**

**Mystery Pollster answers the call, [delves deep into the competing methodologies of those crazily conflicting Iowa polls](#)** and discovers ... that the methodologies are pretty much the same. Which leaves him stumped along with everyone else, except for the possibility that "voters are not yet engaged in the race enough to have strong allegiances." ... **kf's nominee for likeliest possible explanation** (informed by an email from Iowa reader G.M.): There's a big difference between **1)** asking voters if they "definitely plan" to go to the caucuses, and **2)** asking voters if they *actually participated* in the 2004 caucuses. Lots of people *say* they "plan" to attend. That's normal! But those who *have attended* are the sort of pathetically unrepresentative hard core activi ... sorry, committed citizens who make up the tiny sliver (6%) of Iowa voters who actually show up and choose the winner. ... In this case, the merely aspirational caucusgoers pick Clinton, while the **hard core goes for Obama**--a result consistent with the idea that Obama is capturing those who think a lot about politics, while those who don't think as much about politics haven't yet been hit by the wave. ... **P.S.:** The Dem hard core would also be more anti-war, and thus anti-Clinton. ... **P.P.S.:** And the same strategic 'electability' worries that led the hard core geniuses to light on John Kerry in 2004 might cause them to reject Hillary now. ...

**Update:** [MP says](#) the theory is "plausible" and notes that more numbers from the competing pollsters--showing how many people their filters filtered out--might resolve the issue. 8:27 P.M.

**Soft hothouse quirkiness** pays off in *Eat the Press'* 2006 [Honorable Mentions](#)--much more fun than *ETP's* actual, predictable (except for [Hodgman](#)) [Winners](#). ... **P.S.:** "What did you do this year?" is not a question we like to ask around here, though. ... 7:21 P.M.

**Arguments that Only Work in a Cocoon Dept.:** Another sneering [op-ed arguing](#) the Mexican border fence has an "effectiveness" problem because in San Diego, when 14 miles were built, people stopped crossing there! They went elsewhere to cross!

A little-noticed Congressional Research Service report issued Dec. 12 indicates that expanding the California wall makes little sense. After the San Diego wall went up, apprehensions in the area were reduced, the CRS reports. But "there is ample evidence that flow of illegal immigration ... shifted to more remote areas of the Arizona desert."

See? It won't work because where it's been tried it worked. Q.E.D. ... 6:53 P.M.



If you can't lick the [mob of salivating morons](#), join 'em! Even MSM-friendly blog victim Eason Jordan [is officially frustrated by the inability of anyone to locate](#) the AP's mysterious key Iraqi source, Capt. Jamil Hussein:

But efforts by two governments, several news organizations, and bloggers **have failed to produce such evidence or proof that there is a Captain Jamil Hussein**. The AP cannot or will not produce him or convincing evidence of his existence.

It is striking that no one has been able to find a family member, friend, or colleague of Captain Hussein. Nor has the AP told us who in the AP's ranks has actually spoken with Captain Hussein. Nor has the AP quoted Captain Hussein once since the story of the disputed episode.

Therefore, in the absence of clear and compelling evidence to corroborate the AP's exclusive story and Captain Hussein's existence, we must conclude for now that the AP's reporting in this case was flawed.

To make matters worse, Captain Jamil Hussein was a key named source in more than 60 AP stories on at least 25 supposed violent incidents over eight months. [E.A.]

[via [Confederate Yankee](#)] 10:32 A.M.

[Mohammed](#) of *Iraq the Model* still [sees the emergence of a "front of the moderates" in Iraq, presumably excluding the Sadrists, as a possibility](#)--followed by "early general elections towards the end of 2007" designed to weaken Sadr further. ... Have Sadr's Shiite rivals really abandoned the hopes for a military anti-Sunni solution, contrary to [what Fareed Zakaria reported](#) two months ago?

The Shia politicians I met when in Baghdad, even the most urbane and educated, seemed dead set against sharing power in any real sense. In an interview with Reuters last week, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki also said he believed that if Iraqi troops were left to their own devices, they could establish order in six months in Iraq. It is not difficult to imagine what he means: Shia would crush Sunni, and that would be that. This notion—that military force, rather than political accommodation, could defeat the insurgency—is widely shared among senior Shia leaders. Abdul Aziz al-

Hakim, the head of the single largest political party in Parliament, has made similar statements in the past.

Hakim, of course, is one of the Sadr rivals we are courting to join the "front of the moderates." ... 1:59 A.M. [link](#)

**Monday, January 1, 2007**

[An ARG poll](#) of "likely Democratic caucus goers living in Iowa" has **Hillary Clinton beating Obama 31 to 10%**. But a [Research 2000 poll](#) taken at almost the same time showed **Obama beating Clinton 22 to 10%**. I find it difficult to believe these apparent **wildly discordant results** can be explained by ARG's possible use of a tighter 'likely caucus goer' filter. [Pollster.com](#)'s [commenters](#) are perplexed too. ... Looks like a job for *Mystery Pollster*. ... **P.S.--Alternative Resolution:** Who cares what Iowa caucus goers think? They're the idiots who picked Kerry last time! [You're not allowed to say that about America's historic first-in-the-nation caucuses--ed Sorry. Momentary slip-up. Will care intensely about Iowa from now on.] ... **Note:** Hillary had a **"non-trivial" decline** in national polls over 2006 that began "before 'Obama-mania' took hold in late fall," [according to Prof. Franklin](#). ... **P.P.S.:** What are the chances that Hillary pollster Mark Penn's numbers will show her in a bad light and convince her *not* to run? Wouldn't Penn be missing out on a lot of remunerative work plus celebrity and excitement if she bails out? Just asking! ... 11:52 P.M. [link](#)

**Fast:** The Giugiaro Mustang, **"out"** already? It [only showed up a month ago](#)--and it's not so badly done. ... 2:46 P.M.

**Historic Hillary vs. Obama Clash looms** over ... [ethanol](#). Once again, the Iowa caucuses focus our nation's leaders on the big issues. ... **P.S.:** Clinton opposed allowing Sen. Coburn to continue practicing medicine because "she believes that senators should not have a second source of income." ... [???](#) ... 1:49 P.M.

**Friday, December 29, 2006**

Good to see Ann Coulter [defending the Black Panthers](#). ... 6:50 P.M.

Sen. Tim Johnson is still under sedation, and AP's report contains this **alarming quote** (missing from the [version now posted](#) on *WaPo*):

Dr. Keith Siller, director of the Comprehensive Stroke Care Center at NYU Medical Center and assistant professor at the NYU School of Medicine, said it is unusual for a patient to be

sedated after brain surgery for more than a few days.

"The two-week period is longer than I would be happy with," he said.

Siller is not the doctor on the scene, of course. *Congressional Quarterly* has some [more encouraging stats](#) [via [IP](#)]. ... **He said it:** Only *Slate*'s Tim Noah, however, [has had the balls to prematurely speculate](#) about a partisan Schiavo do-si-do in which Tom DeLay suddenly realizes that 'quality of life' is what counts, while Democrats discover that maybe the Schiavo conservatives had a point. ... **Backfill:** See also [Ace of Spades](#): ("Johnson's minor interaction with the world is enough to keep him in the Senate, but wasn't enough to keep Terry Schiavo alive. ... Democrats seem to have newfound respect for an occasional opening of the eyes.") 2:35 P.M.

**Thursday, December 28, 2006**

[Crooks & Liars](#) has **4 of the top 10 blog posts of 2006**, according to [Nielsen BuzzMetrics](#), which is pretty impressive. ... 3:20 P.M. [link](#)

**Sunday Morning Sullivan:** Bob Wright [engages a Buddha-like Andrew Sullivan in intense theological discussion](#). Then [I try to give Bob grief for not taking the obvious shots](#) at him. Bob [takes this rather more seriously](#) than I meant it--and that's always must-see TV! ... **P.S.:** The [Great Plano Controversy](#) comes up during this discussion (except I stupidly call it "Waco")--and I now realize I've never linked to [Virginia Postrel's definitive resolution in Texas Monthly](#). The key point Postrel makes--which Sullivan **ignores at his peril, if he thinks reducing the theological sway of fundamentalism is the key to winning red-state approval of gay marriage**--is this:

[M]ost Planoites are not ...[snip] "wildly exercised about sodomy." These solidly conservative, mostly Christian families are not about to launch a pogrom against their gay neighbors. "I have yet to know somebody on finding out that an educator or volunteer was gay in to say, 'Oh, gosh, I can't have them working with my child,'" Kelly Hunter says. "I have known them to say that about the mom who drinks before she goes some place." By the standards of twenty years ago, and certainly by those of Peoria, Planoites are positively accepting.

[snip]

Plano residents aren't "wildly exercised about sodomy," notes a gay friend who last year moved from Dallas to Los Angeles, "but most anti-gay people aren't. They are wildly concerned with making sure their kids never hear the word 'sodomy'; never ask, 'Mommy, what's a drag queen?'; and never have to deal with anything even remotely related to sex. ...[snip]"

He exaggerates, of course. But Plano parents want to determine when and where they talk to their kids about sex, and they assume that explaining that some men fall in love with other men is "about sex."

"We don't have control over a whole lot in the world, but hopefully the education of our children is part of it," Hunter says.

Even in a highly Republican town like Plano, in other words, the religious objection to gay marriage isn't the crucial objection. Fear that moral entropy will envelop your family's children is the crucial objection. I don't see how that fear is addressed theologically. I would think it has to be addressed practically, over time, by repeat demonstration. But time is one thing a rights-oriented, judicial route to gay marriage doesn't [allow](#). ... 1:13 A.M. [link](#)

[Influence Peddler sees ten House seats moving into Republican areas](#) (from the Democratic Northeast, and from Iowa) after the 2010 census--for a potential net change of 20. \*\* ... Doesn't that assume: **a)** the districts added in Texas, Florida, Arizona, Nevada, Georgia and Utah will invariably be Republican (your bailiwick, [Barone](#)); and **b)** "Republican" will mean the same thing in 2012 that it means today. ... **Update:** IP says he's talking about 10 new reliably Republican *electoral votes* for presidential purposes, not necessarily 10 Republican House seats. ...

\*\*--Pelosi currently has a majority of [31](#). ... 12:33 A.M. [link](#)

**Wednesday, December 27, 2006**

**Our [idea](#) doesn't work! Let's do it!** According to Tamar Jacoby, the recent arrest of 1,300 suspected illegal workers at six Swift & Co. meat processing plants [demonstrates the need for 'comprehensive immigration reform'](#). I don't understand:

1) "Comprehensive" reform is supposed to be a deal in which amnesty for current illegals (and a guest worker program) is coupled with a tougher workplace enforcement program to block *future* illegals. Sounds good, but the last

such "comprehensive" reform--the 1986 amnesty--failed miserably when its workplace enforcement program turned out to be ineffective at stopping employers from hiring illegals. **The idea behind the current Bush proposal is that this time workplace enforcement will work.** But, as the [New York Times notes](#), Swift & Co. in fact participated in the

the federal Basic Pilot program, a system of checking Social Security numbers that President Bush has touted as a way to crack down on immigration fraud.

**How does it increase our faith in "comprehensive" reform if the sort of "reliable verification system" that President Bush himself touts failed conspicuously to stop so many illegals from getting jobs at Swift that they made up 10% of the company's work force?**

2) Jacoby praises Swift for "trying to comply" with workplace enforcement laws. If this is the result that's achieved by a firm "trying to comply," how awful will the results in the future be with firms that are maybe not trying so hard to comply?

3) Jacoby notes that when Swift & Company "tried inquiring" more deeply into the backgrounds of job applicants, it was "sued for discrimination by the Justice Department." Couldn't President Bush--if he cares so much about workplace enforcement--have told the Justice Department to cut it out? If a conservative Republican president won't rule out crying "discrimination" when immigration laws are applied, why do we think a liberal Democratic administration will? **And even if the government doesn't sue to block effective inquiries into illegal status, won't the ACLU and other "civil rights" groups?** The ACLU [just sued](#) a Dallas suburb that passed a law against renting to illegals. Hispanic activists, including big groups like the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) [protested the Swift raids themselves](#).

"This unfortunately **reminds me of when Hitler began**

**rounding up the Jews for no reason** and locking them up," Democratic Party activist Carla Vela said. "Now they're coming for the Latinos, who will they come for next?" [E.A.] \*\*

Hmm. If enforcing immigration laws at the workplace *before* the passage of "comprehensive" immigration reform [reminds Hispanic activists of Hitler](#), **won't enforcing immigration laws at the workplace after the passage of comprehensive reform still remind them of Hitler?\*\*\*** In both cases it will presumably be mostly Hispanic illegal immigrants who are caught in the net. Jacoby allows that the Swift raids "could be justified in the context of an immigration overhaul of the kind proposed by the president." But the reaction of Hispanic activists suggests *they* will continue to fight in the courts and legislatures to make sure that the enforcement mechanisms on which the immigration bill relies are as ineffective as possible.

None of this makes Bush's proposed amnesty-for-enforcement deal *more* credible. It makes it seem likelier that, as in 1986, the amnesty part will work but the enforcement part won't. Which may or may not be the real idea behind "comprehensive" reform.

**P.S.:** After the raids, the line of applicants at the Swift & Co. office in Colorado for the now-vacant jobs--jobs that, according to Jacoby, legal immigrants and Americans won't do--[stretched out the door](#).

**P.P.S.: Kausfiles--Solution-Oriented!** Why doesn't Congress simply **pass a moderate increase in the unskilled legal immigrant quota from Mexico** (and other Latin American countries) while an effective enforcement system\*\*\*\* is devised and tested. No amnesty, no guest-worker program. Then, once we know we have an enforcement scheme that actually works--and won't be crippled by lawsuits--Congress could revisit a "comprehensive" legislation that includes amnesty.

\*\*--How come she gets to violate the Hitler Rule with impunity? No fair. ...

\*\*\*--For example, according to the *NYT*, [even the "comprehensive" legislation expected to be proposed in the Senate would deny amnesty to immigrants who "arrived after a certain date, perhaps 2004 ..."](#) But would it let the feds actually enforce the law against them? They'll be mostly Hispanics. It will look bad!

\*\*\*\*--Including, I'd argue, the border fence Congress authorized last year. ... [Some links via [The Corner](#)] 12:59 A.M. [link](#)

## **Tuesday, December 26, 2006**

**Mo' bama:** The *kf* enthusiasts [commenting over at MatthewYglesias.com](#) have a point, in that last week's [skeptical Obama item](#) conflated two issues:

- 1) Has Obama **grappled seriously and smartly with the big questions** of the day; and
- 2) Has he, in the course of this grappling, **told Dems something they don't want to hear**, or demonstrated independence from Dem interest groups that enforce the party's line in unfortunate ways (e.g., teachers' unions impeding education reform, seniors unwilling to accept any Social Security cuts, populists who pretend bargaining-down drug prices will largely solve the problem of health-care costs, etc.).

You'd hope that even Dems who don't agree with the DLC-ish sentiments behind #2 would insist on #1. But, yes, Obama could do #1 without #2.

Has he done that? A few weeks ago, *Obsidian Wings* [catalogued Obama's "wonky" efforts](#).\*\* He's against loose nukes, avian flu and unregulated genetic testing! That's impressive, but follows a standard good-Senator's path of **picking off a chewable, discrete problem and pushing a rifle-shot, programmatic solution** (typically involving creation of a small new federal office to control nukes, prepare for avian flu, or establish gene-testing standards, etc.). It's not the same thing as confronting deeper, bigger, less easily addressed problems: How to structure the health care system, how to pay for entitlements, how to confront the terror threat, the rise of China, the problems of trade and immigration, the increase in income inequality at the top.

Josh Gerstein of the *N.Y. Sun* [makes a better case](#): Obama listens to Samantha Power and Susan Rice on human rights, Gerstein reports. He wants to talk to Iran, he discounts the Chinese military threat but **surprisingly, for an early Iraq war opponent, he has said he'd favor "launching some missile strikes into Iran"** if that was the only way to stop "having a radical Muslim theocracy in possession of nuclear weapons." (Does Iowa know this?) He's unpredictable as well on trade. What's less clear is whether that unpredictability reflects a developed world-view or ad-hockery that's fine in a Senator but in a president, not so much.

More talk on these issues, please. And no fair "transcending" them!

Unpredictability of any sort is a plus when it comes to #2, of course. But so far Obama isn't close to meeting the Joe Klein Piss-Someone-Off Test, despite the efforts of his press boosters to claim he has. [Tom Maguire points to a comical attempt by the New York Times](#), where [a mini-profile by Jeff Zeleny declared](#):

He has demonstrated an occasional willingness to break from liberal orthodoxy, including his vote to confirm **Condoleezza Rice** as secretary of state, which at the time infuriated liberals (13 Democrats opposed her).

Wow! As Maguire notes: "So Obama boldly stood with a mere 86 fellow Senators .... " **P.S.:** What's the word for trumped-up contrarianism? Sister Fauxjah? ...

\*\*--Thanks to commenter ["Trevor" on bloggingheads](#) for the link. 2:08 P.M. [link](#)

## **Sunday, December 24, 2006**

**On to New Hampshire!** The mighty Hillary juggernaut **closes its vise-like grip on the post of Senate Majority Leader**. A [Concord Monitor poll](#) shows the same weakness as last week's [survey](#) from Iowa. [RCP summarizes](#):

Just like in Iowa, **Hillary loses to Rudy and McCain but beats Romney. And just like in Iowa, Obama beats them all**. Edwards doesn't run as strong in New Hampshire as in Iowa - no surprise there - but he still manages a dead heat against McCain and Giuliani and handily beats Romney. So even though Hillary is clinging to a lead at the top of the field, she's once again giving off the "unelectable" vibe in comparison to her two most serious primary challengers. [E.A.]

**P.S.:** In light of these poll results, doesn't Dick Morris' theory--that if Obama now *doesn't* run [he'll have done Hillary a favor by clearing the field](#)--have a couple of holes: **1)** Obama hasn't cleared Edwards out; and **2)** If Obama decides not to run early next year, and Hillary's still this weak, there will be plenty of time for new challengers to jump in. ... **P.P.S.:** Why does Massachusetts' governor Mitt Romney do so poorly in 'neighboring New Hampshire'? 12:32 P.M. [link](#)

**Hollywood Hates Obama?** [Juan Williams on Fox](#):



The question now is does Obama have any hope of raising money? I don't think he'll raise it out of the New York people, **I don't think he's going to raise it out the Hollywood people**, so where's the money going to come from for Barack Obama? [E.A.]

That's right, a charismatic black Iraq war opponent has [no appeal](#) out here! As always, the entertainment community demands *more policy details!* ... **P.S.:** Hello? Juan? You're making [Lawrence O'Donnell](#) look like Edgar Cayce! "Hollywood people" will obviously swoon for Obama at least as easily as any other Democratic constituency. ... **P.P.S.:** Remember when Joe Lieberman was briefly said to be through, after his primary loss, because he [wasn't going to be able to raise money?](#) 12:53 A.M. [link](#)

**kf's First Law of Journalism, Rigorously Applied:** If, as Lawrence Kudlow claims, ["the Fed has vanquished inflation,"](#) why do all the fancy restaurants that used to cost \$75 for two now routinely top \$100? When the rich-who-are-getting-richer bid up prices, doesn't that count? Just asking. ... **P.S.:** The food I've gotten for \$100 seemed to taste better than the old \$75 food. Maybe the statisticians take that into account. ... **Update:** Alert reader G.J. suggests fancy restaurants are simply victims of [Baumol's Disease](#)--they're a labor intensive business that's seen few gains in productivity. But in the rest of the economy productivity improvements could still be driving down prices. Good point. ... 12:15 A.M. [link](#)

### **Saturday, December 23, 2006**

**Clintonia Breakdown:** Isn't Samuel "Sandy" Berger's explanation for why he snuck classified documents out of the National Archives **entirely plausible?** Haven't you ever **been in a library, reading non-circulating material in an uncomfortable chair under harsh lighting--all the while thinking you could just make sense of it if you could take it home and review it in more familiar surroundings?** I faced this dilemma quite frequently at college and law school, and on more than one occasion my reaction was to stuff the papers in my backpack and smuggle them back to my dorm.\*\* You never did that? ...

Sure, the [Inspector General's report on Berger's misconduct](#)--obtained and released by **Pajamas Media**--raises lots of potential questions, some of which are [listed by the Pajamas editors here](#) and the [Powerliners here](#). And I yield to no one when it comes to paranoia about possible extralegal skullduggery in the Clinton administration! Well, I yield to only a few. (My [bona fides](#).) It *could* be Berger was trying to destroy all copies of an early 2000 email that said "Al Qaeda, al Schmaeda. What could they ever do to us?" But **if you read through the IG report in a non-paranoid mood and look for facts that are at odds with Berger's plausible 'I-wanted-to-**

**sort-out-this-stuff-at-home explanation, ' you won't find much.**

I did notice one jarring fact: When Berger is given a second copy of an email he's already taken home--#217--he takes *that* copy home too. That makes it look like he wanted to remove all copies of #217. But it's also consistent with the familiar last-minute-crammer's habit of wanting to make sure you've scooped up every little bit of material to study during the impending all-nighter. As long as you're stealing stuff, you might as well be comprehensive. Maybe Berger (as he apparently claims) wasn't certain the two copies of #217 were identical.

Meanwhile, in Berger's defense, we learn from the report that he read the documents in an office with an archives employee who was doing his own work, and whom Berger was reluctant to bother. **Sounds like exactly the sort of arrangement that would stop me from getting any productive thinking done.** Bad Feng Shui! Couple that with **a)** the requirement that Berger couldn't even remove his *own notes* from this room and **b)** Berger's almost certain knowledge that many of the documents subject to these maddening regulations probably shouldn't really be classified in the first place, and you might easily conclude that **the IG report does more to back up than to cast doubt on Berger's non-sinister explanation.**

\*\*--Admittedly, I didn't then cut them up and put them in the trash. But then, unlike Berger, I wasn't caught before I returned them. 10:51 P.M. [link](#)

**D\_\_\_ Cab for Cutie:** The car that most [impressed me](#), during my recent *Gearbox* phase, was the **Scion Xb**, which only recently went out of production. Perfectly-sized for the city, inexpensive, reliable, handles well, holds a lot, leaves a light footprint on the planet. But jeez, before you buy one, take a look at [this picture](#). Grim! [via [Autoblog](#)] 5:33 P.M. [link](#)

### **Friday, December 22, 2006**

**Thanks, Iowa?** Hillary's [big Iowa problem](#). She's running a **strong fourth** with 10%! ... **P.S.:** She can't blame lack of "name recognition." [*Time for the contest to write her withdrawal speech?--ed* We wouldn't want somebody else to [steal that gimmick!](#) But there's one way to guarantee that she won't need a withdrawal speech--if she decides not to risk a run that might end in humiliating primary defeat. She doesn't seem like the type who'd handle that well.] ... **Caveat:** Hillary can always note that [Iowa Democratic voters are proven fools](#). ... 3:28 P.M.

### **Thursday, December 21, 2006**

Obama--[He's no Gary Hart!](#) ... 1:08 A.M

### **Wednesday, December 20, 2006**

Is that a [photo](#) of Rick Stengel or the Madame Tussauds installation of [Rick Stengel](#)? 12:35 A.M.

**Tuesday, December 19, 2006**

**My Obama Problem:** After reading up a bit on Barack Obama for a temporarily-aborted *bloggingheads* segment, my tentative working thesis is this: **He's too damn reflective!** And introspective. ... Maybe it's the writers, or the questions they ask, or the audience they think they're writing for, but all the *drama* in the [stories about Obama](#) comes from his "[emotional wrestling match with his background](#)," his overcoming of his "angry sense of racial displacement," his wrenching assessments and reassessments of how to live in "a world that is broken apart by class and race and nationality," etc.

One of those reassessments, according to Obama, came when a friend told him "you always think everything's about you." And he doesn't any more? Obama's favorite complexity still seems to be Obama--it was certainly a subtext of his [2004 convention address](#). ("We worship an awesome God in the blue states"). At the end of his early Obama profile, my boss Jacob Weisberg says Obama "would never be so immodest" as to compare himself to Lincoln. But a dozen paragraphs earlier, Obama had done just that:

"That kind of hunger—desperate to win, please, succeed, dominate—I don't know any politician who doesn't have some of that reptilian side to him. But that's not the dominant part of me. On the other hand, I don't know that it was the dominant part of—" his voice suddenly trails off as he motions behind him to a portrait of Lincoln, the self-invented lawyer, writer, and politician from Illinois. "This guy was pretty reflective," he says, offering a sly smile.

I'm a "character" voter, not an "issues" voter. **But the way you reveal your character is by grappling with issues, not by grappling with yourself.** Anguish is easy. Isn't it time for Obama to start being ostentatiously reflective about *policies*? That's what you want from a Harvard Law Review type.

And on the issues, what's Obama done that's original or pathbreaking? I don't know the answer. But compare his [big speech on immigration reform](#) with failed Dem Senate candidate Brad Carson's [article on immigration reform](#). Carson says things Democrats (and Republicans) haven't been saying; Obama's speech offers an idiosyncratic **vener of reasonableness over a policy that is utterly party line and conventional**, defended with arguments that are party line and conventional.

OK, that's just one example. Maybe I'm an old-fashioned Joe Kleinish Clintonian self-hating Dem. But I'm not swooning until I hear Obama to tell Democrats *something* they maybe don't want to hear. Did I miss it? 12:21 A.M. [link](#)

**Monday, December 18, 2006**

[Shane MacGowan of the Pogues on Kirsty MacColl](#), who was killed six years ago yesterday, and their song *Fairytale of New York*, which won a 2004 poll for best Christmas song. [via [Gawker](#)] ... **My nominee for best Christmas song** is something I've only heard once, *The Wedding Present's* ecstatically noisy version of "Step Into Christmas." ... **P.S.:** OK, I've now heard it twice. (It's [here](#).) I stand by my position. ... 8:52 P.M.

**And Johnson Walks?** So Fannie Mae ex-CEO Franklin Raines [may have to give back \\$84 million in bonuses](#) he received [from 1998 to 2004](#), while his predecessor **Dem bigshot Jim Johnson--who apparently got a bigger bonus than Raines did in 1998--doesn't have to give back anything?** Hardly seems fair. ... **P.S.:** Johnson at one point had [parlayed his position at the head of the Fannie Mae gravy train into the chairmanship of the Kennedy Center and the otherwise-reputable Brookings Institution](#). ... Yet even the conservative *N.Y. Sun* [seems to have forgotten](#) that Johnson, who also headed John Kerry's vice-presidential search, is involved in this mess. ... **P.P.S.:** [Here's](#) my attempt to assess Raines' relative guilt or innocence. ... In any case, if Raines had taken *kausfiles'* 2004 advice--'[give the money back now!](#)'--he'd be better off, no? He could be the Tara Conner of overpaid CEOs! And he'd still have a political future. ... 7:15 P.M.

If Judith Regan lawyer Bert Fields' bite were as fearsome as his bark, wouldn't [Susan Estrich own the L.A. Times](#)? Just asking! ... 7:14 P.M.

**Y.U.:** William Beutler, [eerily prescient](#). ... He claims *Time* magazine is just **preternaturally predictable**. [via [Surber](#)] 4:23 P.M.

Hillary Clinton was [asked about a possible troop surge in Iraq](#):

"I am not in favor of doing that **unless it's part of a larger plan**," Clinton said. "I am not in favor of sending more troops to continue what our men and women have been told to do with the government of Iraq pulling the rug out from under them when they actually go after some of the bad guys." [E.A.]

*Note to WCBS:* This does not support the headline "Clinton Opposes U.S. Troop Surge In Iraq." It supports the headline "Clinton Fudges on U.S. Troop Surge in Iraq." On balance, I'd even say it's **more supportive than not**--any troop surge will

clearly be presented as part of a "larger plan," after all. Clinton didn't even say, [as Sen. Harry Reid did](#), that the "plan" has to include "a program to get us out of there ... by this time next year." .... 11:46 P.M.

**"Are social conservatives stuck with a pro-golden shower candidate?"** [Ryan Lizza](#) goes into the hilarious details of Mitt Romney's not-so-long-ago tolerance of Bay State gay activism. ... What's shaping up, Lizza notes, is a battle between cynical inside-the-Beltway conservative pros who are willing to overlook Romney's "pro-gay, pro-abortion record" because **"they need an anti-McCain,"** and actual outside-the-Beltway social conservative voters who might be **horrified by state-sponsored fisting seminars** and "Transgender Proms." ... **P.S.:** Instead of trying to persuade social conservatives he's been secretly battling for them all along, wouldn't Romney be better off playing the conversion card? 'Nobody knows the evil of golden showers better than someone who ...,' etc., etc.. I would think it would pack a convincing *frisson*. ... 11:13 A.M.

**Sunday, December 17, 2006**

**Breast Cancer Rates Fall** as Women Abandon Hormone Replacement Therapy. ... Moral: Don't get your medical advice from [The New Yorker](#). ... 11:29 P.M.

**Warner rethink:** OK, that's [enough time with my children!](#) ... And if the need for family time is *not* the big reason why Mark Warner dropped out, as [rumor says it wasn't](#), what made him change his mind? ... Seems like there must be a story here, though maybe not the kind of story that ever comes out (except in [novels](#)). ... [via [HuffPo](#) via [Goddard](#)] 9:53 P.M.

Mohammed of *Iraq the Model* is [cautiously non-pessimistic](#) about the creation of an anti-Sadr majority coalition in Iraq, but doesn't expect it to move militarily against Sadr. ... Juan Cole, who's been [right about Sadr](#) before, [argues that any military move will backfire](#):

The fact is that if provincial elections were held today, the Sadr Movement would sweep to power in all the Shiite provinces (with the possible exception of Najaf itself). It is increasingly the most popular political party among Iraq's Shiite majority. For the US to cut the Sadrists out of power in parliament and then fall on them militarily would just throw Iraq into turmoil. It would increase the popularity of the Sadrists, and ensure that they gain nationalist credentials that will ensconce them for perhaps decades.. ...

Neither thinks al-Maliki will be replaced as prime minister. ... 9:41 P.M.

**Saturday, December 16, 2006**

**First Mark Warner, now [Evan Bayh](#).** The solid centrist Dem alternatives to Hillary are dropping out, one by one. Funny how that happens! ... 11:46 P.M.

**Friday, December 15, 2006**

**Malkin and Alterman--Together Again:** [Lt. Col. Bateman's post](#) on Media Matters' *Altercation*--disputing Associated Press in the ongoing controversy over the alleged burning of six Sunnis in Baghdad--seems **quite damning**. Eric Boehlert's [response](#)--'Hey, I'm not defending the AP on this, just attacking the AP's attackers!'--seems quite weak. And **Boehlert, while blasting "unhinged" warbloggers, comes unhinged himself**, I think, when in his [original, near interminable article](#) he writes:

I don't think it's out of bounds to suggest that warbloggers want journalists to venture into exceedingly dangerous sections of Iraq because warbloggers want journalists to get killed.

[via [Malkin](#)] ... **Update:** But [see](#) ... 4:44 P.M.

**Thursday, December 14, 2006**

**Fading Reyes?** Hmm. Looks like that big fight over the chairmanship of the House Intelligence committee was a fight over a [committee that will soon lose--or at least have to share--a big chunk of its turf](#). ... It wasn't because of [the quiz](#), was it? ... 1:20 P.M.

**Di Bug Bust:** [That official police report](#) on Diana's death appears to be a bust, as far as alleging spying by the Clinton Administration on Republican magnate Ted Forstmann. [Byron York](#):

[T]he Lord Stevens report contains no mention of Forstmann and no description of anyone like him, **nor does it have any evidence that anything like the Forstmann scenario took place.** [E.A.]

But the U.S. may have caught Diana talking about hairstyles with her friend Lucia Flecha de Lima! (The report speculates they would have been overheard because we were eavesdropping on the Brazilian embassy in D.C.). ...

**P.S.--Keeping Hope Alive:** I should also note, at the risk of sounding like a raving conspiracist, that the Stevens report doesn't seem to say anything that would *rule out* a U.S. a bugging of Forstmann that turned up conversations with or about

Diana\*\*--though to be consistent with the NSA's account they would have to be "only short references to Princess Diana in contexts unrelated to the allegations" about her death being the result of a conspiracy. It's just that the Stevens report was what was supposed to substantiate the Forstmann angle, and it doesn't. It's not like there is a lot of *other* evidence for the Forstmann-bug scenario--unless the [credibility-challenged Brit papers](#) can produce some. ...

Still! Diana's apparently famous July 14, 1997 statement to the press--

"You're going to get a big surprise, you'll see, you're going to get a big surprise with the next thing I do"

*does* seem a lot more consistent with [future plans](#) to [hook up with a rich U.S. Republican who would run for president](#) than with plans to marry Dodi Al Fayed--whom, the report says, she hadn't yet met "that summer," doesn't it?

\*\*--From [WaPo](#) :

[NSA official Louis] Giles said the NSA would not share the documents with investigators on grounds their disclosure could reveal secret intelligence sources and methods. Nor did Giles reveal whose conversations were being targeted by the NSA.

12:07 P.M. [link](#)

### Wednesday, December 13, 2006

Bloggingheads [bring sexy back!](#) ... Plus Matt Yglesias does his best [Muqtada al-Sadr impression](#). ... 5:32 P.M.

[The Note](#) writes that Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney is "looking for ways to sharpen his differences with McCain on immigration." That shouldn't be hard! ... [Here comes one now](#). ... 4:58 P.M.

### Tuesday, December 12, 2006

Is it possible those British press reports are completely wrong about the bugging of Ted Forstmann and Diana? (See [below](#).) Thursday's publication of the official Scotland Yard report on Diana's death should be near-definitive on the issue, since the Brit papers are supposedly merely offering leaks from that report. But, [according to today's New York Daily News](#), Forstmann thought he was bugged:

A source close to Forstmann told the Daily News yesterday that Diana may have been overheard while traveling with Forstmann on his private plane, which Forstmann **believed was bugged by the feds to listen in on his rich and powerful friends.** [E.A.]

Note that the [Washington Post's Source Close to Forstmann](#)--who seems to know things only Forstmann himself would know--only says that "he had heard rumors that someone had planted listening devices in his plane to listen to the princess," not to listen generally to Forstmann's rich and powerful friends. Of course, targetting *the princess* is exactly what the Feds are busy denying. Which leaves open ... [via Drudge] 12:44 P.M.

**[Bloggingheads](#)** --Bob Wright's videoblog project. **[Gearbox](#)**--Searching for the Semi-Orgasmic Lock-in. **[Drudge Report](#)**--80 % true. Close enough! **[Instapundit](#)**--All-powerful hit king. **[Joshua Marshall](#)**--He reports! And decides! **[Wonkette](#)**--Makes Jack Shafer feel guilty. **[Salon](#)**--Survives! kf gloating on hold. **[Andrew Sullivan](#)**--He asks, he tells. He sells! **[David Corn](#)**--Trustworthy reporting from the left. **[Washington Monthly](#)**--Includes Charlie Peters' proto-blog. **[Lucianne.com](#)**--Stirs the drink. **[Virginia Postrel](#)**--Friend of the future! **[Peggy Noonan](#)**--Gold in every column. **[Matt Miller](#)**--Savvy rad-centrism. **[WaPo](#)**--Waking from post-Bradlee snooze. **[Keller's Calmer Times](#)**--Registration required. **[NY Observer](#)**--Read it before the good writers are all hired away. **[New Republic](#)**--Left on welfare, right on warfare! **[Jim Pinkerton](#)**--Quality ideas come from quantity ideas. **[Tom Tomorrow](#)**--Everyone's favorite leftish cartoonists' blog. **[Ann "Too Far" Coulter](#)**--Sometimes it's just far enough. **[Bull Moose](#)**--National Greatness Central. **[John Ellis](#)**--Forget that Florida business! The cuz knows politics, and he has, ah, sources. **["The Note"](#)**--How the pros start their day. **[Romanesko](#)**--O.K. they actually start it here. **[Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#)**--Money Liberal Central. **[Steve Chapman](#)**--Ornery-but-lovable libertarian. **[Rich Galen](#)**--Sophisticated GOP insider. **[Man Without Qualities](#)**--Seems to know a lot about white collar crime. Hmmm. **[Overlawyered.com](#)**--Daily horror stories. **[Eugene Volokh](#)**--Smart, packin' prof, and not Instapundit!



**Eve Tushnet**--*Queer, Catholic, conservative and not Andrew Sullivan!* **WSJ's Best of the Web**--*James Taranto's excellent obsessions.* **Walter Shapiro**--*Politics and (don't laugh) neoliberal humor!* **Eric Alterman**--*Born to blog.* **Joe Conason**--*Bush-bashing, free most days.* **Lloyd Grove**--*Don't let him write about you.* **Arianna's Huffosphere**--*Now a whole fleet of hybrid vehicles.* **TomPaine.com**--*Web-lib populists.* **Take on the News**--*TomPaine's blog.* **B-Log**--*Blog of spirituality!* **Hit & Run**--*Reason gone wild!* **Daniel Weintraub**--*Beeblogger and Davis Recall Central.* **Eduwonk**--*You'll never have to read another mind-numbing education story again.* **Nonzero**--*Bob Wright explains it all.* **John Leo**--*If you've got political correctness, he's got a column ...*  
[More tk]

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## low concept Wiki-Parenting

How babies invented community-based collaborative authorship.

By Dahlia Lithwick

Wednesday, January 24, 2007, at 4:49 PM ET

With all due respect to [Ward Cunningham](#), I'd like to take issue, for a moment, with the claim that he is the [originator of the wiki](#). Because anyone who's had a child can assure you that collective public authorship, collaborative editing, and anonymous generative correction—those wiki hallmarks—have been around since Mrs. Cain first brought Baby Cain over to Uncle Abel's house dressed only in a too-thin fig-leaf onesie.

I took my small sons to visit family over the holidays. As invariably happens when one wants to show off one's young, the smaller one's face exploded into great green ropes of snot only seconds after deplaning. The consumptive Victorian wheeze followed mere hours later. And suddenly, he was no longer my baby. He was a server-side wiki.

Now, my husband and I had more or less finalized our wiki entry on caring for babies with colds. We had agreed, for instance, about the germ theory over the outside-with-wet-heads theory. We were, in the main, for hot liquids, baby Tylenol, hand-washing, and humidifiers. But as our boys are increasingly exposed to a growing number of end users, the markups of their illness wiki began to proliferate.

One of the great-aunts quickly submitted the milk markup. "No milk, no cheese, no yogurt," she wrote definitively. I went back that afternoon and edited this out. "The pediatrician has assured us that there is absolutely no connection between dairy and mucous," I wrote. My mom was spurred on to correct my error. "Absolutely no milk," she marked up my markup. "Also, no baths!"

When the baby started to smell funny that night, I checked his wiki for any Recent Changes. I noted the no-baths entry with some surprise and responded with a hasty edit: "Baths are okay," I wrote. "He finds them very soothing, and they are better than a sandblaster for the welded-on green mucous."

By the morning, "definitely no baths" had been reinstated, and "warmer slippers and indoor hats" had been added in by the lady at the supermarket who heard him coughing in the checkout line. Beginning to doubt myself and the gurus from *What to Expect the First Year*, I found myself mulling over these modifications. "Should we really be overheating him if it isn't cold out?" I typed into the comments section.

"He needs to sweat it out," responded a former law school classmate, who had also gone in and deleted the "baby Tylenol" entry, noting that suppressing a fever is a mistake, as is preventing the mucous from circulating freely. A visit to the local pediatrician that day prompted a similar entry, even as my big brother was editing the "slippers and hats" instructions and replacing it with "plenty of crisp fresh air." Then suddenly, my house was divided against itself, as my husband abruptly changed course, finding himself in agreement with the sweatiness/free-range-mucous camp.

I surreptitiously deleted these entries following the baby's 3 a.m. coughing fit/antihistamine fix. When I awoke that morning, the patient was bundled in 13 alpaca throw rugs and the wiki entry had been marked up to reflect that "Both Tylenol and decongestants should be discouraged. The child must rid himself of his bodily floods naturally." I could tell from the spelling that my older son was the poster.

"No wheat or refined sugars" had been added next to the "no dairy" section. "Only fresh fruit and vegetables and warmed broth." But by that afternoon, "broth" had been deleted and "Glenfiddich" had been added. My brother again. Next to that was the "vitamin C and Echinacea" entry, and beneath it was something from a cousin's homeopath about fashioning a tiny anklet out of chicken bones. The chicken bones were out by midafternoon, but the chicken soup was in. Handy hypertext recipe. Great-aunt again.

In between checking the shifting wiki entries, I would poke my head in on the baby, who was now soaking outside in a tub of lukewarm Glenfiddich in a bonnet made of celery, with vitamin C tablets in his ear.

Miraculously, the next morning he was cured.

That morning, there was also a new entry in the wiki, and the telltale green snot on my keyboard suggested that the 20-month-old had proven the adage that one is never too young to wiki. "It may take a wiki to raise a child," I read. "But could somebody please get in here and change my diaper?"

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medical examiner

## What a Long Strange Trip It's Been

Ecstasy, the new prescription drug?

By Amanda Schaffer

Tuesday, January 23, 2007, at 12:52 PM ET

This year, the drug MDMA, otherwise known as ecstasy, could take a step toward medical respectability. Researchers in South Carolina have begun experimenting with MDMA for patients with [post-traumatic stress disorder](#). At Harvard, a long-awaited pilot study will begin on whether the drug can help relieve anxiety and pain in terminal cancer patients in connection with psychotherapy. And studies will also start in [Switzerland](#) and [Israel](#), where a former chief psychiatrist of the Israel Defense Forces will oversee work with people whose PTSD stems from terrorism or war.

Ecstasy gained notoriety as a party drug in the 1980s and 1990s. (Recall teenagers at raves with sparkly eyes and pacifiers rolling and dancing all night; a [revival](#) appears to be under way in England.) Enthusiasts say the drug makes them feel relaxed, energetic, and mentally clear. One likened it to a [six-hour orgasm](#). In rare cases, however, users died after [dancing for hours and overheating](#), or after taking mixtures of ecstasy and other drugs. Animal studies have shown that long-term, heavy ecstasy use can be risky for the brain. Human studies have found some ill effects in chronic users, as well. The government classifies MDMA (or 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine) along with heroin, LSD, and marijuana as a Schedule 1 drug, which means that it's illegal and has no recognized medical uses.

But research [has not proved](#) that moderate or low doses of ecstasy are particularly dangerous. And avant-garde psychiatrists have long argued that in a controlled clinical setting, low amounts can play a role by reducing fear, without sedation, and so encourage openness and emotional insight. "There is nothing else like this in psychiatry—a fast-acting anti-anxiety medication that makes people alert and talkative," says [Julie Holland](#), a psychiatrist at NYU Medical Center. If available to treat patients, "It would be incredibly useful." Some mental-health professionals interested in exploring MDMA's therapeutic uses [protested](#) when the government made it illegal 20 years ago.

Stories of the drug's power to combat the [psychological effects of terminal illness](#) have continued to surface over the years. But proponents have had little but anecdote to go on. The current wave of studies should bring new rigor to answering an old question: whether MDMA deserves to be a prescription drug.

MDMA was patented more than 90 years ago by the German chemical company E. Merck. For years, it was essentially shelved for reasons that aren't clear. In the 1950s, the U.S. Army conducted research on MDMA, perhaps as a potential incapacitant or truth serum, but apparently dropped the idea. The compound was rediscovered in the late 1970s by chemist and psychedelic cult hero [Alexander Shulgin](#), who synthesized it for recreational use (and supplied it to at least one psychiatrist interested in trying it with patients).

Ecstasy works by prompting the brain to release a [flood of neurotransmitters](#), including serotonin, which is believed to kick off the sensations of physical pleasure and euphoria. That sounds nice, but animal research suggests that high doses of the drug can cause the nerve endings that release serotonin to degenerate, ultimately lowering its levels in the brain. Some studies suggest that heavy users sustain [damage](#) to their serotonin systems. Long-term users may also experience [increased anxiety, depression, or sleep disturbances](#). Recently, researchers in the Netherlands reported preliminary findings to suggest that in new users, low doses of ecstasy can alter blood-flow patterns in the brain and may result in small decreases in verbal memory.

In truth, this litany of harms is not as scary or as conclusive as it sounds, however. The best-known [neuroimaging work](#) purporting to show ecstasy-related long-term damage to the human serotonin system was [fraught with methodological problems](#). Much of the research on the drug's apparent psychological or behavioral effects in chronic users fails to account for other drugs, like cocaine or marijuana, which ravers often take, as well. Nor does most research account for other substances like [methamphetamine](#), [DXM](#), and [ketamine](#) that pills sold as X may contain.

John Halpern of Harvard Medical School, who is running the study on MDMA for cancer patients, has tried to avoid this problem by studying a group of ravers in Utah who took large quantities of ecstasy but rarely used other illegal substances or drank alcohol. (Apparently, the mores of this largely Mormon area allowed the ravers to conclude that X isn't as bad as drinking—Halpern isn't sure why.) He found that those who took the drug 60 or more times [performed worse](#) on a number of neuropsychological tests, especially those involving mental processing speed and impulsivity. But the heavy users still performed within the normal range. And those who used X fewer than 50 times [did not show these effects](#). When Halpern combined data on all the users, regardless of the extent of their use, he found no significant differences between users and nonusers, including in their scores on memory tests. (The recent

Dutch work that links low doses of X to small memory changes is, so far, [difficult to evaluate](#).)

Minor and probably transient memory impairment may not be so bad. And MDMA would be safer in a clinical setting, where the patient's mind-set would be different and the drug's purity guaranteed. So can the anti-anxiety effects of ecstasy be harnessed to good effect under a psychiatrist's care? George Greer, perhaps the best known of the doctors who gave their patients MDMA in the 1980s, prescribed it to about 80 patients who suffered from mild depression, anxiety, or relationship troubles. He says they could more freely remember and discuss difficult events. A few felt tired, depleted, or anxious the next day. But according to Greer, none suffered lasting side effects. Other psychiatrists say that ecstasy has the potential to accelerate therapy and to enhance the therapeutic alliance, creating a closeness that carries over to future sessions. But neither Greer nor anyone else conducted any controlled studies to prove the point.

In the Harvard and South Carolina studies, patients will be screened for physical and psychological conditions that might make MDMA dangerous to them. (High blood pressure and major medical problems are pre-emptive, as are psychoses.) The idea is to look for benefits in psychotherapy, but also to watch out for adverse reactions. The studies include two psychotherapy sessions with the drug and multiple sessions without it, so subjects and their therapists can integrate material stirred up under the influence. Both are designed as randomized, double blind, controlled trials—the gold standard of scientific research. And both have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration.

It's too soon to say what these trials will yield. But if all goes well, MDMA could help some patients, and also help build acceptance for parallel work on the potential therapeutic effects of [psilocybin](#) (found in 'shrooms) or even LSD. Even at this late date, it's possible to imagine for psychiatry a small psychedelic renaissance.

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The famous cautionary tales of X emerged from the rave scene, where a small number of users died from [overheating](#) (the result of both the dancing and the drug, which can interfere with temperature regulation). A few others died from drinking too much water—a precaution they took to avoid overheating. As a

stimulant, X can also raise heart rate and blood pressure, a danger to some people with heart problems.

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The most terrifying and widely publicized study on small amounts of ecstasy appeared in *Science* in 2002 and claimed that the amount of X consumed by a typical user in one night could cause [permanent brain damage](#) in primates. But embarrassingly, this work was [retracted](#) in 2003, because the researcher had somehow swapped methamphetamine for MDMA in his lab.

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In the mid-1980s, a group of physicians, psychotherapists, and researchers petitioned the Drug Enforcement Administration, requesting that MDMA not be made a Schedule 1 drug. An administrative-law judge agreed with them, deciding that the less-restrictive Schedule 3 would be more appropriate. But the DEA classified MDMA as Schedule 1 anyway. See [here](#) for a summary.

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Much of the Dutch data have not been published yet. The work is potentially significant because it is prospective instead of retrospective—meaning that it follows subjects forward through time, rather than looking back at past events and behaviors, which may be hard for people to recall accurately. But the findings may still be confounded somewhat by subjects' use of other drugs. And the short-term effects of X use, even if confirmed, may turn out to be transient.

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## mixing desk

### jTunes

The insanely great songs Apple won't let you hear.

By Paul Collins

Tuesday, January 23, 2007, at 12:48 PM ET

"Killer Tune" is just that: It sounds like the Killers, and it *is* killer. It's one of the most popular iTunes downloads for the band Straightener—but you haven't heard it.

You *can't* hear it.

The iTunes Music Store has a secret hiding in plain sight: Log out of your home account in the page's upper-right corner, switch the country setting at the bottom of the page to Japan, and you're dropped down a rabbit hole into a wonderland of great Japanese bands that you've never even *heard* of. And they're nowhere to be found on iTunes U.S. You can listen to 30-second song teasers on the Japanese site, but if you try purchasing "Killer Tune"—or any other tune—from iTunes Japan with your U.S. credit card, you'll get turned away: Your *gaijin* money's no good there.

Go to iTMS Japan's [Terms of Sale](#), and the very first three words, which berate you in all caps, are:

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So, what's going on here?

Music labels have a good reason to lift up the drawbridge: iTunes spans 22 countries, often with somewhat uneven pricing between them, and the specter of cross-border music discounting has already been raised by services such as Russia's much-sued [allofmp3.com](#). But in Japan's case, the blockade becomes

downright tragic. If your knowledge of Japanese music barely extends beyond the Boredoms, you're in for a shock at iTMS Japan: There are *thousands* of Japanese bands that play circles around ours—and they're doing it in English.

It hasn't happened overnight. Japan's long been a music geek's paradise, a Valhalla of reverent remasters of American and British albums that time and fashion have passed by in their native lands. Want a CD release of Rick Wakeman's 1976 LP [No Earthly Connection](#)? There's no such thing over here—but there is in Japan, and you can even buy it from the Disk Union chain at a downtown Tokyo [store dedicated entirely to prog-rock](#). Like the British invaders of 40 years ago, the Japanese seem to care more about our music than we ourselves do.

The result? Japan's bands are by turns bracingly experimental and jubilantly retro, a land where our own greatest music returns with an alienated majesty. How else can one describe the [King Brothers](#)' "100%," a song that could make the Black Crowes eat Humble Pie? Or [Syrup16g](#)'s Elvis Costello-esque "I Hate Music"? Or "Johnny Depp" by [Triceratops](#), an amp-crunching reanimation of *Physical Graffiti*-era Zep? And you'd swear that [the Pillows](#)' "Degeneration" was a hidden track on Matthew Sweet's *Altered Beast*. Other bands, less easily categorized, are no less revelatory: [The Miceteeth](#)'s "Think About Bird's Pillow Case" conjures up a Japanese troupe stranded in a 1930s British music hall, while NICO Touches the Walls' "[泥んこドビー](#)" boils Franz Ferdinand over into a waltz.

Next, there's power pop. If ever a song cried to be played on late and lamented *The O.C.*, it's "[4645](#)" by the Radwimps. Like many J-pop songs, "4645" is almost entirely sung in English. After pop diva Yumi Matsutoya started mixing bilingual lyrics in the 1970s, bands perfected the art of seamlessly fusing Japanese verses with English choruses. You can mondegreen their songs in the shower for weeks without even realizing it.

So, what happens when this irresistible rock encounters immovable corporations? Inevitably, Straightener's "Killer Tune" has shown up [in its entirety on YouTube](#), where the band amuses themselves in an exuberantly goofy lip-sync. With YouTube sporting the [clever animated video](#) for the blistering follow-up "Berserker Tune," American fans might get the Straightener they need after all.

Meanwhile, a back door has appeared in the Music Store itself: While iTunes Japan pegs foreign undesirables from their credit card numbers, it can't screen fake Japanese addresses provided by prepaid iTunes Card users. There's a small but ardent underground economy among Americans in dummy addresses and e-mailed scans of Japanese iTunes Cards, picked up by friends in Tokyo convenience stores or openly sold online.



It certainly beats buying CDs. Import shops and Amazon.com lack most Japanese bands, and while Amazon.co.jp maintains a [somewhat-English-language version](#), you may find yourself plunged into hair-raisingly incomprehensible pages while entering credit card information. If, for instance, this [audio clip](#) of the math-rock single "Japanistan" by the band Stan sends you running for their album [Stan II](#), you'll find nothing at U.S. Amazon. Buying it from Amazon Japan costs 3,090 yen (\$25) with international shipping. And, since Amazon Japan pages often lack audio samples, you have to already know what you're looking for. If you didn't catch that [Stan video](#) on NHK while jet-lagged in a Shinjuku hotel, you're out of luck.

iTunes United States maintains its own hamstrung Japanese Music playlist, where a few bands have broken into our realm of 99-cent downloads. Listen to the Rodeo Carburettor's head-rattling "[R.B.B. \(Rude Boy Bob\)](#)," the stuttering art-punk of the Emeralds' "[Surfing Baby](#)," and the propulsive stop-time of "[Riff Man](#)" by the Zazen Boys—a room-clearing roar of gloriously unhinged vocals—and you start to sense what's maddeningly out of reach across the Pacific.

And there are 20 more countries where iTunes users can lurk among the samples, including the United Kingdom, Germany, Greece, and Australia. They won't let you buy their songs, either. You can find an EP of Scottish sensations the Fratellis at iTunes United States, for instance, but their hit glam singalong "Chelsea Dagger" is in nearly every country *except* the United States. (Their randy burlesque video for it, naturally, is [all over YouTube](#).)

Even so, window-shopping in the Japan store remains particularly instructive. Why? Because variable pricing—a label demand that Apple loudly and [successfully fought off](#) in other countries—has quietly appeared there in the form of 150- and 200-yen songs. Whether "Killer Tune" gets the success it deserves or not, someday we might all be turning Japanese.

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*Log on to iTunes for Slate's "iTunes iMix" playlists: [one at iTunes Japan](#) of Japan-only songs, including those mentioned in this article (foreign users can sample, but not purchase, them), and this domestic [Slate iTunes iMix](#) of songs available for purchase by U.S. users. U.S. iTunes users must log out of their account and switch countries at the bottom of their screen before accessing the Japanese iMix.*

Note: Occasionally iTunes Netherlands refuses to allow you to change countries from the bottom of the home page. Simply click any song's "Buy" button, and a prompt asking if you're from abroad will get you to the Country Selection menu.

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## moneybox

### Look Who's Starting a Hedge Fund!

Madeleine Albright's money machine.

By Daniel Gross

Monday, January 22, 2007, at 6:11 PM ET

Long before Washington even had a K Street, public servants have been cashing in via the private sector. Till recently, there was no better way to monetize government service than a late career switch to lobbying or law. But now there's a new business for the over-the-hill Washington player: hedge funds.

As Lynnley Browning [reported](#) in the *New York Times* last Friday, [Richard Breeden](#), former chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, is now a hedge-fund manager, complete with \$500 million under management, a Cayman Islands registry, and an office in hedge-fund capital Greenwich, Conn.—even though he "has no investing experience." Browning [reported](#) that, "Mr. Breeden is now perhaps the most senior former government official ever to run a hedge fund."

But not for long. Last week, Clinton Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who has the same amount of investing experience as Breeden (zero)—[announced](#) the formation of an emerging-markets hedge fund. [Albright Capital Management](#) is backed with \$329 million in seed money from [PGGM](#), a Dutch pension.

Albright and Breeden are following what has become a well-worn path. In October, mammoth hedge fund/private-equity firm [D.E. Shaw](#) appointed Clinton Treasury Secretary [Lawrence Summers](#) as a part-time managing director, and [Cerberus Capital](#), another mammoth hedge-fund/private-equity firm, [named](#) departing Bush Treasury Secretary John Snow as chairman.

Let's set aside the question of whether the arrival of politicians is a neon sign to hedge-fund investors to *Cash Out Now!* Instead, let's try to explain the phenomenon. There are several reasons—millions of them, actually—why high-ranking former officials are signing up with hedge funds. The money is excellent. Instead of billing by the hour or receiving retainers, principals of hedge funds and private-equity firms hold stakes in very lucrative businesses. At most hedge funds, managers generally receive a 2 percent annual asset-management fee and 20 percent of the profits they generate. K Street can make you comfortable. Hedge funds can make you filthy rich.

But Madeleine Albright and Larry Summers have no record of generating above-market returns. Why would a hedge fund want them?

First, hedge funds and private-equity funds are in a constant state of raising funds—from public-employee pension funds like CALPERs, from U.S. investors, and from investors around the globe. In a world of 8,000 hedge funds, many of them run by very rich but generally anonymous traders, it helps to bring boldface names along for sales pitches.

In addition to acting as highly paid greeters, former government officials can also function as doorkeepers. Firms like Cerberus and D.E. Shaw, which started life as rapid-trading hedge funds, are evolving into asset managers that seek long-term returns by buying and selling entire companies. In many instances, the less-crowded foreign markets offer the most compelling opportunities. Cerberus' [list of holdings](#) includes regulated foreign companies such as [Air Canada](#) and banks in [Japan](#) and [Germany](#). Given the political issues that frequently surround international investments, funds need gray-haired globe-trotters to smooth the way. (Here's how another Cerberus employee, former Vice President [Dan Quayle](#), describes his role at the fund: "travels throughout the US, Europe and Asia to meet with the heads of investment banks, corporations, buyout shops, potential investors, and other business leaders.") D.E. Shaw, the world's [third-largest hedge fund](#), has similarly global ambitions. Who better to take along on forays into new markets than former treasury secretary, Harvard University president, and current *Financial Times* columnist Larry Summers?

The most recent duo of public servants turned hedge-fund managers is seeking to apply public-sector experience directly to the management of private capital. Rather than buy and sell dozens of stocks and trade them quickly, Breeden, who has landed consulting gigs monitoring bankrupt WorldCom and investigating shenanigans at Conrad Black's [Hollinger](#), [said](#) he planned to buy a handful of stocks at undervalued companies—and then use his status as a corporate-governance expert to prod management into boosting shareholder value. In December Breeden [announced](#) his firm had amassed a 5.25 percent stake in underperforming restaurant chain [Applebee's](#), and was [nominating](#) four members for the board of directors, including Breeden.

Albright is taking it a step further. Former foreign-policy hands such as Henry Kissinger supply advice to hedge funds and *Fortune 500* companies on how geopolitical events affect their investments. Albright is taking this practice a few rungs up the value chain. Rather than simply sell *advice* based on her experience and connections, she's selling *investment-management services* based on her experience and connections. Investment management has much higher profit margins.

As more big institutional investors such as pension funds allocate capital to hedge funds, we should expect more such career switches. By 2009, it wouldn't be surprising if investors were listening to sales pitches for CRAM (Condi Rice Asset Management), Dick Cheney's Buckshot Capital (sole holding:

Halliburton), and the Stuff Happens Global Fund, an arbitrage operation run by Donald Rumsfeld.

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## movies

### Men With Guns

The absurdly macho pyrotechnics of *Smokin' Aces*.

By Dana Stevens

Thursday, January 25, 2007, at 5:46 PM ET

Joe Carnahan, please put down the gun (and the flamethrower, and the suitcase full of mysterious torture implements) and back away slowly from the movie camera. Four years ago, you scored a modest hit with *Narc*, a tightly plotted if ultimately empty buddy-cop-betrayal drama starring Ray Liotta and Jason Patric. *Smokin' Aces*, a cameo-crammed action comedy with a strangely maudlin twist ending, is another fable about the perils of ratting out your friends and the joys of riding shotgun with Liotta. But it's less *Narc II* than a throwback to the title of your first, ultra-low-budget feature, *Blood, Guts, Bullets and Octane*. Except for the octane part: *Smokin' Aces* is awash in ammo and carnage, but it chugs to the finish line with a tank full of sludge.

The film's first act is faux Tarantino, with a huge cast of quirky hit men and down-on-their-luck lowlifes trading insults as they brief one another on a million-dollar mob hit. (Despite this section's rapid-fire dialogue and dizzying introduction of new characters—approximately one per minute—the setup takes a good 20 minutes of screen time.) In the second act, these assorted teams of bail bondsmen, neo-Nazi rednecks, and lovable lesbian assassins converge on Buddy "Aces" Israel (Jeremy Piven), a Vegas magician-turned-mobster holed up in a Lake Tahoe casino penthouse. Buddy has made a deal to snitch on his bosses and henchmen in exchange for the protection of two FBI agents (Ray Liotta and Ryan Reynolds). But the elderly don, Primo Sparazza (Joseph Ruskin), wants Buddy taken out with extreme prejudice—he's specified that whoever gets the job done should bring him the stool pigeon's heart.

A gruesome *Cannonball Run* with Piven flesh as the trophy, *Smokin' Aces* is a depressingly nihilistic entry in the Tarantino/Guy Ritchie/*Ocean's Eleven* caper genre. It jollies us along with gross-out man banter ("Who jizzed on my jacket?") and lighthearted sadomasochism for three-quarters of its running time, then suddenly lurches into random dramatic interludes that—if the solemn piano music is any cue—we're actually supposed to care about. Most of these involve the slide into coke-addled dementia of Piven's Buddy. But given the utter absence of development or context for this character—we don't even see him do any real magic tricks!—it's impossible to decide whether to root for the victim or his equally un compelling assassins.

The weirdly magnetic Piven is the only reason I still watch HBO's *Entourage* (which I've inveighed against [here](#) and [here](#)). He's a mercurial actor, one of the few I could imagine effecting the transition from magician to gang lord. (Isn't it always the way? One minute they're pulling bunnies from hats, the next they're collecting protection money.) But Piven is powerless to combat the deep stupidity of this role, and his performance ranges from adequate (in the comic scenes) to excruciating (in the "tragic" ones). At the movie's puzzling dramatic nadir, Buddy stares blearily into the bathroom mirror, wearing a single bright-blue contact lens, as a tear rolls down his cheek. I wish my insurance covered Lasik surgery too, but you don't see me crying about it.

I tried to experience *Smokin' Aces* as a wild amoral thrill ride, but it feels more like a first-person shooter video game. Some of the sitting ducks include Ben Affleck as a bail bondsman with a walrus mustache and teeth like piano keys; Andy Garcia as an FBI boss with an unprecedented Southern Gothic accent; and Alicia Keys and Taraji P. Henson as lady assassins who also happen to be lovers. Henson, who played the pregnant prostitute in *Hustle & Flow*, is the movie's strongest dramatic presence, and Jason Bateman, as a degenerate, self-loathing lawyer, provides the funniest two-and-a-half minutes (is there anything Jason Bateman *doesn't* make funnier?). But cherry-picking performances feels like a sucker's game in *Smokin' Aces*, an undifferentiated heap of genre clichés that, less than 48 hours after seeing it, is already receding in my memory.

*\*To download the MP3 file, right-click (Windows) or hold down the Control key while you click (Mac), and then use the "save" or "download" command to save the audio file to your hard drive.*

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## movies

### The State of the Oscar

Forget the *Dreamgirls* snub, what about *Volver*?

By Dana Stevens

Tuesday, January 23, 2007, at 5:26 PM ET

It's somehow perfect that this year's Oscar nominations coincide with George Bush's sixth State of the Union address. The Oscars and the State of the Union are like the senior proms of their respective spheres of influence: overhyped, meaningless, self-congratulatory shams that somehow matter anyway, if only to give us a common target at which to hurl invective, opinions, and wisecracks. They're as close as our huge, technologized, alienated country gets to a national conversation, and I'll be damned if I'm going to be left out.

Predictions of the likely winners are both dull and, in my case, pointless—I'm not enough of an L.A. insider to know what the industry favorites are, and this is my first Oscar season as a pro film critic. But here's an overview of some of the most egregious disses on the list, a few surprises that are a pleasure to see there, and at least one legitimate, head-scratching, "Huh?"

The pouting about *Dreamgirls*' supposed cold shoulder from the academy seems a little diva-esque, like an onstage hissy fit thrown by one of the movie's heroines, Effie White. The film still got more nominations than any other, even if they were largely spread out among the tech categories that are unjustly ignored every year. (Screw those people who toil away behind the scenes at crafts that take a lifetime to master! They're obscuring my view of Brangelina!) *Dreamgirls* truly did have some of the best costume design I saw onscreen this year, with those witty period montages and matching '60s frocks. It certainly didn't have the best directing or writing, and even the swooniest fans admit that the movie doesn't cohere as a whole. I love the fact that *Dreamgirls* is a fan favorite. Jennifer Hudson is a great populist Cinderella, and the moment she takes best supporting actress (or tries to look noble as Abigail Breslin steals it from her) will be the high point of the ceremony. But *Dreamgirls* is a big, lumbering filmed play without a single hummable number, and its absence from the big lists (best picture, best director, best adapted screenplay) seems defensible to me.

As a longtime Mark Wahlberg nut (I got teased for comparing him to Brando when *Boogie Nights* came out), I was all atwitter to see him up for best supporting actor for *The Departed*. And Leo DiCaprio got the Best Actor nomination he deserved—I'm impressed that academy voters bothered to distinguish between his showier turn in the Scorsese film and his deeper, darker work in *Blood Diamond*. The neglect shown for Catherine O'Hara's amazing performance in the otherwise lackluster Chris Guest comedy *For Your Consideration* is an eerie echo of the movie itself, in which she plays an actress overlooked for an Academy Award! I hope she's out right now reliving the bender her character went on in the movie, and enjoying every minute of it.

Pedro Almodóvar's near-perfect *Volver* got nary a nod for best foreign language film, best director, or even best score (Alberto Iglesias' rich, string-heavy soundtrack was the perfect aural equivalent for all those heaving bosoms and crimson mop buckets of blood). Just last week, I was mentioning, in [a discussion of \*Notes on a Scandal\*](#), the maddening, ubiquitous drone of Philip Glass' awful music score for that film—and damned if it doesn't get a nomination! Glass also wrote one of my favorite soundtracks this year, the mysterious, swirling music for *The Illusionist*—but it went unrecognized. *The Illusionist*'s only moment of glory was a cinematography nomination for Dick Pope. Pope's work on that film is a marvel of technical precision and historical rigor—every frame looks exactly like an early photograph. But if there's any justice (which

of course there isn't—bemoaning that obvious truth is just another part of the yearly Oscar ritual), Emmanuel Lubezki will win the cinematography prize for his innovative lensing of *Children of Men*. Not only because it truly is groundbreaking camerawork—DPs will be copying the device he invented for that car-chase scene for years to come—but because that nomination and two others (one for editing, the other for best adapted screenplay) are the only crumbs being thrown to what was, to my mind, the single finest film of the year.

Listen to Dana Stevens [discuss the Oscars](#) on NPR's *Day to Day*.

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## podcasts

### Plastered, Hammered, and Other Euphemisms for Drunk

Plus, help us describe your lazy co-workers.

By Andy Bowers

Thursday, January 25, 2007, at 2:30 PM ET

*To listen to Slate's latest euphemisms audio contest, featuring language columnist Barbara Wallraff, click the arrow on the player below:*

*You can also click [here](#) \* to download the MP3 file.*

Now that the holiday party season is a distant, and perhaps somewhat foggy, memory, *Slate's* audio euphemism contest is back with some perfect roundabout ways to describe the state many of us experienced: You know, a "rolling brownout," "kilketay," "tired and emotional" ... in other words, plastered.

To find out more about these phrases and others, plus the winner of our contest, play or download our latest audio program featuring language columnist [Barbara Wallraff](#).

You don't need an iPod or other portable audio device to hear the program—you can play it right from your computer. Our new Flash audio player (above) should make it easier to listen to the show.

We're also announcing our next listener contest. This time, we're looking for interesting ways to describe that co-worker or boss who isn't exactly the most productive member of society. You

know, that lazy, slacking, infuriating, or otherwise completely useless person in the next cubicle, up on the top floor, or at the other end of the phone.

As always, we strongly recommend that you listen to the program before submitting an entry. Here are the details:

*Submit a euphemism for:* workplace incompetents.

*Deadline:* Feb. 15, 2007.

*E-mail address:* [podcast@wordcourt.com](mailto:podcast@wordcourt.com).

*Prize:* none (sorry). But winners will be noted on Barbara's Web site, [www.wordcourt.com](http://www.wordcourt.com) (visit the Library section to find previous winners), and she may include worthy entries in a future book much like her most recent book, *Word Fugitives*.

(By entering this contest, you grant *Slate* permission to use your name, unless you expressly request otherwise.)

For comments, not contest entries, write us at [podcasts@slate.com](mailto:podcasts@slate.com).

*\* To download the MP3 file, right-click (Windows) or hold down the Control key while you click (Mac), and then use the "save" or "download" command to save the audio file to your hard drive.*

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## poem

### "Sitting in the Last of Sunset, Listening to Guests Within"

By Eric Paul Shaffer

Tuesday, January 23, 2007, at 7:12 AM ET

*Click to listen to Eric Paul Shaffer read this poem.*

All my friends are in the kitchen now. Dinner is done, the sun set,  
and after our muted admiration from the yard, by ones and twos,  
they rose beneath a sky gone dull and turned to the house for wine

or coffee and pie. Plates clatter, and cabinets bang, and the spigot  
gurgles in the sink. I'm alone on the last step, watching universal  
blue darken the mountains and the sea. Over all, the voices carry



laughter through the windows open to the cool. As I sit here,  
I'm laughing as they laugh, and the night unveils the keen eyes  
piercing the sky deepening beyond my gaze. I'm content at the  
end

of a day of joy. A new bottle is uncorked, and from within, they  
call  
my name. The stars are far, the moon far from full, yet even  
alone  
under these old stars, I'm not alone. Now is the moment to return

to warm, yellow rooms crowded with companions, to leave the  
owl  
hovering silent over the fallow field and the ten thousand  
tongues  
of the starlit trees to the voiceless and eventual work the dark  
does.

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## politics

### Dispatches From the Scooter Libby Trial

What I didn't learn at the urinal.

By John Dickerson, Dahlia Lithwick, and Seth Stevenson

Thursday, January 25, 2007, at 9:50 PM ET

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**From:** John Dickerson

Subject: Thunderbolts at the First Real Day of the Libby Trial

Posted Tuesday, January 23, 2007, at 8:12 PM ET

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Scooter Libby is being sacrificed to protect Karl Rove. That is going to be a key part of Libby's defense, judging by his lawyer's opening statements today. Libby attorney Theodore Wells channeled his client, recalling a 2003 conversation between Libby and his boss, Vice President Dick Cheney, at the start of the leak investigation. "They're trying to set me up. They want me to be the sacrificial lamb. ... I will not be sacrificed so Karl Rove can be protected." Cheney then scrawled a note to himself: "Not going to protect one staffer and sacrifice the guy that was asked to stick his neck in the meat grinder." Libby had stuck his neck (probably his head, too) in the meat grinder by talking to reporters about prewar intelligence. Rove, or, as Wells called him, "the person who was to be protected," was being shielded because he was "the lifeblood of the Republican party" and "very important if [Republicans] were to stay in office." If Scooter Libby was sacrificed to save Karl Rove, then Scooter Libby is now returning the favor.

How much this line of argument helps Scooter Libby in the courtroom will be up to the [12 members of the jury](#) to decide,

but it will certainly be a political problem for the president and his staff, who are already doing a lot of duck-and-cover drills. Bush has historically low approval ratings, a very unpopular Iraq strategy, and new domestic programs Democrats will ignore. Now they must deal with the fact that Rove, who is still organizing the president's strategy, engaged with others in the White House to sell out the vice president's chief of staff.

The notion that Rove set up a colleague and that other White House officials worked to shield Bush's boy genius is a Democratic revenge fantasy come to life. How will the White House respond to such a charge from Libby, whom both the president and vice president have lauded in the highest terms? White House officials are likely to continue to play peekaboo—refusing to talk about the case though it's under way, except when it serves administration interests. Cheney said on [Fox in early January](#) that Libby was one of the most honest men he knew.

Today marked the real start of the Libby case. After four days of jury selection, each side gave opening statements, and the first witness was called. Patrick Fitzgerald, the Chicago prosecutor, opened like a dime novelist. "It's Sunday July 2003 just after the Fourth of July. The fireworks are over—but a different kind of fireworks are about to begin."

Fitzgerald spoke quickly throughout his hour and a half presentation. He wore a sturdy gray suit, white shirt, and sensible blue tie, upon which he had a microphone pinned. He paced before the jury, his fingers often in a steeple. The courtroom audience only saw his back and the pink yarmulke of baldness at the top of his head.

Fitzgerald's case was linear and clean. Libby told investigators he learned about Valerie Plame from NBC News reporter Tim Russert. But Fitzgerald told jurors that was clearly a lie because Libby had already been discussing the matter inside and outside of the White House. Fitzgerald then went through a careful delineation of the 11 instances in which Scooter Libby discussed Valerie Plame's identity with administration officials and reporters. "When the FBI and grand jury asked about what the defendant did," Fitzgerald said, "he made up a story."

To explain why Libby would be motivated to lie, Fitzgerald offered two main arguments. The first was that White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan had told the press that anyone involved in the business would be fired. If Libby was found to be the leaker, he'd lose his job, or at least cause a massive public embarrassment for the administration.

The second motivation, Fitzgerald explained, was that Libby had promised Vice President Cheney he wasn't involved, and on that promise Cheney had gone to bat for him. In the October 2003 press swarm over the CIA leak, Libby asked Vice President Cheney to help clear his name in the press. Scott McClellan had

told reporters Karl Rove was not involved in the leaking but had stopped there. Libby wanted McClellan to say specifically that Libby had also been cleared. He asked Cheney to make that happen. Cheney did, and in a subsequent briefing, McClellan said Libby was not involved in the affair.

The Fitzgerald presentation was like a warm soak. Ted Wells' defense opening was a Roling. He was emotional and emphatic about his client, whom he said was "wrongly, unjustly, and unfairly" charged. Wells only needs to raise a reasonable doubt in the minds of jurors, and he did a very good job of it. He was a charismatic fog machine who challenged everything but the very nature of human existence.

He was most effective picking apart the three reporters whose recollections contradict Libby's. He suggested that Tim Russert had the faulty memory. The host of *Meet the Press* says he didn't tell Libby about Wilson's wife because he didn't know about her status as a CIA employee, but Wells argued that Russert may have been in a position to have known. David Gregory, the NBC White House reporter who works with Russert, had been told by White House spokesman Ari Fleischer that Wilson's wife worked at the CIA. Wells argued that Gregory or his colleague Andrea Mitchell, who also claimed to know, would have passed this information on to Russert before he had his conversation with Libby.

Wells pointed out that Matt Cooper, my former *Time* colleague, had extensive notes about his interview with Karl Rove, who passed along the information about Wilson's wife, but had no record of Libby's secondary role in confirming that information. To discredit Judith Miller, Wells relied on the former *New York Times* reporter's own testimony, in which she repeatedly referred to her bad memory, tendency to conflate events, and fuzziness about details.

The government's case suggested Libby had been on the hunt for information about Wilson's wife after Wilson published an op-ed in the *New York Times* claiming he'd been sent to Niger to answer a question Cheney's office posed to the CIA about the sale of uranium yellowcake by Niger to Iraq. During that hunt, Libby engaged in eight separate conversations with colleagues about it. Wells didn't go after all eight conversations, but he picked apart several of them. Two of the people who had said they talked to Libby about Plame only remembered the conversations after prompting from investigators. Ari Fleischer's account of Libby was suspect because he had asked for immunity from the government. (This immunity deal is news: Presumably, Fleischer asked for it because he had disclosed Plame's CIA status to Gregory and thought he'd get in trouble.) "All of these witnesses have their own personal recollection problems," he said.

As his presentation wore on, Wells got his blood flowing. He got chatty and colloquial. "Mr. Libby was a very busy man, but he

wasn't stupid," he said. He threw around a lot of "doggone" this and "doggone" that. He described a sudden recollection by one witness "like it came out of the sky, like a lightning bolt went into his head." He did impersonations: At one point, when characterizing the prosecution's narrative, he lapsed into "white person," the highly nasal formal patois of the Caucasian diction teacher. He did a little Jewish: "You want to talk about the week this guy was having?" In a debate with Fitzgerald and the judge, he dismissed an opposing view by saying "izzzzitzzzzit." It sounded like a dying neon bulb and yet accurately conveyed his view that the argument was absurd.

The case, which picks up again tomorrow with testimony from Mark Grossman, a former State Department official who discussed Plame's status with Libby, has opened a window into an administration that in 2003 was deeply at war with itself. The White House was at war with the vice president's office, and the vice president's office was at war with the CIA. Much of the spat was over 16 words uttered in the 2003 State of the Union address. Four years later tonight, Bush must give that annual speech again.

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**From:** Dahlia Lithwick  
**Subject:** Libby's Lawyers Conduct Extremely Effective Cross-Examinations  
**Posted Wednesday, January 24, 2007, at 7:45 PM ET**

You want a leak case? Here's a leak case: socialite-actress-producer [Zeta Graff suing socialite-actress Paris Hilton](#) for libel and slander for Hilton's alleged leak to Page Six of the *New York Post*. Hilton allegedly falsely reported that Graff had gone "berserk" at a London nightclub when she saw Hilton dancing to "Copacabana" with Graff's ex-boyfriend Paris Latsis. Hilton allegedly also reported that Graff tried to rip a \$4 million diamond necklace off Hilton's neck, and that Graff, according to Hilton, is allegedly "a woman who is older and losing her looks, and she's alone. She's very unhappy." Graff is in her mid-30s.

But instead we have Scooter Libby and no tiny dancers. Yesterday's opening arguments supplied high drama—[Libby's claim](#) that he was hung out to dry so that Karl Rove could continue to work the levers of Bush's brain—but today the trial gets down to the more mundane business of whether Scooter lied to investigators and the grand jury.

In case you believed that trials are interesting, this morning's cross-examination of Marc Grossman—the first prosecution witness, a former undersecretary of state who testified yesterday afternoon that he told Libby that Joseph Wilson's wife, Valerie Plame, worked for the CIA—would quickly disabuse you of that enthusiasm. Libby's attorney Ted Wells makes about 200 rapid-

fire attempts to impeach Grossman's credibility, some of which are silly, and some of which result in bits of bloody tissue on Grossman's chin.

I have never been a fan of defense efforts to make witnesses look stupid for failing to take notes or otherwise memorialize every conversation they had with anyone at any time, in anticipation of future litigation. So, Wells' relentless "you have no notes/ you wrote no follow up/ you have not one piece of paper," says less about Grossman's credibility than it does about his rather healthy tendency to avoid thinking like a lawyer.

But Wells scores points for either tenacity or truth when, after about 30 laps around the same mulberry bush, he gets Grossman to concede that what he told the FBI, the grand jury, and the Libby jurors about his conversations with Libby had "changed" over time. Wells also highlights Grossman's inconsistency about whether these meetings with Libby happened over the phone or face-to-face. He plants the seed with the jurors that Grossman's decision to meet with his boss, former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, the night immediately before Grossman was interviewed by the FBI in October 2003, was "fishy" and tantamount to "cooking the books"—although Wells withdraws his original legal characterization of that meeting as "monkey business."

This morning's direct examination of the government's second witness, former Deputy CIA Director and "Iraq Mission Manager" Robert Grenier, goes pretty much along the same lines as yesterday's direct of Grossman. Grenier delivers a polished performance—the former CIA deputy who looks like an anchorman.

Grenier reveals how he came to tell Libby that Plame was Wilson's wife. According to Grenier, an "aggrieved" and "slightly accusatory" Scooter called him on June 11, 2003, wanting to know whether the CIA was responsible for sending Joe Wilson on his mission to Niger, and whether it was true that interest from the office of the vice president was the basis for the mission. According to Grenier, Libby was—paraphrasing now— *freaking out*  about what Wilson was telling the press—so much so that Libby couldn't wait for Grenier to call him back, but instead pulled him out of a late-afternoon meeting with then-CIA Director George Tenet, to find out whether he had learned anything since they spoke a few hours earlier. This was also when Grenier passed along the tidbit about Wilson being married to a CIA agent—a bit of gossip about which Grenier later felt "guilty."

Grenier testifies on direct, and then later on cross, that he didn't mention the whole Plame thing in his FBI interview or his grand-jury testimony, but that months later he developed the "growing conviction" that he had indeed told Libby about it. As the defense characterizes it this afternoon, "his memory grew." When confronted on cross with FBI reports that contradict his

earlier testimony, he prefaces his remarks with: "As a former CIA officer I have the greatest respect for the FBI. But the FBI officer who reported this may not have gotten it exactly right." The pressroom busts out laughing.

Grenier, like Grossman, wriggles uneasily under defense questioning about his on-again/off-again memory. When asked whether his grand jury testimony was "wrong" he says, "It was what I believed at the time." Then Grenier begins to pat at his pockets, in search of the eyeglasses he'd been wearing all afternoon. This goes on for so long that the judge calls for a break in which we watch the court being ransacked for the glasses. Doubtless, once his glasses are found, Grenier will remember where they were.

The last witness of the day is Craig Schmall, Libby's morning intelligence briefer from the CIA. On direct examination, he describes how briefing books are organized and tabbed and then details the events of June 14, 2003, which included a visit to Libby's office by Tom Cruise and Penélope Cruz. He was "very excited about it." When asked why the Cruise-Cruzes were visiting, Schmall relates that they were "there to discuss with Libby how Germany treats Scientologists." No wonder Scooter can't recall anything else that happened that day!

Schmall testifies about the Plame leak, including his concerns about the "grave danger" that might follow the disclosure of the name of a CIA officer that could lead to "innocent people in foreign countries" who could be "arrested, tortured, or killed" as the result of outing an agent. This elicits a stern caution from the judge that jurors not consider the matter of Plame's status as a CIA agent, or the dangers of leaking her identity: These issues are not before them.

On cross, Schmall is questioned about whether he recalls that on June 14, the same day he and Libby discussed the Wilsons, he also briefed Libby about a bomb defused near a residential compound, a police arrest, a terrorist bombing in an unidentified country, explosions, extremist networks, a possible al-Qaida attack, Iraq's porous borders, violent demonstrations in Iran, and 11 other pages of terrorist threats. Schmall cannot recall. Then Schmall has a ride in the defense team's "I forgot what I told the FBI and remembered it later" machine. But he's still a good prosecution witness. He smiles when he says, "I forgot."

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**From:** Seth Stevenson

**Subject:** What I Didn't Learn at the Urinal

**Updated Thursday, January 25, 2007, at 9:50 PM ET**

**9:23 a.m.:** Scooter Libby arrives, walks up the courtroom aisle, and, before taking his seat at the defense table, gives a quick smile and nod to his wife in the front row. As we're waiting for the judge to arrive and call us to order, I glance around. This is a modest little room with a broken clock on the wall. The public seating section isn't full: Aside from the press, there's just a handful of spectators here—including a vaguely syphilitic-looking older fellow, in jeans and a sweatshirt, who carries a stack of newspapers and constantly jots notes on a tiny memo pad.

The last time I covered a trial, the defendant was Michael Jackson, and there was a lottery every morning for these public seats. Fans lined up by the hundreds sometimes for a chance to be in the same room as the King of Pop. Scooter Libby is apparently not quite the same draw.

**9:30 a.m.:** Judge Reggie Walton enters, we all rise, and at this point I notice a three-ring binder sitting on the prosecution table. Its spine reads: "Ari FLEISCHER." Perhaps today will bring our first semi-celebrity witness?

**9:33 a.m.:** The defense continues its cross of Wednesday's witness, Craig Schmall, Libby's CIA intelligence briefer. They're mostly clearing up odds and ends. After a few questions, there is some sort of technical dispute between the lawyers, and they approach the judge to confer out of earshot of the courtroom. For nearly half an hour, we patiently wait for them to wrap up. All I can think about is how many thousands of dollars this dead airtime is costing Libby (and the friends and supporters helping him to pay). Scooter's sitting idly at his defense table, surrounded by a legal team of at least seven people in suits. The clock is ticking. (Actually, it's not, because it's broken. But metaphorically, it is.)

**11:23 a.m.:** The government calls witness Cathie Martin, a blond Harvard Law School graduate (Class of '93) who succeeded Mary Matalin as the top press liaison for Vice President Cheney. Martin gives a behind-the-scenes account of how the whole Joe Wilson-yellowcake-Valerie Plame incident unfolded within Cheney's office.

Martin's story begins with the Nicholas Kristof column that appeared in the *New York Times* in spring 2003—and kicked off this whole sordid mess. The column alleged that Cheney's office had asked for an envoy to be sent to Niger (that envoy being Joe Wilson, though Kristof didn't name him) with the specific mission to hunt down evidence that Saddam Hussein had sought nuclear materials from Africa. This assertion threw Cheney's office into a tizzy because (according to Martin) it just wasn't true. Cheney had no idea who Wilson was, hadn't asked for any mission to Niger, and hadn't heard peep about the whole affair until he read Kristof.

The story didn't go away, and Cheney and Libby became increasingly irritated. They determined that Wilson had in fact been sent to Niger by the CIA. So, Libby asked Martin to talk to an official at the agency, who in turn told Martin that Wilson's wife was a CIA employee. Martin says she soon after relayed this information to Libby and Cheney.

And that, for the government, is the key detail of Martin's testimony. Here's someone in Libby's office (who worked with him every day and knew him well), saying she told Libby that Wilson's wife was a CIA worker. This directly contradicts Libby's assertion that he learned the information later, and from reporters.

**1:14 p.m.:** There's a break for lunch, and I stop by the men's room. On my way out, I pass prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald, who's walking in. It occurs to me that he's alone in there, maybe at the urinal, and that this could be my chance to accost him. I consider going back into the bathroom on some sort of ruse (I forgot to wash my hands?) but decide that the chance Fitzgerald will tell me something interesting is slightly outweighed by the risk that he'll call security.

**2:31 p.m.:** The defense begins cross-examining Martin. I can't see how it's helping them. Everything Martin says reinforces the notion that Libby (and Cheney) was deeply involved in the effort to rebut Joe Wilson. Cheney sat down with Martin and personally dictated talking points (he didn't know Wilson, he didn't ask for the mission to Niger, etc.) that he wanted emphasized to the press. Libby *himself* called at least one reporter to set the story straight. ("I was aggravated that he was talking to the press, and I wasn't," says Martin, drawing a chuckle from the media representatives in the courtroom.) All of which casts doubt on the Libby defense team's contention that their man was too distracted by matters of great import to remember these piddling events.

At one point the defense switches tacks and claims Libby was also distracted by matters of the heart. As the vice president's plane was landing at Andrews Air Force Base one Saturday, Cathie Martin asked Libby to stay at the base and make some quick phone calls before ending his workday. (Martin felt it was somewhat urgent that he reach out to *Time's* Matt Cooper and *Newsweek's* Evan Thomas.) In response to questioning by the defense, though, Martin acknowledges that Libby was irritated by the request—because he was eager to get home for his son's birthday.

**3:42 p.m.:** A short break in the action. For the second time today, Libby leans back in his chair, turns around, and winks at his wife.

**4:07 p.m.:** Martin says she felt *Hardball's* Chris Matthews was saying things about Cheney that were "somewhat outrageous."



**4:46 p.m.:** The jury—and Martin—has been dismissed for the day. It's time for a highly entertaining lawyer slap fight. It turns out Ari Fleischer will be the next witness, once court resumes Monday. (Damn, just missed him!) The defense team wants to note—for the jury's benefit—that Fleischer demanded immunity before he would agree to testify, because this might cast Fleischer's testimony in a different light.

And here Fitzgerald makes a nice little chess move: Fine, he says, we can acknowledge that Fleischer sought immunity. As long as we explain why. Turns out Fleischer saw a story in the *Washington Post* suggesting that anyone who revealed Valerie Plame's identity might be subject to the death penalty. And he freaked. Of course, if Fleischer was this worked up about it during the time period in question, that suggests Libby would have been, too. (Which again undermines the notion that Libby had much bigger fish to fry.)

Cue 20 minutes of lawyers whining about each other's conduct. Finally, the judge tells them to cool it. "This is why I quit practicing," he says. "Other lawyers kept accusing me of doing things I hadn't done."

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## politics

### Lame Duck Soup

Bush's tepid State of the Union speech.

By John Dickerson

Wednesday, January 24, 2007, at 12:31 AM ET

It's hard to treat the State of the Union speech [seriously](#) in any year. But this year, it's practically impossible. The president's [approval ratings](#) are at record lows. Members of his party are revolting against his Iraq troop increase. Democrats control Congress, and the 2008 presidential race has already started, hastening Bush's lame-duck status. And Tuesday he got a [kick in the pants](#) from the opening of the Scooter Libby trial. George Bush has to work fast to save his presidency, and yet he did nothing in his speech to change the political dynamic.

He started strong by lauding Nancy Pelosi as the first woman speaker. To not have done so would have been rude. But he iced the cake by speaking of her father. This was reminiscent of Ronald Reagan who, in 1987, embraced the losses his party suffered in the previous midterm election by [congratulating new Democratic Speaker Jim Wright](#) (who sat in Pelosi's box tonight) and paid homage to Democratic hero Sam Rayburn. Bush also said a special word to ailing members of Congress, including Democratic Sen. Tim Johnson. He ended his annual speech well, too, with moving tributes to civilian heroes in the gallery. (I'm *not* including the Baby Einstein lady.) The president knows the

power of a good gesture in a speech that is largely useful only for gestures.

Good bookends, but then pffft in the middle. He offered some blah proposals and he appealed to the common purpose of America, but that was all. Bush was not confrontational, [as he was in the 2006 SOTU](#), but he sacrificed nothing. He called on everyone to cross the aisle, but showed no intention of doing so himself. And on the crucial issue of the day—the Iraq troop surge—he delivered another rebuke to his opponents. This is the posture of an unhurried man. It is easy to take him at his word when he says he is not concerned about his legacy.

Democrats can't completely write off the president. He still has to sign the bills they pass, and there was nothing in Bush's speech that suggested the tussle over Democratic issues will be any less contentious. Yes, Bush shares a few Democratic (or, as he said, "Democrat") Party priorities—health care, education, and global warming—but this is late in the game, and he's got to do more than just talk about them. Just because some unreconstructed conservatives might have been angry that Bush mentioned global warming is also not an act of bipartisanship.

Bush should have offered more, because he's lost his political capital. The country, Democrats, and many in his party don't believe he has the will or ability to get much done. According to a recent MSNBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll, 50 percent of respondents think he will be too inflexible in dealing with the new Democrat-run Congress. Only 37 percent think he will strike the right balance. In January 1995, after then-President Clinton and his party took a drubbing in the 1994 midterm elections, just 17 percent said they thought that Clinton would be too inflexible in dealing with the Republican Congress, while 55 percent said he would strike the right balance.

Bush's most important request of the night was for more time to let his Iraq strategy work. Yet while he was asking for support, he was also showing who (he believes) is boss. He made it clear that his surge was already under way and pressured Democrats. "I ask you to support our troops in the field—and those on their way," he said. He was playing hardball because Democrats are [terrified of being on the wrong](#) side of the troop issue (which is why having Jim Webb give the Democratic [rebuttal](#) was so smart), but when he plays hardball on the tough issue of the day, he undermines his effort to reach out. Sitting behind him, Nancy Pelosi had lost the teary-eyed look she wore at the start of the speech. She looked like she was biting down hard enough to crack a molar.

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## politics

### The Libby Trial

*Slate's* complete coverage.

Tuesday, January 23, 2007, at 8:12 PM ET

**Slate** is covering the trial of I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby on obstruction of justice and other charges stemming from the Valerie Plame investigation. Here is a compilation of our dispatches on the trial to date, as well as links to some previously published articles on the subject.

#### Jury Selection

["Picking Scooter's Peers,"](#) by John Dickerson. Posted starting Jan. 16, 2007.

#### Opening Statements and the Prosecution's Case

["Scooter Turns on Karl,"](#) by John Dickerson, Dahlia Lithwick, and Seth Stevenson. Posted starting Jan. 23, 2007.

#### Previous Coverage of the Plame Investigation

["Alms for Scooter:](#) Donate today to Libby's defense fund," by John Dickerson. Posted April 17, 2006.

["Throw Scooter From the Train:](#) Should the White House try to ditch Libby?" by John Dickerson. Posted April 7, 2006.

["Where's My Subpoena?](#) Valerie Plame, Scooter Libby, and me," by John Dickerson. Posted Tues. Feb. 7, 2006.

["Liar or Fool?](#) How Bush will deal with the Libby indictment," by John Dickerson. Posted Oct. 31, 2005

["Who is Scooter Libby?"](#) The secretive Cheney aide at the heart of the CIA leak case," by John Dickerson. Posted Friday, Oct. 21, 2005.

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## politics

### Picking Scooter's Peers

Libby gets a jury.

By John Dickerson

Monday, January 22, 2007, at 7:31 PM ET

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**From:** John Dickerson

**Subject:** Opening Day at Scooter Libby's Trial

**Updated Wednesday, January 17, 2007, at 7:56 PM ET**

Scooter Libby's perjury and obstruction-of-justice case started today, but it was Dick Cheney and Tim Russert who were really on trial. Both men will be witnesses in the trial that stems from a federal investigation into Bush aides' leak of the identity of undercover CIA officer Valerie Plame in 2003. Cheney, who was on *Fox News Sunday* this week attesting to Libby's honesty, will testify in support of his former chief of staff. Whereas Russert will testify for the prosecution, which will attempt to prove that the newsman's recollections are more accurate than Libby's about when and how Libby disclosed Plame's identity.

During jury selection, the judge and defense counsel tried to ferret out whether the vice president's unpopularity would cause those weighing the case to discount his testimony or whether the star power of the *Meet the Press* host might lead jurors to believe anything he said. (Prosecutors, who benefit from these preconceptions, were not so worked up about probing them.)

Given these lines of inquiry, it became pretty clear who was going to get out of jury duty. Pay attention to the world around you, and it was pretty likely you were going to get bounced. Libby's defense team honed in on anyone who might have developed views about the case beforehand, who might not like the war in Iraq, or who have any sympathy for the media figures who will be witnesses or figures in the case. Twenty-four members of the media ([including me](#)) were among the 80 figures listed by the judge as playing a role in the case. (Jurors who knew anyone on the list were asked to explain their relationship to see if it might damage their impartiality).

So, for instance, when a young financial analyst admitted he watched *Meet the Press*, it was pretty clear he was going to make it home for lunch. When he interrupted the defense counsel to stand up for the accuracy of bloggers, he might as well have been taunting them. "Some of them are pretty good," he said, to the cheers of [bloggers who are—for the first time—formally a part of the press corps covering the case](#). (This will be a continuing theme of this trial, as those covering it wait to hear for their names, their [book titles](#), or the names of their blog or news organization mentioned in court. When the fledgling *Washington Examiner* was mentioned by a juror who reads it on the subway commute, its correspondent gave—and got—huzzahs.)

An African-American woman found the quickest self-ejection response short of yelling *fire*. She indicated in her answers to the 38-item jury questionnaire that she could not be impartial. The judge called her in to ask why. "I am completely without objectivity," she said of her feelings for the Bush administration. "There is probably nothing they could say or do that would make me feel positively about them." A window in the ceiling opened, and she was levitated out of the chair.

The first shock of the case is that the know-it-alls are in the *minority*. Despite saturation media coverage, frantic blogging, and the personal crusade of Joe Wilson, who at times seemed to be going door-to-door to scare up sympathy for himself, there are still balanced humans roaming the streets who live their lives unscathed by news about the leak. These strange beings admitted to knowing nothing about the particulars of the case or this whole big thing about whether the Bush administration fabricated evidence about weapons of mass destruction to go to war.

"I'm a sports-section guy," said the first potential juror, a little embarrassed. There was a somewhat grim moment for the Medill School of Journalism when one of its graduates said that while she studied the case in school—including in an ethics class—she didn't remember much about it. Out of school and working for a health-care association, she'd really forgotten about the case. "I read Medicare documents all day and don't do a lot else," she said, justifying herself.

At times the day's exchanges sounded like an undergraduate college seminar. There were questions about the influence of the media, whether opinions live in the subconscious, and the nature of memory. The stability of human memory is central to Libby's defense. Fitzgerald claims Libby lied during the federal investigation, but Libby says he was so busy fighting the war on terror he just couldn't keep up with whom he talked to and when. "Have you ever had an instance where you thought you remembered something that turned out not to be the case?" Libby's lawyers asked several potential jurors. They all agreed they had. "I thought I put the car keys in my coat, and I find them in the freezer," said one woman.

Lawyers worked hard to press the jurors, but not too hard—they might, after all, have to appeal to them should they graduate to the jury box. Prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald may have won himself a friend for life when he asked a middle-aged woman if her children were young. "Oh, aren't you sweet," she said as if he'd served up a winning pickup line. She said her kids were college-age.

It was hard to get a real feel for the judge or defense and prosecuting lawyers, because the press had to watch the action from a far remove. We will be let in for the main trial, but we watched jury selection on a flat screen in a windowless room with walls laminated in the fake wood popular in recreation rooms across America in the 1970s.

Justice is blind and therefore does not decorate well.

We looked like the most boring patrons of the most boring sports bar in the world, deciphering the action on the screen that had been separated into quarters representing the four camera views in the courtroom. The judge was in the upper left, the witness in the upper right, the podium where defense or prosecution

lawyers spoke took up the lower-left quadrant, and in the remaining space we saw the entire courtroom from such a distance that we could have been watching an Akron City Council meeting and not known the difference.

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**From:** John Dickerson

**Subject:** Six Degrees of Scooter Libby

**Posted Wednesday, January 17, 2007, at 7:56 PM ET**

You'd think it would be hard to find a pool of jurors untainted by any connection to Scooter Libby. First, his name is Scooter, and as one juror pointed out today during the second day of voir dire, "you don't forget a name like Scooter." Second, everyone in Washington knows everyone, even if their name is John Smith. If you don't know a person directly, your new baby sitter once took care of her kids, or your mechanic says he works on his car, too, or your cousin is the security guard at her building. So, it was surprising that the first dozen potential jurors quizzed in the Scooter Libby trial were somehow completely unconnected to Libby and even more amazing that none had even a remote relationship to any of the 80 names the judge said would be mentioned during the trial. No one had run-ins with famous Watergate reporter Bob Woodward, to whom Plame's name was leaked. No one had sat on a bar stool next to Tim Russert to watch a Buffalo Bills game or genuflected with him in church. Next time someone says "It's a small world," I'm going to put them straight.

But then came Juror No. 1869. Where other jurors said they didn't read the newspaper, this middle-aged man said he read it cover to cover every day. He not only knew journalists, he had been one for much of his professional career. In fact, Bob Woodward had been his editor at the *Washington Post*. He also knew *Post* reporter Walter Pincus, another name on the list. Oh, and Tim Russert? They used to be neighbors. His son played basketball with Tim's son in the alley between their houses. He had gone to grade school with Maureen Dowd. (Apparently *this is the guy* everyone in Washington knows.)

For the next hour, lawyers for both the prosecution and defense turned the man around in their hands like a Rubik's Cube. Unbidden, he offered a view about memory that was straight from the Libby team's playbook. "Memory is a funny thing," he said. "I've been wrong and other people have been wrong. I'm skeptical about everything until I see it backed up." Would he be predisposed to believing testimony from Bob Woodward above all others? "Let's face it—he's written two books about Iraq," said the man. "One contradicted the other in some ways. He was obviously wrong in some ways. I think he's capable of being human and wrong." Lawyers for both sides pressed and pressed on his impartiality until he turned into an evangelist for the

profession: "One thing about being a newspaper reporter all those years, one thing that has always been important to me, was getting it right, checking all the facts. . . . One thing that [Woodward] drilled into all of us is that don't take anyone's word until you get the facts." To not judge the case fairly would "go against everything he taught us. I would find it shameful."

Attaboy, No. 1869. Libby's defense team relies on a far different view of the press and its sense of duty. They're hoping to convince jurors that the press is sloppy and that several of the members involved in the case who will contradict Libby's version of events have agendas and threadbare memories.

Jury selection was temporarily interrupted when a woman who had made it past the first day's questioning on Tuesday asked to speak to the judge. A cleaning lady who works in the Watergate complex, she explained that her employer would not pay her if she participated in the trial. "I wouldn't mind serving at all. It's just I have to look at my finances," said the young African-American woman. The judge called her employer, confirmed her story, and let her go. Tuesday, Libby's lawyers tried to challenge her inclusion because under questioning she seemed to suggest that since the defendant was indicted, he was already guilty. But as she walked out of the courtroom, she looked at Libby and whispered "good luck."

Libby's lawyers continued to press potential jurors about their views on the controversy over weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and their opinions of the Bush administration. Most people said they either hadn't paid enough attention or didn't know enough to make a call. The bulk of them showed such equanimity and fair-mindedness about weighing all the facts and Libby's presumption of innocence that it made you want to sing a hymn for the judicial system. There were a couple who said they could not put aside their negative feelings about the Bush administration and were dismissed, but Day 2 saw the first Bush defender, a woman whose husband is serving in Iraq.

After watching today's procession, it occurred to me that people inside the Beltway (a precondition for service) are far more normal than they get credit for. Not all are politically obsessed wonks. Based on their answers, it appears that no one in Washington watches *Meet the Press*. One woman in her 30s called herself "a master of pop culture but nothing that has to do with current events that have to do with responsible adult things." When asked if he read the newspapers, an older African-American man said, "No sir; I only read the Bible." Another woman buys them only for the Sudoku puzzles. One woman had been a hotel maid for 30 years, another had played guitar in a bar and a man had driven a cab for a year and a half in New York. This is what *Survivor* would be like if the contestants didn't have to be good-looking.

The questioning about jobs and family run-ins with the law opened interesting little windows into their lives. One woman

was dating a felon, while one man was being treated with methadone (he was excused). The lawyers tried to stitch little bonds with the jurors they'll potentially have to appeal to. Twice it went horribly wrong for Libby's men. When talking about faulty memories, Ted Wells said to a middle-aged woman that he bet it was the husband who was always wrong, presumably bonding over the idea that women always find their husbands pigheaded. No, she said, that wasn't the case. Libby's other lawyer asked a middle-aged man: "Did your wife ever say, 'I told you that?'" He took on an annoying voice, presumably bonding over the idea that women are hectoring shrews. The gentleman replied: "I don't have one of those."

A retired teacher from North Carolina was the star of the day. He'd moved to Washington to receive treatment for a debilitating illness. (I know more about him, but the judge says we're not supposed to make jurors identifiable.) Jurors get quite chatty under questioning, and this man explained that he finds it hard to watch television because his grandchildren regularly interrupt. His told us about his wife. "I call her the bionic woman," he said before listing the many surgeries she'd endured recently. "She has a lot of bad joints but a pure gold heart." Asked about the president, he became Gen. [Shinseki](#): "I don't always agree with his Iraq policy. If it were me making the decision I would have gone in with 500,000 troops to make sure we had all bases covered."

What was his opinion of Dick Cheney? "I'm not sure of his health as serving vice president with his heart, and I'm not sure I would like to go bird-hunting with him, either." Nearly everyone in the courtroom laughed. Libby put his head in his hand and smiled. Patrick Fitzgerald, a Joe Friday type, did not smile. His staff kept straight faces, too. Before the man left the witness stand he showed the judge pictures of his grandchildren.

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**From:** John Dickerson  
**Subject:** The Slog Gets Long

**Posted Thursday, January 18, 2007, at 7:36 PM ET**

Jury selection in the Scooter Libby trial was supposed to end today, Thursday, but the process is taking forever. Today, jurors were being tossed out like bad fruit. Nine of the first 10 to come forward were thrown out. By the end of the day, the failure rate was more than 60 percent. One castaway was a felon. One woman said she would distrust any politician. And several said they just didn't like the Bush administration *at all*. "I just can't trust anything anyone from the Bush administration says," said one.



The judge asked another: "Do you have any idea about Mr. Libby's guilt or innocence?" "Guilty," said the prospective juror, as if she were already the foreman and the trial was over.

"You can see the clerk down the hall," said the judge.

A *Washington Post* reporter (yes, [another one](#)) said she would find it impossible to keep from talking about the case with her boyfriend, with whom she lives. "I don't talk to my wife," muttered the judge, continuing the trial's leitmotif of telling us more about the main character's spousal relations. "I'm a journalist," she said in her defense. "I'm a gossip; it's what we do." In the end, it wasn't her profession but her views about Dick Cheney that bounced her. "I don't trust him, and anyone associated with him would have to jump over a hurdle for me to think they are at all telling the truth."

Although at one point it seemed as if the dismissals were coming so fast they should have put the jurors onto a conveyor belt, the bulk of the delay came from the witnesses who showed some juror potential and thus spent extended periods of time in the witness box while lawyers questioned them.

Much of the day's philosophical jockeying between the lawyers focused on the Iraq war. Attorneys for Scooter Libby have grilled potential jurors on their political views. They want to expose anyone with a hint of anti-war or anti-administration sentiment who might not be able to give their man a fair shake.

Prosecutor Fitzgerald, on the other hand, through his questions, tried to show that even those jurors who thought the war was a mistake or those who thought intelligence had been mishandled could nevertheless evaluate the testimony fairly. Or, as one potential juror, an art curator, put it with a theatrical swirl of her hand: "One must suspend one's conclusions." The elderly woman with leonine white hair made it through the questioning. Charlie Rose's bookers should start working *right now* on getting her on the show after the trial is over.

Fitzgerald spent more than 15 minutes Thursday morning arguing privately with U.S. District Judge Reggie Walton over whether to dismiss one potential juror. A management consultant, she, like other jurors, seemed to want to serve, but was also struggling to be totally honest. "My personal feeling is the Iraq war was a tremendous, terrible mistake. It's quite a horrendous thing," she said. "Whether any one person or the administration is responsible for that is quite a complex question." She felt she could be fair but also confessed that her feelings about the administration could spill over into the trial. She too was dismissed.

At times, watching this questioning feels as though you're looking in on a doctor's exam. The first set of questions starts out general enough—what do you do, have you heard about the

case—but you know that by the end of this process, the patient will have been thoroughly worked over.

Before lunch, an African-American woman who worked in an unclassified post at the CIA spent a long time up on the examining table. Before she came to court, she discussed her jury service with the general counsel at the CIA, as all employees must do. The agency lawyer told her that the case was about Libby's outing of covert agent Valerie Plame. That's not what the case is about. The case is about whether Libby lied during the investigation into Plame's outing. Libby's lawyers worried that as a 19-year CIA employee, she might be biased against anyone seen to have harmed a co-worker.

The judge explained to her what the case was really about, and she said she understood, but then Libby's lawyer Ted Wells started asking questions again. He flipped her. "If she wasn't covert, then it wouldn't be an issue," she said. "If she didn't work for the CIA, we wouldn't be here." That was all that was needed. After the marathon questioning session, she was excused.

This questioning picks up again Monday. (The judge had previous commitments for tomorrow.) Opening arguments are now scheduled for Tuesday, but let's not get our hopes up. Ted Wells, who is doing most of the questioning for Libby, is methodical and patient. Though he has to go through the same litany of questions, he does it thoroughly with each juror. His counterpart, Patrick Fitzgerald, who has less to worry about, often just asks a few questions and stops. Wells continues to press. He's like a politician who never gets bored of giving the same stump speech, a tenacity that eventually caused his straight-laced opponent Fitzgerald to offer a little quip. After a brief recess, Wells and the defense team hadn't returned. Fitzgerald looked at the judge and then the empty defense table: "This may go faster, Judge."

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**From:** John Dickerson  
**Subject:** Libby Gets a Jury

**Posted Monday, January 22, 2007, at 7:31 PM ET**

Scooter Libby has his jury: nine women and three men. In a city that is nearly 60 percent African-American, 10 are Caucasian. The group includes an art historian, a soprano, a postal worker, a Web designer, and a [charming](#) retired North Carolina math teacher. Somehow, juror No. 1,869, that *Washington Post* reporter [who seems to know everyone](#), made it into the box.

Libby has to feel relieved. His jurors are not people who are hooked on the 24-hour news cycle. They're more interested in celebrity gossip or the sports pages than the news. "I don't like

reading newspapers," said one thirtysomething woman who said she watches *Heroes*, *Jericho*, and *Judge Judy* instead of Katie Couric or Tim Russert. ("You know [Judge Judy's] not a judge," Judge Walton told her during her questioning.)

Most are thoroughly unfamiliar with the case, but though they may not have known Libby's name, they all know their duty as public citizens. When they were asked about their ability to judge events fairly, they were thoroughly informed. "That is the obligation in this setting," said the theatrical elderly art historian, who will either drive her fellow jurors mad or have them all sounding like members of the Royal Shakespeare Co. by the end of this.

Not only did jurors promise to weigh the evidence carefully, but when asked if the Bush administration lied in the run-up to the war, they were ruthlessly fair and balanced. "I don't believe in that stuff you have to go to the right person," said the giggly, 30ish travel agent. "There are three sides to a story: his side, her side, and the truth." One woman who thought Bush had not been "candid" nevertheless said it wouldn't affect her ability to judge evidence in this case.

All jurors seemed predisposed to buy the defense argument that memory can be a funny thing. "We get so bogged down in so much going on that you can ... sometimes to be pretty sure about something [that might not have actually happened]," said a middle-aged woman who was selected. Of course, the challenge for the defense is convincing the jury that Libby had the most extraordinarily resilient false memory. Repeated questioning by the FBI and grand jury could not shake his story.

The last time we were in court, the process of picking the 12 jurors and four alternates ground slowly, but Monday the blockage cleared. None of the eight jurors interviewed by the lawyers had conflicts, and no one knew any of the players. Those who did get bounced had the good manners to do it quickly. They made it immediately clear that they couldn't get past their dislike of the Bush administration. They were in and out of the box in about a minute.

The day's smooth glide to a jury was briefly interrupted after lunch for a debate over the last stage of jury selection. The first four days of questioning created a pool of potential jurors. From that pool, defense attorneys could strike 10 jurors, and prosecuting attorneys could exclude six. Lawyers could use those peremptory challenges without explaining their reasoning. Each side also had the power to chuck two alternates. It's like picking teams in a very complicated pickup game.

When lawyers tried to clarify the rules for the process with the judge, everyone seemed to get confused. Would jurors be divided into two pools (jurors and alternates) before the peremptory challenges started or as the process continued? This would influence the way in which the teams used their strikes.

The lawyers and the judge had different views of the rules. "I'm sorry to be a geek about this," said Fitzgerald, explaining his opinion of how the order should work. Judge Walton grabbed an enormous book and looked up the rule.

Libby's lawyers, laughing, asked for more time to reorder their list. "We were working over the weekend [about how the selection would work]," said Wells. "We have to revisit how the world looks." This would not have given me confidence, if I were Libby.

The process for discarding jurors was opaque. The lawyers didn't say out loud who they wanted cast off. Instead they handed the clerk a list, and she read it with no indication of which side sent the ejection order. The prosecution presumably struck the two women who said they had a hard time believing anyone would lie. The defense team presumably got rid of the man whose wife worked as a criminal prosecutor, since he might have sympathy for Patrick Fitzgerald's team.

Tomorrow both sides will offer their opening statements, and the press will surge into the courtroom, free [from the little room in which we have been sequestered](#) for the jury-selection process. And then we, like Libby, will be able for the next six weeks to study the faces for some clue about whether they think the vice president's former chief of staff was [lying or simply had a disastrously faulty memory](#).

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## press box

### The Lies of Ryszard Kapuściński

Or, if you prefer, the "magical realism" of the now-departed master.

By Jack Shafer

Thursday, January 25, 2007, at 6:18 PM ET

The *Washington Post* obituary of Ryszard Kapuściński, who died Jan. 23, calls him "among the most celebrated war correspondents of his generation." The *Los Angeles Times* obituary proclaims him the "most celebrated of Polish journalists, whose work earned international acclaim." In the *Guardian*, director Jonathan Miller speaks of Kapuściński's "magnificent reportage" from Haile Selassie's royal court. The *Daily Telegraph* obituary describes him as "Poland's most renowned foreign correspondent and a witness to much of the turbulent birth of the Third World."

The obits and appreciations published this week make much of Kapuściński's bravery in reporting stories from Africa, Central America, the Middle East, and elsewhere. He's credited again and again for witnessing 27 coups and revolutions, of enduring malaria, tuberculosis, and blood poisoning in backwater

hellholes. He is said to have lived on almost nothing while filing brilliant stories about deprivation and oppression, and he cheated death time and again as it claimed others. Take, for example, the much-repeated account that he wrote about escaping death after a gang soaked him with benzene at a roadblock in Nigeria during civil war. Irony, in the form of demonic laughter, saved his life.

John Updike worshipped him. Gabriel García Márquez tagged him "the true master of journalism." But there's one fact about the celebrated war correspondent and idol of New York's literary class that didn't get any serious attention this week. It's widely conceded that Kapuściński routinely made up things in his books. The [New York Times](#) obituary, which calls Kapuściński a "globe-trotting journalist," negotiates its way around the master's unique relationship with the truth diplomatically, stating that his work was "often tinged with magical realism" and used "allegory and metaphors to convey what was happening."

Scratch a Kapuściński enthusiast and he'll insist that everybody who reads the master's books understands from context that not everything in them is to be taken literally. This is a bold claim, as Kapuściński's work draws its power from the fantastic and presumably *true* stories he collects from places few of us will ever visit and few news organizations have the resources to report and confirm. If Kapuściński regularly mashes up the observed (journalism) with the imagined (fiction), how certain can we be of our abilities to separate the two while reading?

Should we regard Kapuściński's end product as journalism? Should we give Kapuściński a bye but castigate [Stephen Glass](#), who defrauded the *New Republic* and other publications by doing a similar thing on a grosser scale? Do we cut Kapuściński slack because he was better at observing, imagining, and writing than Glass, and had the good sense to write from exotic places? Exactly how is Kapuściński different from James Frey in practice if not in execution?

Some Kapuściński sympathizers want us to understand his books as allegories about the place he came from—totalitarian Poland. As a reporter for the government news agency, he couldn't write the truth about his country, so he channeled his experiences in Sudan, Ethiopia, Angola, El Salvador, Bolivia, Iran, and Chile, among other places, to speak about Polish life under Communism. That's fine with me as long as nobody calls his footwork journalism.

John Ryle inventories Kapuściński's skills at inventing details in a [Times Literary Supplement](#) piece published in 2001 and recently revised. Ryle, currently of the [Rift Valley Institute](#), documents scores of embellishments, fabrications, errors, and fictions in Kapuściński's work, most of which even the greatest fan of the man's work would not have gleaned had they given every page a close reading. So much for understanding Kapuściński in his context.

Ryle quotes a 2001 interview in the *Independent*, in which Kapuściński complains about the excess of "fables" and "make-believe," saying, "Journalists must deepen their anthropological and cultural knowledge and explain the context of events. They must read." He also captures Kapuściński criticizing the shoddy reporting of other foreign correspondents, which establishes that he paid lip service to the traditions of accurate reporting, even if he didn't observe them in the field. He wasn't very consistent on this point. In a 1987 interview in [Granta](#), he speaks disdainfully of journalistic conventions, saying:

You know, sometimes the critical response to my books is amusing. There are so many complaints: Kapuscinski never mentions dates, Kapuscinski never gives us the name of the minister, he has forgotten the order of events. All that, of course, is exactly what I avoid. If those are the questions you want answered, you can visit your local library, where you will find everything you need: the newspapers of the time, the reference books, a dictionary.

The liberties Kapuściński takes with events, places, and people matter for the same reason it would matter if an Ethiopian journalist had covered the Solidarity uprising but ginned up his story in order to speak allegorical truth to the authorities in Addis Ababa. Nice try, but no journalism.

Ryle writes that the

criticisms do not rob Kapuściński's work of its bright allure, its illuminating moments, its often lively sympathy for the people of the countries he writes about, but they warn us not to take it seriously as a guide to reality.

A "guide to reality" is a pretty good pocket definition of journalism, if you ask me.

Some Kapuściński enthusiasts believe that his "techniques" are defensible because they allow writers to reach a higher truth than does the low-octane variety of journalism. *Slate's* Meghan O'Rourke [writes](#) that our culture needs a label for the hybrid bred by Kapuściński, and such writers as Joseph Mitchell and Truman Capote, whose books straddle the wall between fiction and nonfiction. Dave Eggers attempts such labeling (successfully, I'm told) in his new [book](#), *What Is the What*, which bills itself as the autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng done as a novel.

Truth in packaging for wall-straddling authors would calm my savage, beating heart, but I'm still bothered by the conceit. Every news story ever published could be better—contain a higher truth, if you will—if reporters were allowed to make up stuff. The measure of a journalist, especially a foreign correspondent,

is to achieve the effect of Kapuściński without scattering the pixie dust of magical realism. Dexter Filkins, John Burns, Anthony Shadid, Carlotta Gall, and other geniuses of foreign correspondence have astonished readers without "allegorizing." To create a special category of international reporting that is true—except where not specified as true—would diminish the true masters' feats.

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Feats don't fail me now. Kapuściński fans are invited to pour benzene over my naked body and set it afire with e-mail to [slate.pressbox@gmail.com](mailto:slate.pressbox@gmail.com). (E-mail may be quoted by name unless the writer stipulates otherwise. Permanent disclosure: *Slate* is owned by the Washington Post Co.)

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## press box

### Unspeak From the Readers

They find it everywhere.

By Jack Shafer

Tuesday, January 23, 2007, at 5:34 PM ET

At the bottom of Monday's [column](#), I invited *Slate* readers to submit the best examples of unspeak they've encountered and promised to publish the best of the lot. If you didn't read the column and have no intention of doing so, let me bring you up to speed.

*Unspeak* is [Steven Poole's](#) wicked term for words or phrases that attempt to smuggle a political argument into conversations. Poole's classic unspeak examples are the phrases *pro-life* and *pro-choice*. If a journalist describes an anti-abortion figure as pro-life, he creates a semantic space in which all the pro-lifer's opponents are necessarily anti-life. If he describes a pro-abortion figure as pro-choice, he similarly reduces the debate to a stick-figure battle between those who make decisions for themselves and those who want to boss others around.

Poole has collected scores of examples and amplified them in his recent book, *Unspeak: How Words Become Weapons, How Weapons Become a Message, and How That Message Becomes Reality*, which should be required reading for reporters and editors everywhere. Other examples of unspeak: *community*, *reform*, *smart weapons*, *intelligent design*, and *collateral damage*. (Want to know why they qualify as unspeak? Read Poole's book, or better yet [read my piece from yesterday](#).)

At this writing, about 260 readers (and counting) have taken the unspeak challenge and submitted their nominations. Many

thanks to all who participated, and if you don't see your name below, it's because I ran out of time and energy, and not necessarily because your nomination didn't pass muster.

Even author Poole wrote in, informing me that *Islamofascism*, which I nominated for unspeak status in my column, had made the postscript of the paperback edition of his book, due at bookstores in [April](#). I asked for a sample of the postscript, and Poole obliged with this:

*Islamic fascism* suggested that fascism was somehow inherent to Islam, just as with the associated notion of *Islamic terrorism*. (Few spoke of *Christian terrorism* when the perpetrators were Christians.) Third, and most excitingly, *Islamic fascism* allowed the use of dramatic historical analogies. In one speech, [President George W.] Bush inventively compared "the terrorists" to some other "evil and ambitious men," namely Lenin and Hitler, taking care to remind his audience of the trouble those two had caused. ...

[Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld] ... prowled the stage muttering darkly about the 'vicious extremists' who constituted "the rising threat of a new type of fascism."

At least the phrase "a new type of fascism" was subtler than his boss's *Islamic fascism*. The rider "a new type of," it seemed, was designed to acknowledge the obvious fact that what was under consideration was not "fascism" as hitherto understood, while allowing oneself to say the scary word "fascism" anyway. It was ridiculous to think, Rumsfeld said, that these fascists could be "appeased," even though no one was actually recommending such a historically disreputable course of action. (It did not take long for some commentators to suggest that the celebrated photograph of a beaming Rumsfeld shaking hands with Saddam Hussein in 1983 evoked "appeasement" more than anything that serious critics of the "war on terror" were suggesting.)

Criminal defense lawyer Elizabeth Simpson writes in to note the unspeakery of public grousing about defendants getting off *on a technicality*. "Many times, this 'technicality' is the U.S. Constitution. Prosecutors charge people on technicalities all the time, but this word would never be used to describe their tactics."

Dennis Harrington finds both *affirmative action* and *equal opportunity* as code phrases for discrimination and "we'll take



anyone, however useless, as long as they have our preferred gender or skin color," respectively. Rick Kaempfer, Nick Stern, and John Bisges offer *surge*. Writes Bisges:

Rather than "troop increase," which implies an open-ended commitment of more troops to a failing war, a "surge" goes along with the idea of a power surge—a brief burst of energy that overwhelms a circuit's resistance. Using it in the context of the Iraqi conflict makes it much more palatable: everyone is against a troop "increase," but a troop "surge" invokes the idea that this is a very temporary burst of soldiers that will quickly overwhelm the insurgency. Perfect because the administration reaps the benefits of the phrase while bearing no responsibility for its misleading characterization of troop redeployment; after all, it's just a word.

Not everybody played the nomination game as directed. In his e-mail, Jay Heinrichs claims that "Poole's book title employs the same device he denounces: Using our belief in unfettered speech, he applies a shocking label to the practice of labeling," adding that Aristotle called what Poole calls unspeak a "commonplace," the philosopher's "term or phrase based on the audience's own beliefs, values and naked self-interest."

Paul W. Westermeyer diagnoses *anti-war* as unspeak because it declares "that everyone else is 'pro-war,' implying no distinction between supporting a war of defense and a war of aggression." *Progressive* also deserves our attention, he writes, because it "implies improvement."

"The term *not incorrect* is almost always favored over 'correct' because it, while acknowledging undisputed facts, still casts doubt on whatever the opposition is trying to get across, and implies that the fact is a technicality," writes Robin Snyder.

*Terrorist surveillance program* is "the [preferred term](#) of the Bush administration towards their illegal, warrantless, unsupervised spying of American citizens. It was also the phrase used by Fox News, right wing pundits, and right wing blogs," writes Joshua Fletcher, calling it a "safe, innocent, sanitized phrase which implied no wrongdoing."

Linda McIntyre recalls an article from long ago in the *New Republic* "about the *Children's Defense Fund*," which casts "those not in agreement with CDF's policy prescriptions as anti-child, a strategy that worked well for the group in terms of politics and fundraising."

*Mass casualty event* really describes mass slaughter, writes Michael Billips. "*Heritage* has become a code word for race,"

writes Jeremy Voas. "Since the '80's being *against deficits* means being for something that cannot be said: taxes," offers Robert Cunningham. Joe Keohane and Tom Stephens find unspeak in the vague phrase *support the troops*, Ashley Masset nominates *smart growth*, and Alec Mcausland wants to know where the eggheads get off calling themselves the *Union of Concerned Scientists*.

*Interrogation techniques* sanitizes torture, writes Donald DiPaula, and anything that contains the word *agenda* (*homosexual agenda*, *left-wing agenda*, and *right-wing agenda*) qualifies because it implies the homosexuals, lefties, and righties are "homogenous and in complete internal agreement." Similarly, about a dozen readers drew their unspeak revolvers whenever encountering the word *family* anywhere near *values*, *oriented*, *pro-*, or *-friendly*. Beth Prather brings up the rear with one of my hobbyhorses, the *war on drugs*, and Carol Kania with the cringe-making *stakeholders*.

Many readers nominated such unspeak as *unlawful combatants* and *climate change*, which are analyzed in Poole's book. To my great disappointment, nobody finds the phrase *net neutrality* an example of unspeakableness. Can I get a second out there?

Finally, Keith Benoit suggests that readers listen to the State of the Union address tonight and e-mail me examples of Bush's unspeak. Excellent idea. If you have the stomach to listen, send your examples to [slate.pressbox@gmail.com](mailto:slate.pressbox@gmail.com) and I'll post the best of the lot.

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## press box The Devil's Lexicon

*Unspeak* exposes the language twisters.

By Jack Shafer

Monday, January 22, 2007, at 5:09 PM ET

*Unspeak*, writer [Steven Poole](#)'s term for a phrase or word that contains a whole *unspeak* political argument, deserves a place in every journalist's daily vocabulary. Such gems of unspeak, such as *pro-choice* and *pro-life*, writes Poole in the opening pages in his book *Unspeak: How Words Become Weapons, How Weapons Become a Message, and How That Message Becomes Reality*, represent

an attempt to say something without saying it, without getting into an argument and so having to justify itself. At the same time, it tries to *unspeak*—in the sense of erasing, or silencing—any possible opposing point of view, by laying a claim right at the start to only one choice of looking at a problem.

*Pro-life* supposes that a fetus is a person and that those who are anti-pro-life are against life, he writes. *Pro-choice* distances its speakers from actually advocating abortion, while casting "adversaries as 'anti-choice'; as interfering, patriarchal dictators."

Poole's list of suspicious phrases rolls on for more than 200 pages. *Tax relief* and *tax burden*, which covertly argue that lowered taxes automatically relieve and unburden everybody. *Friends of the Earth* casts its opponents as *enemies of the earth* and implies that the Earth is befrienable, a big, huggable Gaia.

Poole cautions readers not to confuse *unspeak* with *doublespeak*, a word that grew out of the concepts of *Newspeak* and *doublethink* that George Orwell introduced in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Poole writes, "But *Unspeak* does not say one thing while meaning another. It says one thing while *really meaning that one thing*," and the confusion *unspeak* generates is almost always calculated and deliberate.

Poole calls *community* one of the most perfect political words in English because it

can mean several things at once, or nothing at all. It can conjure things that don't exist, and deny the existence of those that do. It can be used in celebration, or in passive-aggressive attack. Its use in public language is almost always evidence of an *Unspeak* strategy at work.

The plasticity of *community* allows it to encompass geography, ethnicity, profession, hobby, or religion, and in the mouths of diplomats and journalists can expand to include everybody, as in the *international community*, a concept that Justice Antonin Scalia once described—rightly—as "fictional."

We're drawn to the "semantically promiscuous" word, Poole writes, because it allows us to simultaneously express our tolerance for a group and our discomfort. For example: the *homosexual community* and the *black community*. People rarely refer to the *heterosexual community*, the *white community*, or even the *Christian community*, because in the United States and Britain, they are the "default" positions and carry the "privilege of not having to be defined by a limiting 'identity.'" Likewise, a group defined by the majority as transgressive, say, the Ku Klux Klan, would never qualify as a "community" even though it

organizes itself with the same conscious effort as the "anti-war community."

*Unspeak* concurs with [my position](#) that journalists everywhere reject the word *reform* because it's become meaningless. He assails the Tories in England who spoke of "bogus asylum seekers" because the phrase destroys any presumption of sincerity, and served as code for "simple racism." When governments speak of a *tragedy*, they imply that the bloody results of their work were unforeseen—as if visited upon man by the gods—and nobody can be blamed. *Surgical strike* conveys the benevolent practice of medicine, ridding a target of its disease. *Collateral damage* redefines the death of innocents as injury. *Smart weapons* posit the opposite of dumb weapons that kill indiscriminately. *Daisy cutter* sanitizes the killing power of the daisy-cutter bomb. *Weapons of mass destruction*, which earlier referred to the horrific mechanized tools of warfare being stockpiled in the 1930s, now applies to biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons when possessed by nonstate actors or regimes in disfavor.

*Unspeak* usually flows from the lips of politicians, but news organizations are equally inventive. Poole quotes a Fox News Channel executive who instructed reporters to refer to U.S. "sharpshooters" in Iraq instead of U.S. "snipers," because *snipers* was negative. The same Fox News sought to substitute "homicide bombers" for "suicide bombers" because "suicide" gave too much prominence to the attacker.

Poole asks how the *war on terror* can exist when it's almost impossible to wage war on a technique; he recoils at the euphemism of *detainee abuse*, which minimizes physical and psychological violence; and punctures those who dress their acts in the cloths of *democracy*, *freedom*, and *liberty*.

Other suspect phrases and words that Poole takes his cane to: *intelligent design*. *Sound science*. *Security fence*. *Regime change*. *Extremism*. *Moderate*. *Coalition forces*.

Unlike George Lakoff, who lectures the Democratic Party about the importance of "framing" political debates in order to win them, Poole dismisses this tactic as fighting *unspeak* with *unspeak*, as the "pro-choice" and "pro-life" schools demonstrate. Quoting linguist Ranko Bugarski, Poole maintains that what's needed is "judicious use of normal language, allowing for fine-grained selection and discrimination, for urbanity and finesse," even though "normal language" is already subject to unending political debate.

As the channel through which politicians, activists, and corporations market their words, reporters are usually the first recipients of new examples of *unspeak*. Monitoring how they say what they say is as important as reporting precisely what they say. As Poole notes, resisting *unspeak* isn't quibbling about semantics. It's attacking the "chain of reasoning at its base."

Making sense of nonsense is 90 percent of what being a journalist is about. To forewarn readers about unspeak, Poole advises, is to forearm them.

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As I read Poole's book, a couple of examples of unspeak came to me: *Accept responsibility. Gridlock. Loopholes. Islamofacism.* Send your favorite original examples to [slate.pressbox@gmail.com](mailto:slate.pressbox@gmail.com). I'll publish the best of them and credit the senders.

**Addendum, Jan. 23:** No more submissions, please. See the Tuesday "Press Box" [column](#) for the readers' unspeak nominations.

(E-mail may be quoted by name unless the writer stipulates otherwise. Permanent disclosure: *Slate* is owned by the Washington Post Co.)

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recycled

## E. Howard Hunt's Final Confession

The monstrous spymaster gloats over his crimes.

By A.L. Bardach

Wednesday, January 24, 2007, at 3:12 PM ET

*Former CIA spymaster E. Howard Hunt [died yesterday](#) at age 88. His ignominious career included masterminding the Watergate break-in and overthrowing the democratically elected government of Guatemala. He gloated over his most sordid exploits—including Che Guevara's assassination—in a 2004 *Slate* "Interrogation" by A.L. Bardach, which is reproduced below. He was unrepentant to the end: When asked if he had any regrets, he replied, "No, none. [Long pause] Well, it would have been nice to do Bay of Pigs differently."*

MIAMI, Aug. 25, 2004—E. Howard Hunt is one of the most notorious spies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The son of an influential Republican leader in upstate New York, Hunt began his career as a founding member of the OSS, the precursor of the CIA in the 1940s. After beginning as an intelligence operative in China, Hunt trailblazed the path for the CIA in Latin America from 1950 to 1970, ever on the lookout for the Communist menace. By his account, he was the architect of the 1954 U.S.-backed coup ("Operation Success") in Guatemala that deposed democratically elected President Jacobo Arbenz. Adept at psych ops (propaganda and subversion) and running "black flights" (covert operations), he also played a role in the Bay of Pigs: He was responsible for propaganda operations and the organization of a post-Castro government. Such exploits and excesses led to

the scaling back of the CIA's prerogatives following hearings by the Church Committee in 1976.

In July 1970, Hunt went into "private practice," taking with him the tools he acquired during his 25 years in the intelligence business. His most famous black-bag jobs were breaking into Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office and, later, Watergate, where Hunt's "plumbers" cadre, recruited from among his Cuban exile comrades, rifled and bugged the offices of the Democratic Party in May and June of 1972.

Since pleading guilty to his role in Watergate and spending "33 months in 13 federal prisons," Howard Hunt has lived in Miami, where he met and married his second wife of 27 years, Laura. An expert storyteller, Hunt has had a second career as a spy novelist. The couple live in a modest ranch house at the end of a cul-de-sac in north Miami. Posted around his door are warnings against trespassing, which seems somehow appropriate for a man with a history of illegal entry.

Hunt answered the door in a wheelchair. One of his legs has been amputated due to atherosclerosis, and for the past few months, he's battled lymphoma localized in his jaw (it is now in remission). He wears a hearing aid and sports rimless, bifocal glasses. While no longer the dapper spymaster, he remains salty and unremorseful.

As a general rule, Hunt said, he doesn't talk about Watergate or "the old days." But with his 86<sup>th</sup> birthday soon to occur on Oct. 9, he was feeling a bit more chatty.

**Slate:** You started the CIA's first bureau in Mexico in 1949. Did you first start working on Guatemala from there?

**Hunt:** In Mexico, I had a few agents from Washington with me, and I had recruited a few others ... [including] a young Catholic priest. So the priest came to me one time, and he said, "I'm sending down several young men to Guatemala to get a view of the situation there. It's not good." He said, "My people were beaten up and put into jail, and then exiled from the country." And he sort of sat back expectantly. And I said, "That's certainly not right. I'll let Washington know what's going on in Guatemala." So I retold the story of Guatemala and the treatment of my young Catholic friend. I found that there was a lot of intense interest in what I had to say.

**Slate:** We're talking about the time after 1952, the year Jacobo Arbenz was elected president of Guatemala.

**Hunt:** He was in power then, yes. But his wife was by far the smarter of the two and sort of told him what to do. She was a convinced communist. ... I waited for orders [from Washington]. A couple of [CIA and military] officers came down to join me, and it became apparent that there was going to

be an effort to dislodge the communist management [*laughs*] of Guatemala. Which indeed happened. We set up shop and had some very bright guys working against Arbenz, and the long and short of it was that we got Arbenz defenestrated. Out the window. [*Laughs*]

**Slate:** But President Arbenz ended up in exile—not really out the window?

**Hunt:** Yeah. In Czechoslovakia. With his very bright and attractive wife.

**Slate:** So it seems you were the architect for the Guatemalan operation?

**Hunt:** It was mine because nobody else knew more than I did. I would say that I had more knowledge about it than anybody did. I knew all the players on both sides.

**Slate:** How did you run the Guatemalan operation?

**Hunt:** We set up the first Guatemalan operation/shop at Opa-Locka [airport in Miami, formerly an Army base]. There were three barracks, and we used the airstrip to fly in people from Guatemala and to send our people into Guatemala. These were known as "the black flights." They always occurred at night; they are a secret and officially do not exist as having happened.

**Slate:** Do you think the Guatemala coup went well?

**Hunt:** Yes—it did. And I'm glad I kept Arbenz from being executed.

**Slate:** How did you do that?

**Hunt:** By passing the word out to the people at the airport who had Arbenz to "let him go."

**Slate:** To whom did you give the word?

**Hunt:** It was a mixed band of CIA and Guatemalans at the airport and their hatred for him was palpable.

**Slate:** You were worried they would assassinate him right there?

**Hunt:** Yeah. ... And we'd [the CIA and the United States] get blamed for it.

**Slate:** Some 200,000 civilians were killed in the civil war following the coup, which lasted for the next 40 years. Were all those deaths unforeseen?

**Hunt:** Deaths? What deaths?

**Slate:** Well, the civil war that ensued for the next 40 years after the coup.

**Hunt:** Well, we should have done something we never do—we should have maintained a constant presence in Guatemala after getting rid of Arbenz.

**Slate:** Did you ever actually meet Jacobo Arbenz?

**Hunt:** They [he and his wife] were neighbors of mine—years later—on the same street in Montevideo, Uruguay.

**Slate:** What were you doing there?

**Hunt:** I was the CIA chief of station.

They had come from [exile in] Czechoslovakia, and nobody in Washington had told me they were coming and so it was a big surprise to me, to my wife and me. We went to the country club for dinner one evening and lo and behold, the Arbenzes were seated a few tables away.

**Slate:** What did you do?

**Hunt:** Well, nothing. I sent a cable to Washington saying, "In the future when we have important arrivals, please let me know." It's the least they could do.

**Slate:** I'd like to talk about Cuba now. Did you have a lot of responsibility during Bay of Pigs?

**Hunt:** Leading up to it.

**Slate:** How so?

**Hunt:** I came to Miami, and of course there were [Cuban] exiles, all anxious to take weapons in hand and charge back [to Cuba]. And the CIA was given the responsibility of a twofold action against Cuba. There was the psychological warfare branch which I headed [propaganda, covert operations], and the paramilitary which oversaw the training [of Cuban exiles] that took place in Guatemala.

My [other] responsibility was to form and manage the future government of Cuba. At that point I formed the Cuban government-in-exile with Manuel Artime [Bay of Pigs veteran designated by the United States to succeed Castro]. I had told them [the exile trainees] to meet me in my safe house in Coconut Grove. An FBI guy whom I knew came to me and he said your neighbor has reported you to the police saying that men are



coming and going at all hours of the night. ... He said he thought it was a gay brothel.

**Slate:** Did you go to Cuba after Castro took power in January 1959?

**Hunt:** I did go to Cuba. I went there under a very flimsy cover. Batista was out—it was 1959. I'd been sent to Havana to nose around and get a grass-roots feeling and talk to the proverbial taxi drivers and find out what their likely response would be to a possible U.S. invasion. And I did. And I told them don't count on it because it's not going to happen. But that is exactly what happened.

**Slate:** Did you help in the planning of Bay of Pigs?

**Hunt:** Not the military [planning]. And I couldn't find anybody who thought that it was a good plan.

**Slate:** What were the objections?

**Hunt:** There was an objection on the part of Dean Rusk, secretary of state under Kennedy. He didn't want a "go-and-see invasion"—that was the term he used. And our people [CIA planners] had planned an invasion that combined both a seaborne assault and an airlift. Dean Rusk was a great naysayer—he was not a fellow with useful ideas. When our plan was submitted to Rusk for his OK, he said, "This is too noisy, you gotta do something else." So the assault point was moved to the Bahia de Cochinos—the Bay of Pigs. Which had nothing in its favor. It was a beach that came down from the jungle. A lot of mosquitoes. Our people made that beach landing and they were scooped up pretty soon thereafter.

**Slate:** Did you ever think there was a way to get rid of Castro, short of a military coup?

**Hunt:** No. When Castro went into Cuba and took over, this was the moment—with all the chaos and disorganization—that our forces could have gone in and unseated him. But we always confronted this dreadful organization called the Department of State. Who needs it?!

**Slate:** What was your feeling about Batista?

**Hunt:** Well, I thought he ran a good government there. There was a lot of corruption, but there's always been corruption in Latin America. We can't be too purist about these things.

**Slate:** Let's talk about the final days and execution of Che. Do you know what the real story was there?

**Hunt:** I do. El Che was becoming a popular threat to Castro. Castro was a gradualist; his view was that great changes couldn't take place immediately. But El Che had a different idea—he had wanted the entire continent of Latin America to become Communist. And Castro, sort of to get rid of him, said, "Take a band down to Bolivia. Here's money and radio phones and all that." So Che went down there. But Che's very first [radio] transmissions were picked up by our people at the National Security Agency. The agency was able to track him wherever he went with his little forlorn band. The Bolivians wanted to get rid of him as soon as possible, and our people kept the Bolivian army informed as to where he was.

**Slate:** So you knew where he was all the time?

**Hunt:** Yes. There was no question about where he was or what he was trying to do. The Bolivians had gone through this kind of BS before, and they wanted to put an end to it as soon as possible. Eventually they just said, "We're gonna put an end to this farce," and they rounded up this little band of Che's, and they didn't kill anybody except Che.

**Slate:** I thought it was Felix Rodriguez, the Bay of Pigs Cuban exile, who says he killed Che.

**Hunt:** No, the Bolivians did.

**Slate:** What did the Americans want to do with Che?

**Hunt:** We wanted deniability. We made it possible for him to be killed.

**Slate:** Do you think anybody back then was thinking this guy would become a cult figure, that he might be more trouble dead than alive?

**Hunt:** No, nobody had the foresight for that. ... What I thought was great foresight was that the Bolivian colonel had Che's hands cut off.

**Slate:** Why did he do that?

**Hunt:** So he couldn't be identified by fingerprints. That was a pretty good idea—if you don't want somebody identified. People still shiver a little when they think about hands being cut off.

**Slate:** Did that idea come from the Bolivian colonel or from the CIA?

**Hunt:** I have no idea. But I talked with Felix about it. I said, "You were there when Che expired." He said they had taken him into this room, and they shot him there and killed him. And they had kind of a medical examination table. They put his body on

that and cut off his hands. They fooled around for a day or so before they disposed of the body. And that was done in a very sloppy fashion. The colonel had a shallow grave dug and his remains were dumped in there.

**Laura Hunt:** [*Interjects*] For all we know, Felix [Rodriguez] did shoot him.

**Hunt:** It was just important that it was done.

**Slate:** Maybe Rodriguez arranged for the Bolivians to do the killing and then took credit?

**Hunt:** What we certainly didn't want was a public monument to Che. We wanted his memory to vanish as soon as possible. But it never did. Even my son goes on about Che.

**Slate:** What do you think of Felix Rodriguez campaigning these days against John Kerry, who questioned him at the Iran-Contra hearings?

**Hunt:** I think that's great! Felix can do no wrong in my book.

**Slate:** What led you to leave the CIA?

**Hunt:** I found out the CIA was just infested with Democrats. I retired in '70. I got out as soon as I could. I wrote several books immediately thereafter.

**Slate:** I still don't understand how you get involved in Watergate later. Through the CIA?

**Hunt:** I had been a consultant to the White House. I greatly respected Nixon. When Chuck Colson [special counsel to Nixon] asked me to work for the administration, I said yes. Colson phoned one day and said, "I have a job you might be interested in." This was before Colson got religion.

**Slate:** How long were you in prison for the Watergate break-in?

**Hunt:** All told, 33 months.

**Slate:** That's a lot of time.

**Hunt:** It's a lot of time. And I've often said, what did I do?

**Slate:** Did you get a pardon?

**Hunt:** No. Never did. I'd applied for one, and there was no action taken, and I thought I'd just humiliate myself if I asked for a pardon.

**Laura Hunt:** He was sort of numb because all of this happened to his wife and his family, his children went into drugs while he was still in prison.

**Slate:** Wasn't your first wife killed in a plane crash?

**Laura Hunt:** She was killed when her plane crash-landed at Chicago's Midway Airport. And there was all this speculation from conspiracy buffs that the FBI blew the plane up or something ... so that she would never talk, all this ridiculous stuff.

**Slate:** How do you feel about Chuck Colson?

**Hunt:** He failed to come to my assistance, which would have helped Nixon and me.

**Slate:** Do you hold anyone responsible for Watergate?

**Hunt:** No, I don't.

**Slate:** And you didn't apologize?

**Hunt:** No. It never occurred to me to apologize.

**Slate:** Should Nixon have resigned?

**Hunt:** No.

**Slate:** I know there is a conspiracy theory saying that David Atlee Phillips—the Miami CIA station chief—was involved with the assassination of JFK.

**Hunt:** [*Visibly uncomfortable*] I have no comment.

**Slate:** I know you hired him early on, to work with you in Mexico, to help with Guatemala propaganda.

**Hunt:** He was one of the best briefers I ever saw.

**Slate:** And there were even conspiracy theories about you being in Dallas the day JFK was killed.

**Hunt:** No comment.

**Laura Hunt:** Howard says he wasn't, and I believe him.

**Slate:** Any regrets?

**Hunt:** No, none. [*Long pause*] Well, it would have been nice to do Bay of Pigs differently.

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## sports nut

# The Saints Go Marching Home

Plus, how the Colts finally beat the Patriots.

By Josh Levin

Monday, January 22, 2007, at 2:04 PM ET

With 1:50 to go in the first half, Drew Brees and the Saints offense took the field down 16-0. But then Brees lofted a long third-down pass to Marques Colston, fired to Terrance Copper for another first down, and zipped a slant to Colston to get the Saints in the end zone. In a mere 70 seconds, the Saints had reclaimed their mojo. Chicago was toast.

After that glorious second half—three ankle-breaking Reggie Bush touchdown runs, four Fred Thomas interceptions—it's hard to believe the Bears ever held the lead. But if it weren't for that first-half drive, the Saints might not have won, much less captured the NFC crown by the shocking score of 89-16. For Chicagoans, the 73-point final margin was an unpleasant echo of the Bears' [73-0 victory](#) in the 1940 NFL championship game. Now, in light of Commissioner Roger Goodell's announcement that the Bears must disband forever, it's unclear if anyone in the Windy City will ever smile again. Perhaps it's inappropriate to think about the Bears today, with work sensibly suspended on this (and every subsequent) Jan. 22 so that every American can worship the Saints in the manner they see fit. But if your mind flits to the piteous, downtrodden Illinoisan people, please, pray for them.

OK, that's not exactly how it happened. The Bears [beat my New Orleans Saints 39-14](#). A game that was closer than the score indicated, by the way. (The Saints deserved to lose by, at most, 24 points.) Justin Peters, [your gumbo-filled beignets are on the way](#).

Why did the Saints lose? The fumbles had a lot to do with it, which is particularly vexing considering [I explicitly told the Saints not to fumble](#). Beyond that, I'm not much in the mood for detailed analysis. So, in the interest of balanced subjectivity, I talked to some Bears lovers to find out how Sunday's game looked from the other side. "Drew Brees looked a lot like Rex Grossman," gloated northwest Indiana native Mike DeBonis. Ben Healy, who grew up in Hinsdale, Ill., said: "I think the Bears defense looked great. They took control of the game." When asked if he'd like to thank anyone for Sunday's victory, Healy said he'd "just like to thank the Bears." He also plans to wear a Bears stocking cap for the next two weeks, which he expects to spend "thinking about the Bears a lot and being happy about it."

And that's about all I have to say about that. I will, however, leave Saints fans with two notes of consolation. First, the Saints are a young team with a great coach—they'll be in contention for years to come. Second, professional football is [a brutal, incapacitating sport](#). By "missing out" on the Super Bowl, the Saints players will add years to their lives. Compare that with the fate of, say, Chicago's massive defensive tackle Tank Johnson. Thanks to the Bears' extra-long schedule, by the age of 40 he won't have the joint flexibility to [pick up his guns](#).

New Orleanians can also take a bit of solace in the performance of native son Peyton Manning. After years of close calls and playoff chokes, Manning capped the Colts' comeback from an 18-point deficit with a last-gasp touchdown drive. Indianapolis clinched the game when Tom Brady threw an interception in the final minute. It's worth emphasizing that, unlike my extended Saints reverie above, everything in the previous two sentences is true. The Colts [beat the heretofore-invincible Patriots 38-34](#). Peyton Manning was clutch. Tom Brady choked in the playoffs. Tony Dungy is going to the Super Bowl. Bill Belichick is going home.

How did this happen? Brendan I. ["Love the Colts"](#) Koerner says the turning point came when center Jeff Saturday saved Indy's bacon, recovering a fumble in the end zone to tie the game at 28. "When I looked in his furious, lard-ass eyes, I knew we were gonna win," Koerner says.

To my eyes, the Colts' key moment came after Pats cornerback Asante Samuel's brilliant interception and return put the Patriots in front 21-3. In simple terms, Manning didn't go limp. Rather than resorting to safe, short passes, he kept flinging the ball down the field. With Samuel and a surprising Ellis Hobbs playing sticky defense on Indy's Marvin Harrison and Reggie Wayne, Manning repeatedly found tight end Dallas Clark running free in the middle of the field. Those routes were open because the Colts smartly maintained a balanced offense when playing from behind, mixing in runs from Dominic Rhodes and Joseph Addai. But even so, the Patriots got a consistent pass rush from their defensive line and blitzers off the edge. Manning dealt with the pressure by flouting the conventional wisdom that a quarterback must step up in the pocket. Rather, he backpedaled to buy his receivers enough time to break into the clear, then lofted the ball into the wide open spaces between the Pats linebackers.

In the Belichick era, the Patriots have won bushels of games they had no business winning. See, for example, last week's game against the Chargers. The Pats have done this so many times that it almost stopped making sense to evaluate them rationally. Now that they've finally lost a game in January that they should've won, their mystique will dissipate. It's about time.

Bill Belichick and Tom Brady never had a magic formula for winning in the postseason. The Patriots won three Super Bowls

because they were a talented, well-coached team and because they made winning plays at the end of tight games. That the Pats, and Tom Brady, continually made these clutch plays doesn't make them lucky, or undeserving. But it also isn't evidence that New England won because of some kind of innate "clutchness." Just like Peyton Manning's postseason failures prior to this season didn't mean he was a choker.

Manning's late-game drive to send the Colts to the Super Bowl will burnish his legacy. The fact that he finally beat the Patriots, though, doesn't mean he's suddenly a better player than he was last week. It just shows that if you give a great quarterback enough chances, he's going to succeed. And Tom Brady's game-ending interception? If you give a great player enough chances, he's going to fail, too.

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## summary judgment

### Go With God

The critical buzz on Alexandra Pelosi and Calvin Trillin.

By Doree Shafrir

Thursday, January 25, 2007, at 1:18 PM ET

*Friends of God: A Road Trip With Alexandra Pelosi* (HBO, Thursday at 9 p.m.). Disgraced former Christian leader the Rev. Ted Haggard figures prominently in Pelosi's cheeky but substantive documentary about evangelicals, delighting critics with comments about sexuality that seem ironic after his sordid fall. "There is a God," smirks the *New York Times'* Alessandra Stanley, "And he punishes those who [overreach on television](#)." The *Washington Post's* Tom Shales remarks, "[T]he Christians we see in this film are unyielding in the [rightness of their ideas](#) ... and if someone challenges them, they simply say God has told them the truth." The *Baltimore Sun* enjoys the fun as well but gripes that "*Friends of God* doesn't have much to say about what those [evangelical] beliefs mean to 'the [future of America](#).'"

*About Alice*, Calvin Trillin (Random House). Trillin's ode to his late wife, who died of heart failure in 2001, has resonated with critics. The *Los Angeles Times* calls it a "[short and sweet elegy](#)," and the *New York Times Book Review* muses, "Sometimes we come across a piece of first-person writing that shocks us back into a [restorative innocence](#) vis-à-vis the human heart." Critics and audiences were already familiar with Alice Trillin from her husband's books about food and travel, as well as the *New Yorker* [memorial piece](#) from which this book is adapted. But as the *Boston Globe* points out, Trillin's book isn't so much about Alice's death as her life: "From the first page, Calvin Trillin makes it clear why we're here. We are going to spend a few hours with [somebody we miss](#)." ([Buy About Alice](#).)

**Oscar nominations.** Excitement over *Little Miss Sunshine's* best-picture nomination was overshadowed by shock that *Dreamgirls* got [shut out of the category](#)—despite receiving [eight other nods](#). The *New York Times'* David Carr speculates that the academy "decided that that there was [not enough movie in the movie](#). [I] fell for all the stitching between songs, but others did not." But even *Dreamgirls* skeptics responded with surprise. *New York's* David Edelstein writes, "I thought *Dreamgirls* was thoroughly mediocre (with one song, "We Are Family," among the most eardrum-lacerating things I've ever heard), but the [dis is stunning](#)." Others noted the nominations' unusually international scope. "That [global power](#) is perhaps best represented by *Babel*, which was filmed in four countries and told in five languages, with a screenwriter and a director from Mexico," muses the *Los Angeles Times*. (Read *Slate's* [Kim Masters](#), [Dana Stevens](#), and [Timothy Noah](#) on the Oscar nominations.)

*Winning the Night Away*, the Shins (SubPop). Critics are enthusiastic about the third full-length album from the Portland indie rockers. "[T]he band's biggest strength is an [uncanny gift](#) for conjuring a deep, vivid, and palpable sense of the familiar," muses music Web site Pitchfork. The *New York Times'* Kelefa Sannah writes, "Like the other Shins albums, this one is sneaky; it takes hold [slowly but insistently](#)." In *Entertainment Weekly*, *Slate* music critic Jody Rosen calls frontman James Mercer's lyrics "odd and engrossing: He's one of [indie rock's finest lyricists](#), even—especially—when he's not making much sense." And *Rolling Stone* concludes, "The melodies are very nearly on a par with the curlicues and knockout drops of the band's breakthrough, and Mercer is still singing so [lithe and refined](#) you'd think Ray Charles had never existed." ([Buy Winning the Night Away](#).)

*The Good, the Bad & the Queen* (Virgin). It's not surprising that the self-titled debut from this new band is garnering tons of buzz: Led by former Blur and Gorillaz frontman Damon Albarn, the band also counts Paul Simonon (the Clash), Tony Allen (Africa 70/Fela Kuti), and Simon Tong (the Verve) among its members. The *Los Angeles Times* admires the insta-supergroup: "With equal emphasis on groove and hook, and given an experimental spin by the production, they craft a [catchy form of art-rock](#), at once more casual and immediate than Blur's Britpop." Also reflecting on Albarn's past, the *Guardian* muses, "To think Albarn was once compared unfavourably to [Oasis'] Liam Gallagher. These days, that seems a bit like [comparing David Bowie to Les Gray of Mud](#)." ([Buy The Good, the Bad & the Queen](#).)

*The Castle in the Forest*, Norman Mailer (Random House). Mailer's first novel in 10 years imagines the life of a young Adolf Hitler. In an exhaustive 6,000 word essay for the *New*



*York Times Book Review*, Lee Siegel praises the work, writing that *The Castle in the Forest* is "Mailer's most perfect apprehension of the [absolutely alien](#). No wonder it is narrated by a devil. Mailer doesn't inhabit these historical figures so much as possess them." The *Boston Globe* points out that Mailer has long held a Manichean worldview and that his new book is "saturated with a very material sense of evil: The moods, textures, auras and above all the smells that announce the entrance of the [Devil into earthly affairs](#)." The *Los Angeles Times* calls Mailer the "most metaphysical of America's major novelists" but gripes that his decision to end the book in Hitler's adolescence "seems only to have [prepared the material](#), not to have fully examined it. The Hitler of infamy ... has not yet come into being." ([Buy The Castle in the Forest](#).)

**Art Buchwald.** The humor columnist died Wednesday at the age of 81 and managed to be as memorable in death as he was in life—thanks to a *New York Times* [video obituary](#) in which he proclaims, "Hi, I'm Art Buchwald and I just died." He also published a [final column](#), written last February with the instructions that it should not be released until his death. The *Washington Post* memorializes him, writing that "[H]e brought to daily commentary a touch of wit, a [gentle kind of humor](#) and a brave willingness to launch himself occasionally into flights of utter absurdity that produced some of his best moments." And the *Baltimore Sun* recalls that Dean Acheson once referred to Buchwald as "the [greatest satirist](#) in English since Pope and Swift." (NPR has [sound clips](#) of Buchwald on *All Things Considered*, as well as a final interview with him last June.)

**Sundance Film Festival.** The Park City, Utah, festival opened more somberly than usual, due to the premiere of Adrienne Shelley's film *Waitress*; Shelley was murdered in Greenwich Village in November. The *New York Times*' David Carr remarks, "Even for someone who did not know Ms. Shelly, watching the movie might prove to be a [bittersweet experience](#)." Observers are also [wondering](#) what this year's *Little Miss Sunshine*—which was bought for \$10 million at last year's Sundance and has grossed over \$60 million so far—will be, though the *Los Angeles Times*' Kenneth Turan warns: "Unlike other festivals, where the heavyweights are more or less predictable, this event is so focused on unseen films by unfamiliar directors that the identities of the successes and failures simply [aren't knowable in advance](#)."

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## technology

### The Verdict on Vista

Is the new Windows any good?

By Paul Boutin

Monday, January 22, 2007, at 3:56 PM ET

The wait is almost over for [Windows Vista](#). Microsoft wants us to believe that when its new operating system finally debuts on Jan. 30—a date that's been five years in the making—our world will be turned upside down. Redmond's marketers have dubbed Vista's release as a "wow moment—that instant when you recognize that your life has changed." That's according to [a letter from Bill Gates](#) himself.

Tech reviewers couldn't agree less. "[Worthy, largely unexciting](#)," yawned Walt Mossberg in his pacesetting *Wall Street Journal* review. Mossberg makes the "pleasant," "efficient" Vista sound less like a "wow moment" than a passable bore—the Canada of operating systems.

I think Gates and Mossberg are both wrong. Operating systems shouldn't be exciting. Like a good government, a good OS should mostly get out of the way. It needs to stay up and running, prevent invasions from intruders, and avoid ugly surprises. When judged by those criteria, Vista is up to the task. Also, Mossberg should remember this: In 2005, when Apple's OS X debuted many of the features that he now considers boring, he [gushed](#) about how innovative they were. Now that this futuristic stuff is available to the PC masses, it's uninteresting—to a reviewer. But who really cares about the horse race? Isn't who came first less important than which product is better today?

So, should you buy this worthy, largely unexciting, Mac-plagiarizing operating system? The good thing is that you don't have to get your answer from me, Walt Mossberg, or any tech columnist. Download and run the [Windows Vista Upgrade Advisor](#), a handy program that will take you between one and five minutes to install and run. You'll get a tidy report that shows which (if any) of the [four editions](#) of Vista—Basic, Premium, Business, and Ultimate—your PC can run, and which (if any) of your hardware devices don't have Vista-ready software yet. If you've got an 800 MHz processor and 512 megabytes of RAM, your machine is Vista-capable. A 1.5 GHz CPU will do a lot better.

If you don't have enough RAM, you can plug in a \$20 USB flash drive and Vista will use that for extra memory. Clever! But if your computer lacks a buff graphics card and can't handle a new one—my 2006 Dell lacks the wattage for a new card—you'll have to run Vista Basic, which lacks the Premium edition's sexy desktop graphics. Premium also adds [Windows Media Center](#) software that lets you watch TV on your PC. The Business and Ultimate editions add remote access, file backup, and anti-theft tools most home users won't care to use. (Pricing is complicated. It runs from \$100 for a DVD that will only upgrade one PC already running XP to Vista Basic to \$400 for a complete copy of Vista Ultimate. You can buy extra licenses for less.) If your PC is two years old or older, it'll most likely only run Basic. That's one reason Microsoft expects that [only 5 percent of users](#)

will upgrade their existing PCs. Most will get Vista when they buy their next machine.

Microsoft's [Vista site](#) lists dozens of pages of features and benefits to make it seem like it's a no-brainer to buy a new Vista-ready PC. The tech-support team I share office space with dismissed one after the other as freely available XP add-ons. Internet Explorer 7? "Got it." Little thumbnails of your application windows? "See [XP PowerToys](#)." Desktop search tool? "You [reviewed it](#) in 2004." Still, after two weeks slogging through Microsoft's checklist, I found plenty of reasons to go Vista. If these six items sound appealing, you should strongly consider an upgrade.

**Desktop Improvements.** Everything from the Start menu onward is more organized and easier to use. Instead of sprouting multilevel menus like ivy all over your screen, the Start button keeps its program menus and search results in a single window, as shown in [this screen shot](#). Another long-overdue improvement is that you can place live, Mac-style "gadgets" on the desktop: a calendar, a news ticker, and dashboard gauges that show CPU and memory use.

The Premium edition's [Aero](#) interface (also in the Business and Ultimate packages) goes even further. Aero uses your PC's graphics card, which is designed for the hard-core visual processing required by video games, to deliver an eye-popping desktop makeover. What were once boxy menus and window borders now have glasslike, semitransparent edges. (A tip to the horse-race followers: [The new iPhone prototype](#) has transparent menus, too.) The transparencies make it easy to read through windows to see what's behind them, and makes the operating system vanish into the background so you can focus your eyes on pictures, movies, or editing. To get an idea of what I'm talking about, check out [this sexy red-themed screen shot](#).

One of my favorite Aero touches is the Flip feature, which lets you see all your windows at once ([see this screen shot](#)). I also love the pop-up thumbnails of task-bar items, [shown here](#), that are easier and faster to distinguish than tiny text labels. Vista will even let you flip through your windows as a [3-D card deck](#). I think this is silly, but my poker-playing friends took to it instantly.

On my slower PC, which is running Vista Basic, many windows still hesitate when redrawing and leave ghost images behind when I drag them around the screen. These are classic Windows annoyances that Vista Premium's Aero interface has finally done away with, even on laptops. For years, laptop buyers have paid extra for ATI and NVIDIA graphics processors that only come into play during video games. Now, Vista puts these pricey chips to work to draw everything on the screen better and faster. But remember the bad news here: It's likely that you'll need to buy a new PC to take advantage of Aero's graphics-intensive user

interface. (Run the [Windows Vista Upgrade Advisor](#) to make sure.)

**SuperFetch.** Vista figures out what applications you use at which time of day or day of the week. It then schedules the ones you're most likely to use and preloads them into the PC's memory. Your e-mail and calendar will be ready to go on Monday morning, and your anti-virus software won't be in the middle of a full scrub when you come back from lunch. It doesn't always guess correctly. Still, I spend less time listening to my disk drive whenever I sit down to work.

**Stability and Security.** For once, I believe Microsoft's promises. Insiders say the Windows division got religion about squashing bugs and writing hacker-proof software during the latter days of XP's development. Division president [Jim Allchin](#) came back from a sabbatical enraged by Windows bugs that had spoiled his vacation. "I saw what a flaky mess this thing is," he [confessed](#) to *LinuxWorld* columnist Doc Searls. Allchin's bug stomp-a-thon contributed to Vista's five years of production delays. Good for him. Solidly written software is harder to crack, too. I won't get phone calls from worried relatives about the Vista [virus of the week](#) like I did for XP.

**Previous Versions of Files.** If you accidentally mis-edit or overwrite a document, you can right-click the file to bring up a "[Previous versions](#)" menu. Computers have had this capability for years—it's called journaling—but it's a big step forward to place the old versions in a pop-up menu so nontechie users can easily discover them. It sounds boring, but wait'll it saves your bacon when you're on a deadline.

**Presentation Mode.** If projecting PowerPoint slides from your laptop is a make-or-break part of your job, you'll love this: You can finally tell your OS not to bother you with IM popups, beepy noises, or the screensaver.

**Upgrade Process.** I upgraded computers hundreds of times in my past life as a support guy and software developer. The XP-to-Vista move was my smoothest Windows transition ever. The installer gave me a tidy, clickable report of three device drivers it couldn't guarantee would still work in Vista. Two were for old programs I'd stopped using long ago, the other for the software I used to connect to my BlackBerry.

Most of my XP-era applications work fine in Vista, but iTunes—a mission-critical app for me—has hung a couple of times when I quit the program. And if my DSL goes out this week, I won't be able to plug in the BlackBerry to get online. I'm hopeful, though, that driver updates will appear soon after Jan. 30 to fix both problems.

That leads to my final advice: You've waited five years for Vista. That means you can probably wait a bit longer. No

software is bug proof, and every new OS gets patched a few times in its first weeks of public life, after the masses start using it and the black hats start cracking it. I'm enjoying the new features I've listed, but you won't die without them. If \$100 for the Basic upgrade disc or \$150 for Premium breaks your budget, save your cash until it's time to buy a new PC, even if that's not until 2008. Unlike past major Windows revisions, you won't find yourself barred from interacting with those who upgrade—you'll just envy them a little.

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## television

### The Perkinness Never Stops

Does the world need four hours of the *Today* show?

By Troy Patterson

Monday, January 22, 2007, at 6:42 PM ET

NBC announced last week that, starting this fall, its cash cow *Today* (weekdays at 7 a.m. ET) would be getting milked for an extra 60 minutes daily, bringing the length of each broadcast to an epic four hours. While this was a cause for joy for partisans of TV's longest-running morning show, there was a smaller, weirder group who greeted the news with muttered curses. *Today's* land grab spelled the death of the soap opera *Passions* (weekdays at 2 p.m. ET). As *Variety* put it, "Cancellation of the skein points to the increasingly harsh economic climate for sudsters."

The suds of *Passions* were, originally, odd ones—bubbles glistening with Gothic camp. The soap debuted in 1999 and shortly emerged as a cult hit with dramatis personae including witches, warlocks, and a living doll named Timmy who, according to soapcentral.com, "died after being attacked by Zombie Charity." But the strangeness waned, and last week *Passions* was looking much like every other daytime soap, just with a bit less gravity and refinement.

On Friday, Simone asked for a slight clarification from Kay: "So, when you say you were *with* Miguel, you mean you *slept* with Miguel? On the same night that you married Fox?" To which Kay, wounded, gave a shrug that looked like a flinch, as if trying to force together her well-tended eyebrows. Cut to Fox, who, drinking alone in front of a mirror, shared some exposition with his reflection: "Thank God Dad was able to get Mom out of here. I couldn't take another minute of her histrionics. Let's hope she keeps her mouth shut about my phony terminal illness." And so on. What *Passions* had going for it, as a business property, was its youthful audience; the network has touted its huge ratings among "women 18 to 34" and "women 18 to 24" and, appallingly, "women 12 to 17." (To know the age of the target audience is to understand, sort of, why all the men on *Passions* look like they're 28 and all the women dress like they're 15.)

But women 18 to 34 increasingly don't have time for this stuff—at least that's the idea you get while watching *Today* between 9 and 10 a.m. (The show's third hour, an innovation dating from October of 2000, will be the model for its fourth.) This is not the salon of Matt Lauer and Meredith Vieira, with its intrusions of politics and war, but rather a romper room for the ceaselessly jovial weatherman Al Roker, the peerlessly blow-dried correspondent Natalie Morales, and Ann Curry, who shucks off the newsreader's role she inhabits earlier in the show to help prepare easy meals.

Last Friday, Ann stirred away at a healthful Moroccan-style chicken stew presented by an editor from *Good Housekeeping*. That was after Al had hosted a segment, titled "Married to a Workaholic," that involved eliciting tips on balancing work and family from an editor at *Men's Health*. On the same episode, Natalie presided over a winter-weather children's fashion show with an editor from *Cookie*. We were advised on how to protect the kids from hypothermia without turning them into little orbs of wool and goose down. We were told that one young male model "ate seven donuts in the green room," which maybe accounted for his vaguely murderous gaze and sluggish motions. We came to understand that *Today* has grown into an empire by merging the approaches of a shelf's worth of lifestyle magazines into one cozy promise: Despite the odds, the postmodern homemaker can have it all. How can the phony terminal illnesses of *Passions* compete with a fantasy like that?

And what if the fourth hour of *Today* is a success? Will there be a fifth hour? A ninth? How about a 24-hour news channel? Call it *Today Forever*, a network devoted to helping women across all demographics soothe their harried souls.

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## the big idea

### He's Back!

A late-stage return for "the Uniter."

By Jacob Weisberg

Wednesday, January 24, 2007, at 11:15 AM ET

For the last six years, George W. Bush has treated Congress the way he treats the United Nations, the press, and most of his own Cabinet secretaries—as an unavoidable (and entirely useless) irritant. Despite running for president in 2000 on the strength of his ability to forge compromise with the Democratic-controlled legislature in Texas when he was governor, he has for the better part of six years treated the people's representatives with barely veiled contempt. Once established in the White House, Bush "the Uniter" quickly became Bush "the Decider." In the Bush Constitution, as opposed to the U.S. Constitution, the executive "leads" and the judiciary "defers." The legislature's role is to swiftly grant the president what he demands.

Before last night, this imperious attitude resounded through all Bush's speeches to Congress. His previous State of the Union addresses each represented attempts—more successful than not in the first term, more unsuccessful than not in the second—to impose his will on Washington and the world. The administration's attitude toward congressional challenge was perhaps best summed up by Dick Cheney's famous suggestion to Pat Leahy of Vermont on the Senate floor: "Fuck yourself."

It would be foolhardy to think that Bush's true feelings have changed. Until the day he leaves office, he will continue to regard members of Congress as meddling Lilliputians trying to tie him down. But the reality is that they have tied him down. Faced with an assertive and so far remarkably effective Democratic Congress—and with no supportive public to turn to—Bush has to suppress his arrogant and bullying style as best he can. He is in no position any longer to dictate terms.

This grudging recognition of reality is the key to [last night's speech](#). It explains the overall limpness; the elaborate courtesies offered to Speaker Nancy Pelosi; the misty, conciliatory tone ("We can work through our differences and achieve big things. ... Our citizens don't much care which side of the aisle we sit on—as long as we are willing to cross that aisle"); the lack of Bush's familiar taunting and demagoguery; the offer to include members of Congress in a "special advisory council" to help him figure out this whole terrorism thing; and even Bush's almost [plaintive request](#) to give his new Iraq strategy a chance to work.

It also explains the lack of tax cuts or new conservative domestic-policy proposals, and the series of curiously moderate-sounding ideas Bush put forward last night. The most interesting of these was his leaked-in-advance [health-care plan](#). Bush proposed that the most-expensive employer-provided health-care plans become taxable over the threshold of \$7,500 for individuals and \$15,000 for families. In part with the money raised by this tax increase—and that is precisely what it is—Bush would extend deductibility of health insurance to families and individuals who buy it on their own, up to the same amounts. He also offered federal aid (of some costless sort) to states attempting to provide universal coverage, an encouraging fad among Republican as well as Democratic governors.

While this plan falls far short of universal coverage, it is a plausible and progressive step. Capping the deductibility of insurance would help to control health-care costs, because the existing unbounded tax subsidy encourages people to buy more treatment than they really need. Extending this benefit to individuals who don't get coverage at work will help the uninsured afford insurance, especially if the tax deduction evolves into a tax credit. Were the source different, Democrats might well embrace such a proposal instead of excoriating it.

The same is true of Bush's energy proposal, which included for the first time an explicit target for reductions in gas consumption

(20 percent in 10 years), plus a push toward alternative fuels, and what is his first-ever endorsement of fuel-economy standards for cars. On immigration, too, Bush gave Democrats cover, and angered Republicans with his support for a robust "guest worker" system and his call to steer a middle path between "animosity" and "amnesty."

Bush's new tone comes easily to him because it is one he has used before—in the 2000 campaign, and in the early months of his presidency, when he struck a deal with Ted Kennedy and the Democrats on his No Child Left Behind education bill. He also finds a model for his new stance in a man he despises—Bill Clinton, in the final, post-impeachment phase of his presidency. Bush hopes to emulate the way Clinton avoided becoming a lame duck after many wrote him off by thinking smaller, coming up with creative solutions, and working with his congressional opponents.

But Bush's situation is nothing like Clinton's. The embarrassment he faces is similarly of his own making, but it is not the sort of that can be compartmentalized away. Bush lacks Clinton's patience, policy acumen, and ability to cast a temporary spell over his political enemies. Even if Bush can sustain his new tone into next week, Democrats are not inclined to respond in kind. In his [official response](#), Sen. James Webb of Virginia said that if Bush won't follow, Democrats can govern without him because they represent the people's will.

But if only because he is stubborn and wields a veto pen, Bush remains central to the question of what Congress can accomplish over the next two years. Democrats, no less than Republicans, now face the quandary of how to deal with [the problem of a ruined president](#). Should they work with Bush in pursuit of legislative accomplishments for which he would share the credit? Or hold out for his utter subjugation and defeat?

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## the book club *American Islam*

Is it possible to fight a "cosmic war" successfully?

By Reza Aslan and Daniel Benjamin

Wednesday, January 24, 2007, at 4:35 PM ET

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**From:** Daniel Benjamin

**To:** Reza Aslan

**Subject:** Will Islamic Radicalism Gain a Foothold in America?

**Posted Tuesday, January 23, 2007, at 10:35 AM ET**

Reza—



One of the striking things about mainstream journalism in post-9/11 America has been the scant attention paid to the nation's Muslim community. There were, of course, plenty of stories on the many immigrants taken into detention after the terrorist attacks and on the questioning of large numbers of Muslims by law enforcement officials. But compared with the enormous amount of copy that newspapers devoted to the pedicab driver scandals, the coverage of American Muslims has been seriously inadequate. Given the size and importance of the community—it's no understatement to say that it is the first line of defense against jihadist attack—the lack of reporting has been a dramatic failing of the American media.

There were a few exceptions, and one was a series of Page One stories that Paul M. Barrett wrote for the *Wall Street Journal* in 2003. Those articles provided the basis for *American Islam: The Struggle for the Soul of a Religion*, a book that fills a real need and does so remarkably well. (Full disclosure: Paul Barrett is an old friend and former colleague.) *American Islam* does not give us the entire picture of what is going on among believers of the nation's fastest-growing religion. Nothing could. But through a group of seven profiles, it delivers a set of powerful insights about Muslim life in the United States and the tensions that are shaping the community—or, more accurately, communities, since there is a fractious diversity of Muslims in the United States.

As you might imagine, *American Islam* is a study of people caught in the crosscurrents. Some are trying to navigate between the roles of dexterous insider and outraged outsider. Others are trying to push their fellow Muslims to adopt changes that are at odds with hundreds of years of tradition. Others still are re-litigating ancient struggles—such as between mysticism and orthodoxy—in a New World setting. Several are trying to champion a tolerant, ecumenical version of Islam against one that seems increasingly insular and xenophobic.

In that sense, the book poses the question that really is the central one not only for Muslims but all Americans: Is radicalism going to gain a real foothold here?

Barrett's carefully crafted approach is a smart one because of the paucity of sociological data on Islam in the United States. We don't even know how many Muslims there are in the country; the Census Bureau doesn't ask about religious affiliation. Estimates by Muslim groups put the number at 6 million or higher, but these are truly rough guesses; as Barrett notes, the best guess is between 3 and 6 million. The number of mosques is also a matter of dispute, as is the degree of religious observance within communities. Trying to get a sense of the relative strength of different strains of thought among American Muslims is maddeningly difficult.

So, instead of giving us unsubstantiated generalizations, Barrett looks closely at the micro-environments of his seven subjects.

Among them are a colorful newspaper publisher of Lebanese Shiite origins who is a power broker in Michigan's large and politically influential Muslim community, and noted Kuwaiti-born scholar Khaled Abou el Fadl, who challenged fellow Muslims to speak out against the attacks of 9/11, becoming something of a pariah. A chapter on Siraj Wahhaj, a radical-leaning imam in Brooklyn, traces the complicated story of African-American Islam, whose adherents compose a fifth of the country's Muslim population but who have tense relations with Muslims of foreign ancestry, as well as attachments to figures such as Malcolm X and Louis Farrakhan that are shared by no other Muslims.

In telling these stories, Barrett exercises great restraint, avoiding the temptation to generalize on the basis of individual experiences. The book—which I thought was a great read—does not overinterpret, letting the reader instead, for example, hear the unadorned story of Abdul Kabir Krambo, an American-born hippie-turned-Sufi whose faith gave him an anchor in life but not quite enough equanimity to deal with the foreign-born Muslims (he was "the token white guy" on the board of his mosque) who don't always approve of his native ways. Krambo's mosque was destroyed by arson in 1994. The mystery of whether the attack was carried out by non-Muslim Americans or anti-Sufi Muslims provides a perfect example of the complex tensions that plague Barrett's characters.

Among scholars of terrorism these days, the accepted wisdom is that a major reason no second catastrophic attack on the United States has occurred is that the foot soldiers of jihad are not here—at least not in great numbers. Many Muslims in this country may be angry about U.S. foreign policy, but they are not alienated from American society or values. They are also more educated than the national norm, earn more than the norm, and are not ghettoized, as the Muslims of Europe are. ("American Muslims have bought into the American dream," my friend Marc Sageman, the author of *Understanding Terror Networks*, likes to say. "What is the European dream?")

But will it stay that way? One of the most moving chapters hints that it will. "The Activist" describes the trajectory of Mustafa Saied, an Indian-born Muslim who gravitates to the Muslim Brotherhood while in college and spends his time at rallies where the chant was "Idhbaahal Yahood" ("Slaughter the Jews"). He later renounces his extremism after intense conversation with other Muslims, one of whom persuades him that "the basic foundations of American values are very Islamic—freedom of religion, freedom of speech, toleration."

However, that there are some extremists afoot is clear from a chapter on Sami Omar al-Hussayen, the Saudi graduate student at the University of Idaho who was unsuccessfully prosecuted under the Patriot Act for giving material support to terrorists through his role as a Web master for a legal student group. The members of al-Hussayen's Islamic Assembly of North America

are, at the very least, addicted to some deeply anti-American rhetoric, such as the writings of the "Awakening Sheikhs" of Saudi Arabia, Safar al-Hawali and Salman bin Fahd al-Awda.

I'm persuaded that America's culture of immigration has made a huge difference in shaping the attitudes of Muslims here. But other elements in the culture—rising Islamophobia, especially from the Christian right, and ham-handed law enforcement efforts, of the kind Barrett explores in his chapter on al-Hussayen—appear to be eroding some Muslims' sense of belonging. And, of course, there is our presence in Iraq, which appalls most American Muslims, including the Iraqi expats who once supported the invasion. Which way do you think the wind is blowing?

I'd also like your thoughts on one of the central themes of the book—that Islam, or at least one stream of it, is being remade by its encounter with America. This notion appears in several of Barrett's chapters, including the one on Asra Nomani, the former *Journal* reporter, single mother, and author of *Standing Alone in Mecca*, who confronted her hometown mosque in West Virginia with a determined campaign for equal treatment for women. In your superb book *No god but God*, you discuss the "Islamic Reformation" and mention, for example, European thinker Tariq Ramadan's contention that the synthesis of Islam and Western democratic ideals is driving the faith in that direction. Does Barrett's reportage suggest something similar is happening in the United States?

In any case, the changes that Barrett describes are encouraging. But as I think he would agree, it is impossible to say whether the stories he relates are indicative or isolated. What's your take?

Bests,  
Dan

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**From:** Reza Aslan  
**To:** Daniel Benjamin  
**Subject:** Assimilation and the Creation of a Uniquely American Faith  
**Posted Tuesday, January 23, 2007, at 2:05 PM ET**

Dan,

As I was reading *American Islam*, I was reminded of an incident that occurred last November in Washington, D.C., and got a lot of play in the American Muslim community. Jerry Klein, a popular radio host at WMAL-AM 630, suggested during one of his shows that Muslims in the United States should be forced to wear "identifying markers," specifically "a crescent moon arm band, or ... a crescent moon tattoo." As one would expect, his

phone lines were immediately jammed with listeners. Only they were not calling to excoriate Klein, but to agree wholeheartedly with him. One caller argued that American Muslims should not only be tattooed "in the middle of their foreheads," but that they should then be "rounded up and shipped out of the country." A Maryland caller concurred. "You have to set up encampments like they did during World War II," he said, "like with the Japanese and Germans."

Of course, what the callers did not realize was that Klein was joking. To his credit, he was horrified by his listeners' reactions, and said so on air. But perhaps Klein should not have been so surprised. According to recent polls, 39 percent of Americans want Muslims living in the United States to carry "special identification," and nearly half think their civil liberties should be curtailed in the name of national security. Roughly a third of those polled are convinced that the sympathies of America's Muslim community lies with al-Qaida, while a full 60 percent say they do not know any Muslims.

As a Muslim, I am obviously disturbed by these figures. But what I find particularly remarkable about these polls is that if the person being polled *actually knows a Muslim*, they are less likely to have negative perceptions of Islam. (By the way, I think that Barrett's estimate of how many Muslims currently live in America is low; more realistic, I suspect, are estimates of 6 million to 10 million.) It follows, then, that the best way to educate Americans about Islam is to introduce them to living, breathing American Muslims. That is precisely what makes Barrett's book such an engaging and important read. To my mind, this intimate group portrait of American Muslims is far more revealing than any of the half-dozen or so academic tomes that have been written on the subject over the last few years.

You are right to point out that the American Muslim community has, for the most part, managed to avoid many of the problems of identity and integration that plague Muslim communities in Europe. Barrett, like many social scientists, argues that this is partly due to economic factors. After all, the majority of European Muslims come from impoverished immigrant families, while the majority of Muslims in the United States are either middle-class converts or educated immigrants. Sixty percent of Muslims in the United States own their own homes. Believe it or not, the median income for a Muslim household in America is greater than it is for a non-Muslim household.

But as I read the individual profiles in *American Islam*, it became clear to me that it is more than mere economic factors that have allowed Muslims to so thoroughly assimilate into American society. (Maybe it is this assimilation that explains why so many Americans think they have never met a Muslim. Perhaps they assume all Muslims look and dress like Osama Bin Laden.)

Although Barrett does not press the point, I truly believe the ease with which Muslims have assimilated into American culture has less to do with economics than it does with America's long and storied history of assimilating different cultures and ethnicities under a single shared political and cultural ideal—an ideal we can label simply as *Americanism*. The Muslims who settled in Europe formed insulated ethnic enclaves cut off from the rest of European society. But American Muslims have seamlessly integrated into almost every level of American society. Indeed, they represent the most powerful argument against the prevailing "Clash of Civilizations" mentality that pits Islam against the West.

Finally, as a Muslim who lives in the United States and who has spent a great deal of time among Muslims in Europe, I can tell you that, more than anything else, it is the core American belief that faith has a role to play in the public realm that has allowed American Muslims to so seamlessly reconcile their faiths, cultures, and traditions with the realities of American life. Say what you will, this is not, nor has it ever been, a "secular" country. It is, in fact, the most religiously diverse and religiously tolerant nation in the world. In no other country—and certainly no Islamic country—can Muslims pursue their faith and practice in whatever way they see fit than in the United States. It is, in short, America itself that has made American Muslims so much more resistant to the pull of jihadism than their European counterparts.

This brings me to your excellent question regarding one of the central themes of Barrett's book. Is the Muslim encounter with the United States creating a new, American brand of Islam, much the way this country gave rise to new forms of Judaism and Catholicism? The short answer is yes. Just look at the Zaytuna Institute in Hayward, Calif., established by Sheikh Hamza Yusuf, an American convert and one of the world's most respected authorities on Islamic law. Tired of Muslims in the United States being forced to import their imams from countries like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia—countries whose values and traditions are far removed from ours—Sheikh Hamza has created America's first Muslim seminary, to train American imams who can relate to the unique cultural and religious needs of American Muslims. But that's just part of the story. America also gives Muslims the freedom to explore issues like Islamic feminism (as demonstrated in Barrett's wonderful profile of my friend Asra Nomani, a journalist and author), Islamic pluralism, Islamic democracy, and even Islamic homosexuality, all of which has allowed Islam in America to flower into an independent and uniquely American faith.

The real question, which you touch upon, is how the U.S. government, whose image in the Muslim world is at an all-time low, can tap into the American Muslim community and take advantage of what you rightly note may be America's greatest weapon against jihadism. I mean, if what you say is true—if the American Muslim community is the "first line of defense against

jihadist attack" —then why have they seemingly been sidelined by the US government in this "great ideological battle for civilization"?

Reza

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**From:** Daniel Benjamin  
**To:** Reza Aslan  
**Subject:** Is Osama Bin Laden the Martin Luther of Islam?  
**Updated Wednesday, January 24, 2007, at 11:49 AM ET**

Reza—

I agree with you: America's openness to foreigners and the high respect the society accords to hardworking immigrants has made Muslim integration a success story here. Look across the ocean at Europe, and we have reason to be pleased. We shouldn't be complacent, though; there is plenty of room for things to go wrong.

The story you tell about the Jerry Klein incident points to one of the biggest dangers to the sense of security of the Muslim community, and there's no question that there are other signs of anti-Islamic sentiment out there. Paul Barrett discusses some of these in his last chapter—for example, the remarks of Gen. Jerry Boykin, who told a church group that he was sure America would prevail in the struggle against Bin Laden because "my God was bigger than his." The greatest source of this animus comes from conservative evangelical Christians who have a Manichean worldview and have filled the hole left by the demise of the Soviet Union with Islam. The remarks of Franklin Graham (Islam is "wicked"), former Watergate conspirator Chuck Colson (Islam "breeds hatred"), and Jerry Vines, former head of the Southern Baptist Convention (Mohammed was "a demon-obsessed pedophile") are only the most prominent examples. Read some of the sermons and articles on church Web sites if you want more.

Needless to say, this hasn't helped Muslims feel at home, nor have the kind of poll results you cite, such as the 2004 one that showed half of respondents thought Muslims' civil rights should be curtailed. I've heard a number of Muslims say that their biggest worry is that there will be another attack and precisely that abrogation of their rights will occur. That provides some motivation for community self-policing, but instilling fear is not a sustainable counterterrorism strategy.

One of the oddities of the situation is that this is happening, as you rightly point out, against a backdrop of Muslim appreciation for the fact that religion can play a role in public life. But with

polls showing that Americans want religion to play a larger role in their politics, we face the irony that Muslims are being unsettled by the determination of other Americans that *their* faith inform policy. At least during the current administration, the influence of evangelicals, a good portion of whom favored the invasion of Iraq as part of a fight against evil, has been at an unprecedented peak. We shouldn't kid ourselves: American foreign policy over the last five years has alienated more than a few Muslims, as academic observers and journalists, Barrett included, have noted.

Perhaps as American Muslims become politically organized and vocal, they will develop the kind of aversion to mixing politics and religion expressed by most American Jews. I agree, though, that secularism—which carries an implication that people should compartmentalize and even abandon their faith—isn't the answer. One of the problems Western Europe is having in dealing with its Muslim minorities is that secularism causes plenty of friction and antipathy; think of the controversy over Muslim women who wear the veil.

As for your question about why the U.S. government can't take greater advantage of the American Muslim community in the "struggle for hearts and minds," well, the problem cuts many ways. At first, Washington did try—ineptly. Charlotte Beers, the hapless Madison Avenue exec who was the first undersecretary of state for public diplomacy, put together a series of video spots showing how great life was for Muslims in the United States. Some countries refused to run them because the women were, by their standards, immodestly dressed. Others, showing Muslim women in robes and veils, were denounced by Muslim liberals as showing the subjugation of women. And in many countries, the response was: "We're thrilled these people like living in Dearborn. Now please get the Israelis out of the West Bank and Gaza."

Muslims abroad tend to be less interested in how their co-religionists live in the United States—what matters is American foreign policy. So, while the development of the American Islam that you describe may have a long-term effect on the broader faith, it probably will not undercut the appeal of jihadism abroad. What I meant when I wrote that American Muslims are "the first line of defense" was that they will prevent jihadist ideology from gaining much of a foothold here and keep an eye out for anyone who might be involved in violence, which would ultimately threaten the community.

I think that continues to be the case, although the patriotic ardor that some American Muslims expressed after 9/11 appears to have subsided pretty quickly as Afghanistan segued into Iraq, and the Bush administration declined to push any kind of negotiation process between Israel and the Palestinians. The government certainly didn't help itself by detaining hundreds under the material witness and prosecuting a series of dubious

cases, like the al-Hussayen one in Idaho. (The actual number of terrorism convictions in the United States is paltry.)

Meanwhile, the FBI and other government agencies have done a poor job of bringing enough Muslims on board because they can't or won't get them the necessary security clearances. Barrett's story about Imad Hamad, a Michigan social worker of Palestinian ancestry who was nearly—and unfairly—almost deported in the 1990s, tells of another kind of bungled opportunity to strengthen ties to the Muslim community. In 2003, Hamad was slated to receive a special award from the FBI for encouraging Muslims to cooperate with the bureau after 9/11. It was rescinded when a right-wing Jewish organization aired 20-year-old allegations of connections with a radical group.

Hamad took this slight with remarkable grace. Others might have reacted differently.

Now, before signing off, I want to come back to the issue of an Islamic reformation, one with which you've become identified. You noted approvingly that there is now something we could call American Islam, emphasizing what we might call its liberalizing tendency. What I wonder about is whether this will ultimately be the germ of the expected reformation. We don't have too many models for reformations to choose from, but the Protestant Reformation began as a movement of purification, not liberalization. That came much later.

I've often wondered if Bin Laden and his followers, with their grim determination to eliminate all "innovation" in the faith, aren't akin to some of the wild Protestants of the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. With their Salafī emphasis on the direct experience of scripture and the believer's ability to understand the text, they remind me of Luther's notion of "every man a priest." One could even ask whether Bin Laden himself isn't something of a Martin Luther figure, though the head of al-Qaida has none of Luther's skill at theology.

(I once remarked this to a well-known Saudi prince, who instantly replied, "No, he is our Savonarola." That remark floored me and suggested my interlocutor had been thinking about the subject.)

The Protestant Reformation took almost 150 years and, particularly during the Thirty Years' War, claimed an enormous number of lives. I'd like to believe that in our fast-moving age we can skip ahead to the liberalizing phase of a reformation in Islam. But religions don't change easily or quickly, and sometimes they have to take the longest route between two points. Can you give me reason for optimism?

Bests,  
Dan



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**From:** Reza Aslan  
**To:** Daniel Benjamin  
**Subject:** Optimism in the Face of a "Cosmic War"  
**Posted Wednesday, January 24, 2007, at 4:35 PM ET**

Dan,

I'm glad you brought up the devastating effects that the Manichaean rhetoric pouring from the mouths of our political, military, and religious leaders have had on the execution of the so-called war on terror. (My favorite example of this is Republican Rep. Tom Tancredo's suggestion that the United States should respond to the next terrorist attack on its soil by bombing Mecca and Medina. What a great idea!) I suppose you can't blame our leaders for appealing to Americans' innate sense of moral righteousness. But by equating the struggle against jihadism (by which I am referring to the anti-nationalist ideology of violent Islamic puritanism of which al-Qaida is the best, though by no means only, example) with "a crusade" against "evil-doers," and by referring to the global fight against international terrorism as a battle between "good and evil," we have adopted the rhetoric of jihadism and thus allowed our enemies to frame both the scope and meaning of the war against terrorism.

The jihadists are fighting a war that they know cannot be won in any real or measurable terms. That's why they have reframed their earthly struggle for religious and political control of the Muslim world as a "cosmic war," a term developed by my friend and mentor Mark Juergensmeyer. They want Muslims to believe that the world is locked in a heavenly contest between the forces of good (themselves) and evil (us). The enemy for them is not America; it is Satan. And the battle is a contest not between armies but between angelic and demonic forces. The advantages of a cosmic war are self-evident. It turns murderers into holy soldiers. It provides some hope of victory over one's foes (though victory in the heavenly realm, not on earth). It turns the battle into an absolute struggle not over land or property but over *identity*, meaning there can be no room for compromise, settlement, or negotiation. It also assures that the hostilities will never end, at least not until "evil" is once and for all vanquished from the universe, which by my estimation will happen ... *never*.

Of course, rather than debunk this twisted ideology and strip the war on terror of its religious connotations, we have legitimated it through our own religiously charged rhetoric (I can't be the only person in America who is dumbfounded by how much President Bush and Osama Bin Laden sometimes sound alike). "This is indeed a cosmic war between the forces of good and evil," we seem to be saying. "Only we're good, and you're evil!" That is an

argument we can never hope to win, no matter how many Gen. Boykins believe it to be true. You said it best in your excellent analysis of why we are losing the war on terror, *The Next Attack*. American foreign policy since 9/11, and especially the war in Iraq, has unquestionably cleared the way for the next attack on the United States. But in a war of ideology like this, words can be just as important as any action. And thus far, our words have only served to strengthen our enemies by appearing to validate their vision of the world.

Which brings me back to the question of why American Muslims haven't gotten more involved in the "war on terror" (a question I get asked two or three times a week). During the past few years, I have met with numerous Muslim organizations in the United States—from the American Society for Muslim Advancement, to the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the Arab American Institute, and the Muslim Public Affairs Council. I've also spoken to countless Muslim leaders, activists, and imams, including many of the people profiled in Barrett's marvelous book. I can tell you with total confidence that the majority of these American Muslims are desperate for the U.S. government to reach out to them for aid. In fact, they would like nothing more than to help combat the spread of jihadism throughout the world.

Muslim Americans know that they are even more threatened by the rise of jihadism than any of their non-Muslim compatriots. Jihadism is, after all, a *puritanical* ideology. Its primary purpose, as you note, is to strip Islam of its perceived "innovations," so as to return the religion to some kind of purified, unadulterated, and totally imaginary past. Let's not forget that the jihadists consider themselves the only true Muslims; all other Muslims are apostates who must be converted to their militant brand of puritanism or killed. That's why, despite common perception in Europe and the United States, jihadism's primary target is not the West, or Christians, or Jews ("the far enemy," in jihadist terminology), but rather those Muslims who do not accept its worldview ("the near enemy") and who, by the way, make up the overwhelming majority of its victims. In this sense, you are absolutely correct to think of jihadism as a product of a "reformation" taking place within Islam—a reformation in which Bin Laden, with his radically individualistic and militantly anti-institutional faith, comes across very much like the "radical reformers" of the Christian Reformation. (I like to think of Bin Laden not so much as a Martin Luther or Savonarola figure, but rather as Islam's Thomas Muentzer.)

What I mean to say is that for American Muslims, as with most other Americans, defeating jihadism is a matter of existential self-preservation. It's for this reason that they are so eager to play an active role in counteracting the influence of bigotry and extremism in their faith. Yet, thus far, there has been little attempt by this administration to seriously harness the creative energies of the American Muslim community. (In the interest of full disclosure, I should say I have spoken about this issue to

members of Congress, the FBI, the State Department, and Homeland Security, and they have all assured me that the government would very much like to cooperate with American Muslims but is just not sure how to go about doing so.)

The fact is that at no other time in American history has there been a more urgent need to develop a robust program of public diplomacy aimed at the Muslim world. (A poll of 18 countries released just this week by the BBC showed that the percentage of those polled who believe the United States has a positive influence in world affairs currently stands at 29 percent.) But diplomacy will never work if it is run by partisan gunslingers like Karen Hughes or by Madison Ave. executives like Charlotte Beers, not least because their primary goal seems to be making American foreign policy more *palatable* to the Muslim world. That's a waste of time. We need to focus instead on communicating American *values* and *ideals* to the Arab and Muslim world. Who better to express to the world's Muslims what it means to be American than American Muslims? After all, they are already on the front lines of the Islamic Reformation you spoke about.

After your last entry, I went back and reread Barrett's riveting account of Sami al-Hussayen, the Idaho grad student charged with violating the Patriot Act. (I have to say, I found this to be the best of Barrett's profiles.) There was, of course, something incredibly disheartening about the government's zealous mishandling of the arrest, investigation, and trial of al-Hussayen. But what struck me was the way in which al-Hussayen, despite all that had been done to him, seemed never to lose confidence that the American legal system would ultimately find him innocent and set him free. (It ultimately did, though only long enough for the government to deport him back to Saudi Arabia.)

What this story demonstrates to me is that, despite the way in which America's conduct of the so-called war on terror has poisoned its image across the globe, there is still a recognition, even by some of America's most strident critics, that there is no country in the world more dedicated to the fundamental freedoms of faith, conscience, and the rule of law than the United States.

You asked me for some optimism. I'm afraid that's the best I can do.

Reza

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## the has-been Goats Don't Answer Letters

In Bush's State of the Union, heroes were named, not born.

By Bruce Reed  
Thursday, January 25, 2007, at 12:40 PM ET

**Thursday, Jan. 25, 2007**

**No-Whip:** Tuesday's [lame-duck State of the Union may not have done much](#) for Bush's domestic agenda, but it was a boon for mine. My daughter is studying American government this year, so a few hours before the president's speech, I spoke to a gymnasium full of eighth graders about how State of the Union addresses work. We discussed the various SOTU rituals, from the sound of one party clapping to the mystery guests in the first lady's box. As an incentive to watch the speech, I promised to buy every student a Frappuccino if the president didn't name some American hero, like the subway Samaritan from New York.

At the time, that seemed like a safe bet, even in front of 63 Frappuccino-loving teenagers who weren't about to let me off the hook. But 40 minutes into Bush's speech, as he droned on about special advisory councils, I began to worry. Any president with so little interest in attracting support from the country or even his own party might dispense with other quaint democratic traditions, like showing a decent respect to the opinions of mankind or showcasing heroes in the State of the Union.

Luckily, with time running out on his speech and his administration, Bush forgot that he's no Ronald Reagan and decided to embrace symbolic gestures with gusto. Suddenly, a Carteresque speech asking America to give bad news a chance began to sound like the spring lineup from Disney Pictures. Dikembe Mutombo, who rose from humble beginnings to stand 2 feet taller than the first lady of the United States. Julie Aigner-Clark, who made a fortune selling her toy company (to Disney!) and now [makes videos warning kids about strangers](#)—the perfect background to become Bush's next Homeland Security czar.

But Bush saved the best heroes for last. Sgt. Tommy Rieman, who earned a Silver Star in Iraq, and whose wounds sounded so extensive, it seemed a miracle that he could stand up. And of course, Wesley Autrey, the subway hero, who jumped onto the tracks to save a man from an oncoming train.

I don't know how the State of the Union fared with focus groups. But on my Frappu-meter, the last part of the speech was off the charts. Four heartwarming heroes in four minutes was more than enough to spare me from buying 63 \$4 drinks. [And by naming](#) the subway Samaritan, Bush made me look a little like one of the eighth graders' favorite TV characters—the fake psychic on USA's\* *Psych*.

Still, even someone with my psychic powers had to be surprised by the surge of heroes at the end of Bush's speech. According to

a [remarkable new interactive graphic](#) from the *New York Times*, Bush hadn't used the word "hero" in a State of the Union since January 2002. On Tuesday, he called out the whole Fantastic Four.

Why the sudden outburst of heartwarming stories? Two reasons: First, after such a deflating speech, the president and his writers were desperate to end on a high note—or at least, higher than his 28 percent approval. The last time we saw such a parade of heroes in a State of the Union was [1995](#), when Clinton may have set the modern record with a closing flourish that singled out six. That year, we too were reeling from the loss of Congress and wanted to change a sour public mood. It's possible that Bush's speechwriters got the idea for multiple heroes from searching Clinton's 1995 speech for comeback clues.

More likely, the hero glut is just another symptom of a White House that has run out of good options and can't decide between them. A White House that is on its game makes choices; a struggling one runs in every direction at once, in hopes of finding something that will work. That may explain why Bush's entire speech resembled Noah's Ark, not just because it didn't try to stop rising sea levels, but because it offered two of everything—for every new applause line about finding common ground, an old standby to placate the conservative base.

You don't have to be a psychic to know the Bush White House is in desperate need of last-minute heroics. Yet while Wesley Autrey is every bit the "brave and humble man" Bush said, the subway Samaritan arrived too late: The train already flattened this president back in November. ... **12:41 P.M.** ([link](#))

**Correction, Jan. 25:** This blog entry incorrectly stated that the television show *Psych* airs on Fox. It airs on the USA network. [Return](#) to the corrected sentence.

**Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2007**

**No Huddle:** On Saturday, the clock on Bush's presidency wound down to the two-year mark—but by then, both parties had already gone into their hurry-up offense. Three candidacies were announced in a single weekend, breaking the previous two-day record set by Mario Cuomo's [1991 campaign-in-waiting](#). If Republicans and Democrats maintain their current January pace (12 entries in 22 days), each party will have more than 100 presidential candidates by the Iowa caucuses.

For once, the American people are in an even bigger rush than the candidates. In the latest ABC-*Washington Post* poll, Bush's disapproval rating matched [his personal best of 65 percent](#). CBS has [his job approval down to 28 percent](#). That ought to be

a weather advisory for tonight's State of the Union: When the political thermometer drops below freezing, the president can't stand still and expect to survive.

But precisely because Bush can't figure out how to wind down his long war abroad, the presidential candidates are rushing into a long war here at home. In past cycles, the press and the public alike have bemoaned campaigns that began a whole year before the first votes were cast. This time, the long campaign couldn't start soon enough.

For the country, a long, drawn-out campaign could turn out to be a good thing. With so much time to fill, candidates in both parties might actually be forced to turn their attention to putting new ideas on the table.

For those in and around the campaigns, however, a long war is a decidedly mixed blessing. Candidates will have to sustain a blistering pace for the next 51 weeks, and if they're successful, longer still. Because most of the candidates work in the Senate, even when they break from campaigning, they will get precious little break from one another.

Has-beens like me live for campaign season but dread long, drawn-out primaries. As any veteran political reporter or campaign junkie will tell you, presidential campaigns are the most dangerous addiction that doesn't violate the laws of this country. They're a habit that is impossible to resist, harder to quit, and if continued past your twenties, almost certain to kill you. Or worse: You might already be dead and not yet have noticed.

Back in 1972, *The Candidate* showed us a campaign that ended in victory but left its volunteers jaded and cynical. Presidential primary campaigns are often just the opposite—inspiring, idealistic, and ending in defeat.

That's what makes the lure of presidential primaries so dangerous. No matter how many races send us to rehab, most presidential campaign veterans never lose the idealism that led to our addiction in the first place. Even more than rookies, old hands still feel the magic of a presidential campaign, the one moment every four years with unlimited possibility to re-imagine America's future. To anyone who has ever worked on a presidential campaign, the snows of New Hampshire are as much a sign of eternal spring as the smell of fresh-cut grass at Fenway.

The curse of a long campaign is that it prolongs the temptation, even as it ups the dosage. Long campaigns favor the qualities that are the first to go—youth, stamina, and most important, the ability to convince loved ones that the campaign won't really be very long at all.

For the last five presidential cycles, I have been haunted by a story I heard my first time out in 1988, from a legendary policy wonk named [Bill Galston](#). Bill was an ex-Marine, a political science professor, and then as now one of the finest minds in the business. About this time in the 1984 cycle, he had given up his dream job—a tenured position at the University of Texas—to begin a two-year stint as Walter Mondale's policy director, a job so draining its only redeeming quality was that it *lacked* tenure. The way Bill told the story, he woke up one morning on the Mondale campaign, looked in the mirror, and realized that his entire head of hair had suddenly turned white. Yet there he was, back in the fray the next cycle and the cycle after that, with yet another tenured university post to keep from losing and no gray hairs left to give.

George Bush's hair hasn't turned white; he has made the rest of us do a lot of the graying for him. But tonight's State of the Union could well be Bush's rite of passage from president to has-been. Perhaps it's fitting that Bush plans to call on the country to use less fuel, because the gauge on his White House reads empty. Nothing he says will stop or slow the long war to take his place. ... **5:35 P.M.** ([link](#))

**Wednesday, Jan. 17, 2007**

**[Vive La Synergie](#):** Just when we thought the Bush White House had run out of options in Iraq, the BBC uncovered secret documents on perhaps the boldest Hail Mary by an embattled leader in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Fifty years ago, with his country in the midst of losing a civil war in the Middle East, French Prime Minister Guy Mollet proposed a [breathtaking blockbuster merger with Britain](#). Just as remarkably, the British almost said yes. The BBC says Prime Minister Anthony Eden was cool to an outright merger, but "surprisingly enthusiastic" about Mollet's fallback proposal to let France join the British Commonwealth.

These days, with the entire world trapped in ancient hatreds, the near merger of two historic foes is strangely heartening. If it took France only 150 years to forgive Admiral Lord Nelson, and England was willing to bury the hatchet nine centuries after the Norman Conquest, peace in the Middle East may be a mere millennium or two around the corner.

But the merger plot is also a reminder that desperate leaders resort to desperate measures. Mollet made the offer in the midst of mishandling the war in Algeria, which would drive him out of office nine months later. Eden had troubles of his own, with the Suez crisis that would cause his government to fall even sooner.

Given his abysmal standing in the polls and in the world, perhaps we should worry that President Bush will be forced on

bended knee to make a similar offer. Forget the surge – what if Bush wants to merge?

We already know that [Bush harbors a secret desire for America to be the next France](#). Could Bush be deliberately forcing us into the very type of national embarrassment in the Middle East that has prompted merger offers in the past? Like Ricky Bobby in *Talladega Nights*, who loses his NASCAR crown to a gay Formula One racecar driver from France, could Bush subconsciously be steering us into the wall on purpose as the only way to escape the haunting sense that "[if you ain't first, you're last](#)"?

Like the cake and the Bible in Iran-Contra, the pieces start to fit together at last. Merger kingpin Henry Paulson's baffling decision to leave one of the largest deal-making firms on earth to come to Washington, where there are no deals in sight. The until-now-unexplained fit Bush threw when reporter David Gregory might have uncovered any merger talks [had he been allowed to keep speaking French to Jacques Chirac](#). And of course, Bush's sudden and otherwise inexplicable interest in Albert Camus, history's most famous French Algerian.

Before, no one could understand why Bush would read an author often credited with the un-Bushlike words, "Don't walk behind me, I may not lead. Don't walk in front of me, I may not follow. [Just walk beside me and be my friend.](#)" Behind the guise of poster-ready pacifism, Camus's real meaning is now clear: that's how a merger proposal sounds in French.

Bush defenders will be quick to point out that in today's flat world, companies merge all the time. Why can't countries do the same? Nations could achieve enormous savings by streamlining their combined overhead, and no longer having to maintain two bureaucracies, two armies, and two Olympic teams.

A merger with France would be the kind of doomed masterstroke that has been Bush's trademark. While France and the United Kingdom are themselves products of ancient political mergers, modern political pressures run the other way. The Soviet Union broke apart. Iraq may do the same. Even the UK, which was forced to spin us off long ago, is losing its grip on Northern Ireland and Scotland.

M&A experts at State and Treasury can no doubt draw up the prospectus of what U.S. and France would bring in common to a merger: the revolutionary backgrounds, the fervent cultural chauvinism, the head-butt diplomacy. *Vive la synergie!*

But if Bush is desperate to merge, let me suggest a different target: Canada. The benefits to us are obvious: massive natural resources, low health care costs, a safe haven from global warming. Merging with Canada would be like merging with Britain and France at the same time – and Quebec offers the



taste of France without all the fat. Bush could finance the whole deal with the border control savings from the first year alone.

For a president at 30% approval, a U.S.-Canada merger (under the new name "AmeriCan") can only help. Conservatives will be thrilled to learn that Tom Tancredo was wrong – Bush's merger isn't with Mexico. Liberals will admire Canada's stance on same-sex marriage. Best of all, every American will welcome the hope that comes with any merger: the 50-50 chance that your chief executive will be the one to go. ... **4:05 P.M.** ([link](#))

**Thursday, Jan. 11, 2007**

**In Search of the Holy Grail:** It's a shame that American politics doesn't have splashy trade shows like [MacWorld and the Consumer Electronics Show](#) going on this week in San Francisco and Las Vegas. Of course, that would require new products – and President Bush's speech last night showed nothing new in the pipeline anytime soon.

In contrast to the high-tech future gazing of MacWorld, politics has the feel of Tomorrowland at Disney World – displaying different visions of how the future looked in America's past. Republicans long for the '80s, Democrats miss the '90s, and both parties endlessly relitigate the '60s. The Bush administration has sought to recreate the decade nobody else wanted, the '70s, when being unpopular was the only thing presidents were good at.

White House aides had hinted that as a sign of his bold new course, Bush might break with the clichéd Oval Office address by delivering his speech from [the Map Room](#), where FDR plotted America to victory in World War II. Instead, Bush's "New Way Forward" was down the hall in [the Library](#), which appropriately enough once served as the White House laundry.

The bookshelves behind Bush looked like a fake Nightline backdrop. But Bush was eager to show his resolve in the battle that consumed him throughout 2006 – to read more books than Karl Rove. Besides, the Library is the entrance to the [men's room](#), and like the Map Room, gave the White House the picture it deserved: a president stuck in his own basement.

Earlier in the week, another Republican looked backward to roll out a completely different way forward. Arnold Schwarzenegger made headlines for two decisive breaks with conservative orthodoxy. On Monday, he proposed a pay-or-play plan for near universal health care that echoes Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign proposal. On Tuesday, he channeled Al Gore and Tony Blair as he pledged to cut the state's auto emissions of greenhouse gases by 10 percent and require refineries to reduce the carbon content in fuels.

Last year, Schwarzenegger was accused of political expediency for becoming a centrist after seeing the voters trounce his agenda in the 2005 election. This year, he looks more like an action hero. Unlike Bush, Schwarzenegger seems to understand that stubbornness and irrelevance are a sign of weakness, and that leaders are stronger for being what the California governor calls "[post-partisan](#)."

State of the State addresses usually invoke a few pioneers and the occasional Founder. The governor from Hollywood drew more of a big-screen historical parallel. "We are the modern equivalent of the ancient city-states of Athens and Sparta," Schwarzenegger said. "California has [the ideas of Athens and the power of Sparta](#)." Compare that to Bush, who has the prospects of 4<sup>th</sup> century Rome.

After their tragic encounters with national government, Republicans might be wise to go back to the city-state model. Bush seems to view every decision as a choice between the bold path and the smart one. Josh Levin explained last week why a tiny school like Boise State could surprise the football world and end up the only undefeated college team in America – [when you're outnumbered, you have to be bold and smart](#).

Imagine, for example, if Athens were in charge of our national security policy. Athens didn't have the horses to go off and conquer the ancient world on its own. Instead, it managed to create the Athenian Empire by forging one of history's first great alliances, the Delian League, which served Athens' interests by getting other city-states to act in their own.

Likewise, when the combined forces of Athens and Sparta were mired in a seemingly endless war in the Middle East, the Greeks didn't pretend they could end the siege of Troy using the same battle plan and a few more troops. They won the way BSU did – with a really good trick play. The Trojan Horse – now there was a so-called surge worth the gamble.

Alas, bold-and-smart is not in the Bush playbook. Last night, the president admitted that his whole Iraq strategy came from Monty Python: he sent in the [Trojan Rabbit](#) and only later realized he forgot the men. ... **5:30 P.M.** ([link](#))

**Wednesday, Jan. 10, 2007**

**Word Surge:** Despite voters' best efforts in November, the Bush administration didn't get the memo about finding common ground. The gulf between the president and everyone else couldn't be wider: For the Democratic Congress, success means passing the Hundred Hours' Agenda; for a Republican White House, the spread to beat is the Hundred Years' War.

At times, Democrats and Republicans sound like Americans and Brits—two peoples divided by a common language. To be sure, it has never been clear just [what dialect George Bush is speaking](#)—but whatever it is, Democrats are determined to speak something else.

The first great battle of the word wars broke out this week between *surge* and *escalation*. So far, the semantic skirmish mirrors the real war it is trying to affect: Nobody's winning.

Frederick Kagan of the American Enterprise Institute, a leading architect of the *surge*, helped put the word on the map in the [Weekly Standard](#) in late November. A week earlier, Kagan and Bill Kristol had called for a "[heavier footprint](#)" in Iraq, in a piece that made no mention of *surge*. In Kagan's second piece, the *footprints* were gone. Instead, he mentioned *surge* a dozen times—twice in quotation marks, 10 times without.

By the end of December, however, Kagan and retired general Jack Keane worried that the word *surge* was spinning out of control. In a *Washington Post* op-ed called "[The Right Type of 'Surge.'](#)" they wrote:

**"Reports on the Bush administration's efforts to craft a new strategy in Iraq often use the term 'surge' but rarely define it. Estimates of the troops to be added in Baghdad range from fewer than 10,000 to more than 30,000. Some 'surges' would last a few months, others a few years. We need to cut through the confusion."**

In their *Post* op-ed, Kagan and Keane put quotation marks around *surge* five times and omitted them 10 times. Counterinsurgency theory dictates 2 troops for every 100 residents. Judging from the *Post* and the *Standard*, surgency theory must dictate two quotation marks for every three to five uses of *surge*.

As [John Dickerson](#) points out, Democrats can't agree on how to stop Bush's surge. But the party is united in a rearguard action to rename it. In recent weeks, Democrats from [across the spectrum](#) have gone after the term to say that the Bush plan isn't a *surge* at all—it's an *escalation*. They argue that *surge* has a more positive connotation than *escalation* and leaves the misleading impression that troop levels will rise only temporarily.

If the word *surge* were so compelling, we wouldn't all spend good money, no questions asked, on surge protectors to prevent it, and you wouldn't have to go all the way to Norway to find the green caffeine drink Surge that Coca-Cola discontinued everywhere else. But on the vagueness charge, Democrats have a point: Even Keane and Kagan fear that *surge* can mean many different things to different people.

Still, if the best alternative Democrats can come up with is *escalation*, we have to wonder whether the urge to purge *surge*—like the surge itself—is really worth it.

If *surge* is too vague, the word *escalation* is too clinical. It's the mother of all euphemisms, often used during Vietnam as code to avoid saying "more troops."

Consider [this Joint Chiefs of Staff memo from January 1964](#), urging the Pentagon to stop fighting the Viet Cong with one hand tied behind our back: "A reversal of attitude and the adoption of a more aggressive program would enhance greatly our ability to control the degree to which escalation will occur." In that memo, using *escalation* instead of a simpler phrase like "more fighting" made it easier to ignore the (now-all-too-familiar) inconsistency of what was being said—that if our side were allowed to fight harder, we'd be able to keep the fighting from getting out of hand.

Some opponents of the war obviously welcome the Vietnam imagery: Last week, Cindy Sheehan and others interrupted a Democratic press conference with chants of "Deescalate!" But to the average American, *escalation* remains as numbing and bureaucratic a word today as it was in the 1960s. The fog of war has Latin roots and too many syllables.

Democrats' rechristening effort—again, like the Bush plan itself—would seem to be too little, too late. *Time* dedicated its first Friday cover to "[The Surge](#)"—a higher profile than *escalation* can hope for, no matter how often Democrats repeat it. So far, the main result of the Democratic counteroffensive has been to make newspapers put *surge* in quotation marks—except, of course, when proponents of the idea beat them to it.

Some critics have started calling it the "so-called surge." Unfortunately, if *surge* is misleading, "so-called surge" is even more so—leaving the unintended impression that perhaps Bush won't be increasing troops at all. (Then again, as Fred Kaplan has warned, that may be an entirely accurate description of Bush's plan: [more troops than we can mobilize and fewer than we'd need to win](#).) Richard Cohen managed to cram everything into [a single sentence](#): "A so-called surge is a-coming, an escalation all decked out with an Orwellian-sounding name."

Meanwhile, watchdogs on both the left and right have started counting the use of *surge* and *escalation* to determine whether news organizations are biased for Bush or against him. At Tuesday's White House press briefing, one beleaguered reporter asked Tony Snow about the "[troop increase/surge/escalation](#)."

Ironically, the man sometimes credited with popularizing the term *escalation* is one of the most ambitious euphemists in history: Herman Kahn, whose 1965 book, *On Escalation: Metaphors and Scenarios*, included an "escalation ladder" of the

[44 steps to mutually assured destruction](#). Kahn was a military theorist at RAND, and an inspiration for the character of Dr. Strangelove. Louis Menand of *The New Yorker* called him "[the heavyweight of the Megadeath Intellectuals](#)."

Menand writes that although Kahn was a staunch supporter of escalation in Vietnam, he was especially proud of coining the term *Vietnamization*, which gave the Nixon administration what the Bush lexicon apparently lacks—a face-saving euphemism for throwing in the towel. To Kahn's ear, *Vietnamization* was better than *de-Americanization*, although today both sound like two steps high on the escalation ladder toward mutually assured linguistic destruction.

A few years ago, in the depths of Democratic despair, Berkeley professor George Lakoff convinced many Democrats that word control was the only way to snap the country out of some Rove-induced hypnosis. Our side has spent countless hours pontificating about "frames" and "memes" ever since.

The pounding Republicans took in the midterm elections shows that the American people are a lot smarter than Lakoff thinks. A recent CNN poll that described the Bush option as simply "[send more troops](#)" got the answer Democrats want: only 11 percent support. That suggests the winning strategy in the word war is, get out now! The way to doom Bush's plan to send more troops to Iraq is to call it exactly that. ... **12:29 P.M.** ([link](#))

**Friday, Jan. 5, 2007**

**[Why the Long Face?](#)**: The best talking points are the ones that go without saying. Since November, Democrats haven't had any trouble convincing the political world that the midterm elections were a resounding vote for "a new direction for America." Today, Republican congresswoman Heather Wilson of New Mexico even borrowed Democrats' slogan for her speech on "A New Course for Iraq."

But the Bush administration has never been good at asking directions, or taking them. So for the moment, the most visible new direction in Washington can be found in the expressions on congressional faces: one side of the aisle has remembered how to smile, while the other side has its turn to do the frowning.

When Nancy Pelosi rose to the speaker's podium after 12 years in the minority, she might well have kissed the ground, if it weren't covered with children. Meanwhile, press accounts portrayed a range of House Republican emotions: "[visibly glum](#)," "[noticeably glum](#)," "[glum](#)," and "[glumly](#)."

You can't blame Republicans for the long face, because the minority can be a miserable life, especially in the House. Yesterday, the Democrats with the biggest spring in their step were the 80+ members who were around back when Democrats lost the majority. In their first week in the wilderness, House Republicans have already figured out that the winner-take-all nature of House rules means that the principal role of the minority is to [complain about being in the minority](#).

House Republican leader John Boehner gamely acknowledged that turning the gavel over to the first woman Speaker was an historic occasion that transcends party. But if the new division of power in Washington feels familiar, there's a reason: A Republican president with a Democratic House is the modern historical norm. We've had that combination for 20 of the past 38 years since 1969. All the other combinations – Democratic president and Republican House, Democratic president and Democratic House, Republican president and Republican House -- have been the case for only 6 years apiece.

Indeed, the danger for both parties may be the sheer familiarity of the current arrangement. In the early 1970s, Republicans were so resigned to the inevitability of winning only the White House that the late Gerald Ford happily gave up his lifelong dream of being Speaker to settle for replacing Spiro Agnew as VP. In the 1980s, Democrats grew so accustomed to winning the House and losing the White House that we had trouble adjusting to the new landscape after we won both.

At the moment, Republicans seem more at risk of falling back into that rut than Democrats. The current Democratic glee masks a bitter determination to recapture the presidency, because the Bush years have demonstrated how powerless we are without it. By contrast, for all the glum faces in the House Republican caucus, rank-and-file Republicans have such a bad taste in their mouths from their years in control of Congress that it's hard to see them going all out to win it back. In 2008, beleaguered Republicans may well make the same choice Ford made in 1974, and so many Senators in both parties are making this time around: White House or bust. ... **2:59 P.M.** ([link](#))

**Monday, Jan. 1, 2007**

**[Modesty Is the Best Policy](#)**: For all its trappings, the presidency is a humbling experience. No job on earth comes with greater power or more frequent reminders of that power's limits.

Yet while the White House may be ever so humbling, not all its occupants are so humble. The generous outpouring of affection for the late Gerald Ford is a tribute to a genuinely modest man

who rose to the highest office but wasn't afraid to [acknowledge his stumbles](#).

That humility, more than anything else, was Ford's contribution to the nation's recovery from Watergate. As the unelected successor to a failed president who had overreached in every realm, Ford had the good sense not to presume a mandate nor pretend he was the people's choice.

The Bush administration, another accidental and accident-prone presidency, could have used a measure of Ford's humility. Dick Cheney and Don Rumsfeld may have made their names as Ford's right-hand men, but Bush didn't hire them for their modesty. Far from modeling themselves after their old boss, Cheney and Rumsfeld chose to go the other way—spending the Bush years feasting madly on the executive power they felt deprived of in their younger days in the hamstrung Ford White House.

In the eyes of history, Cheney and Rumsfeld have been badly humbled, but there is no sign they see humility as the cure. At Saturday's memorial service, Cheney suggested that what united America after Nixon's imperial overreach was not Ford's restraint, but Ford's own act of executive excess—the Nixon pardon. "It was this man, Gerald R. Ford, who led our republic safely through a crisis that could have turned to catastrophe," Cheney said. "Gerald Ford was almost alone in understanding that there can be no healing without pardon."

It's one thing, now that both men are dead, for revisionists to conclude that a disgraced Nixon suffered enough for his crimes and Ford suffered enough for the pardon. But as [Tim Noah](#) and [Christopher Hitchens](#) have pointed out, the Nixon pardon did little to heal the nation; it didn't even heal Nixon. If it helped heal the country at all, it did so in the opposite of how Cheney described: Nixon's sudden resignation meant Americans wouldn't have him to kick around anymore, but the pardon gave voters the chance to unite in meting out their punishment at the polls.

The Nixon pardon was out of line for an unelected president, and Ford was deservedly unelected for it. But the nation healed anyway, and Ford's unassuming manner was a welcome tonic after the Nixon era. Ford's greatest achievement was simply not being the kind of president Nixon had been.

George W. Bush now finds himself in much the same position that Ford inherited when he took office in 1974—preparing to serve out the unexpired two-year term of an extraordinarily unpopular president. The only difference is that Bush himself is the extraordinarily unpopular president.

As Bush decides how to spend those two years, Ford's legacy offers two distinct, opposing choices: flagrantly ignore the will

of the country (as Ford did by pardoning Nixon) or make modest attempts to heal it (as Ford did by not governing like Nixon).

Bush and Cheney would no doubt prefer to ignore the country's wishes, and regard the Republican defeat in 2006 as sufficient punishment for their mistakes. But that's the same undemocratic route that got Bush into trouble in the first place.

The better path is Ford's more appealing legacy: his refreshing awareness that Americans put up with him only because he was better than the last guy. Bush's goal for his presidency is now exactly the same as Ford's: to prove he's not as bad as Nixon.

"In 1974, America didn't need a philosopher-king," Dennis Hastert said Saturday. "We needed a rock." In 2007, our expectations are equally modest. After six years of George Bush, we'd settle for anyone who isn't a philosopher-rock.

Americans admired the 38<sup>th</sup> president's candor when he called himself "a Ford, not a Lincoln." It may be too late, but that may be the 43<sup>rd</sup> president's last best hope as well: "a Bush, not a Nixon." ... **1:22 P.M.** ([link](#))

## Friday, Dec. 22, 2006

**George Has Two Fathers:** Like Bill Murray in "Groundhog Day," George W. Bush seems doomed to wake up every morning in the same Maureen Dowd column about [a father's shadow he can darken but not escape](#). Bush 43 owes much to Bush 41 – his name, his VP and half his Cabinet, his fateful obsessions with Iraq, taxes, and the Republican base. And for his father's troubles, the current president has been singularly ungrateful. The elder Bush handed his son the keys to the car, and the Daddy Party has been paying for it ever since.

Bush the younger watched his father lose the presidency over a brief moment of responsibility, and vowed to avenge the family name by never governing responsibly again. Bush 43 seems to view Bush 41's administration as a zero-sum game: He is willing to add one old Bush hand (like Robert Gates), so long as he can dismiss another (like James Baker). He has dealt with the Iraq Study Group report the way stubborn sons usually deal with parental advice – once they hear something is supposed to be good for them, they'll never do it.

Less has been made of Bush the younger's rebellion against another father figure, his silver-haired predecessor, Bill Clinton. Although the same age as Bush 43, Clinton has a temperament more like his new friend and fellow elder statesman, Bush 41.



While the younger Bush would never admit it, he owes much to Clinton 42 as well. As governor, Bush stole his campaign slogan – "Opportunity and Responsibility" – from Clinton's campaign speeches. In 2000, Bush ran for president as a different kind of Republican, stealing a page from Clinton's '92 New Democrat playbook. No father in history has left behind a bigger inheritance than Clinton: a \$5 trillion surplus with no strings attached.

Of course, Bush rebelled against Clinton in just as self-defeating a fashion as against his own father. Within a year of taking office, he squandered the entire surplus. In every possible way, he styled his presidency to be the opposite of Clinton's, even when it meant failing where Clinton had done well.

As Mark Halperin and John Harris point out in their book, [The Way to Win](#), Bush's whole approach to politics is the opposite of Clinton's. Clintonism stresses common ground, evidence, and results. By contrast, Bushism eschews common ground in favor of sharp partisan and ideological differences. This year, Bush proved that when winning elections becomes the only result you value, it's bound to elude you as well.

Bush is a famously stubborn man, and never more so than in his insistence on throwing over the conservative achievements of his predecessors. Clinton kept the elder Bush's pay-as-you-go rules to ensure that government didn't try to do what it couldn't pay for; Bush ditched pay-go so he could spend and give away money with abandon. Clinton renewed confidence in government that had been waning since the '60s. Bush shattered confidence in government by reviving the double-barreled spending of the '60s.

In perhaps the most telling rejection of Clintonism, Bush dismantled the COPS program, which had helped communities put more police on the beat and helped cut violent crime by a third nationwide. Not having enough troops turned out to be a losing strategy here at home, too. This week, the FBI announced [the sharpest increase in violent crime since 1991](#).

Under Clinton, the nation's police forces produced the longest sustained drop in crime on record. Now many cities are becoming murder capitals again. In 2006, robbery went up 9.7% -- the fastest rise in at least the past quarter century.

A Justice Department spokesman said the administration will wait for an ongoing study to determine why crime is going up. But the International Association of Chiefs of Police and other leading crime experts pointed out the obvious: Just as more cops on the beat led to less crime, fewer cops on the beat is leading to more crime.

In fact, the current crime wave represents a convergence of Bush failures. The *Post* notes that an influx of residents displaced by

Hurricane Katrina helped produce a 28% surge in the crime rate in Houston. With many police officers serving extended tours with the National Guard and Reserves in Iraq, [the war has further depleted the thin blue line here at home](#).

The more the son rebels, the more prodigal he becomes. Bush 41 and Clinton 42 look better than ever, while Bush 43 never looked worse. Bush is not the sort to [learn from his mistakes](#). But by now, he ought to realize that resisting his elders is yet another rebellion he's not winning. ... **12:14 P.M.** ([link](#))

**Saturday, Dec. 16, 2006**

**Dangerous Liaisons:** If you're tired of buying presents for the people you work with, be glad you're not Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff. This holiday, he has to find white-elephant gifts for 180,000 employees.

From the beginning, the Bush administration has never wavered in its message about the true meaning of homeland security: keep shopping. So it's fitting that Chertoff chose the holiday rush to deliver [his own State of the Union's security speech](#).

From Katrina to the Dubai Ports World fiasco, Chertoff has endured a rocky tenure at DHS. You have to feel for a guy who gave up a lifetime appointment as a federal appeals court judge for a four-year stint as America's least successful management consultant. On Thursday, he talked about "total asset visibility" and "metrics of progress." If only America's borders could be as impenetrable as our speeches.

Last year, Chertoff promised a [major reorganization](#) of the [sprawling department](#). Judging from Thursday's speech, sprawl is winning. Chertoff outlined a five-part mission:

#1: Look out for "dangerous people."

#2: Look out for "dangerous things."

#3: Resist an attack if we fail to stop dangerous people with dangerous things.

#4: Respond to disaster if we fail to prevent an attack by dangerous people with dangerous things.

#5: "Unify the department into a seamless whole, one in which people are both parts of proud components with real legacies, but also working together to build a visionary new 21<sup>st</sup>

century government organization." In other words, look out for dangerous departments who are supposed to protect us from dangerous people with dangerous things.

Chertoff lavished praise on most of his agency. But like Cinderella's cruel stepmother, he berated his [unhappy stepchild, FEMA](#). "We have to make sure that FEMA does not become so enmeshed in its own bureaucratic processes sometimes that they lose sight of the need to have simple common sense," Chertoff said. "We've embarked on a very ambitious program of retooling FEMA to make it a 21st century response organization."

Chertoff has it backwards: FEMA's whole problem is that it was swallowed up by the bureaucratic processes of a 21<sup>st</sup> century response organization. Back in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, when FEMA was independent and capable, director James Lee Witt could call the White House about an impending disaster and speak directly with the president. After FEMA was swallowed by the DHS whale, director Michael Brown's calls to the White House might as well have been forwarded to a call center in India. Or as Chertoff would say, "a 21<sup>st</sup> century response organization."

The trouble with DHS is that its primary mission is now responding to its own size. Something is wrong when the need to "unify the department into a seamless whole" is as urgent as the need to "protect Americans against dangerous people." If Osama bin Laden runs out of caves in Afghanistan, he might try hiding in a cubicle at DHS.

The sheer size of the department suggests that our survival strategy is modeled on the way the penguin masses endure winter storms in Antarctica – huddle together by the thousands, then move those at the outer edges to the middle when they've been exposed for too long.

Chertoff touted 20 new "intelligence fusion centers," which for a mere \$380 million will bring us "embedded DHS analysts in state and local offices and also state and local analysts at DHS, improving the flow of two-way information and fusing our intelligence - not only horizontally across the government, but vertically at all levels, as well." We have embedded the enemy, and it is us.

On the same day Chertoff spoke of his dream of a seamless whole, the Government Accounting Office released a survey of the 1,800 agricultural specialists who became DHS employees as part of the merger with Customs. Earlier this year, the GAO issued a report on the ag specialists entitled, "Management and Coordination Problems Increase the Vulnerability of U.S. Agriculture to Foreign Pests and Disease."

In this week's report, the agricultural experts complained more about the domestic pests they're embedded with at DHS. The GAO asked the specialists what was going well. Their second most frequent response was, "[Nothing is going well.](#)"

DHS has succeeded in streamlining one mission: handing out contracts. A tab on the front page of the DHS website declares, "[Open for Business.](#)" Presumably, that message is meant for prospective contractors, not terrorists, but the jury is still out. Chertoff's speech was overshadowed by this week's decision to [ditch a costly system to track the departure of foreigners at U.S. borders](#). Since 2004, the program has recorded 61 million foreigners entering the country, and only 4 million people leaving. That means DHS spent \$1.7 billion to lose track of 57 million foreigners in two years. In the Bush administration, these are called metrics of progress.

Sadly, all his organizational jargon makes Michael Chertoff sound more and more like [Michael Scott](#) with a really big branch of "The Office." At least the Scranton branch of Dunder-Mifflin doesn't pretend to be a seamless whole. When it comes to shaking things up at DHS, Michael Scott's management philosophy might make him the better choice as Secretary:

**"I'm friends with everybody in this office. We're all best friends. I love everybody here. But sometimes your best friends start coming into work late and start having dentist appointments that aren't dentist appointments, and that is when it's nice to let them know that you could beat them up." ... 12:02 P.M. ([link](#))**

**Thursday, Dec. 7, 2006**

**[Snowflakes on Falling Leaders](#):** Donald Rumsfeld's last memo enjoyed quite a run, from lead story in Sunday's *New York Times* and *Washington Post* to [Slate Hot Document](#) to welcome [harbinger](#) of a [leaky new era](#). Amid all that attention, one aspect went overlooked: After half a century in the nation's service, Donald Rumsfeld still can't write a memo to save his political life.

Rumsfeld is not alone—for a variety of reasons, most Cabinet memos aren't very good. Cabinet secretaries are busy people, so their memos are often written by committee. A Cabinet member's world revolves around his or her agency; a memo is an attempt to make the president feel the same way. As a result, Cabinet memos are almost always too long. No president could read 20-page memos from two dozen Cabinet members, but the

Cabinet churns them out anyway—and the White House staff secretary dutifully boils each down to a one-graph summary.

Two other flaws plague the Cabinet memo genre. First, White House advisers usually have a better idea what the president needs to learn from a memo, because they spend more time with him—and hear back from him whenever their efforts don't measure up. Cabinet members often have to guess what the president knows or thinks and, unless they really screw up, rarely hear an honest appraisal of what he thinks of their work.

Second, White House advisers can afford to be candid. Their advice is privileged, they can't be hauled before Congress to testify about it, and internal presidential memos rarely leak unless the White House does so on purpose. A presidential memo from a Cabinet member is privileged, but an agency's internal memos are less protected. At a more basic level, the White House hates Cabinet memos because they are usually unsolicited and always a risk to leak. That's a deadly combination, and not unrelated: the less the White House wants a memo in the first place, the greater the chance they'll see it on the front page.

Aside from the leak, Rumsfeld avoided some of these problems. His memo is short, and written in his own pull-up-your-socks tone of voice. But it's still a lousy memo, and a telling one. If, as the Duke of Wellington once said, the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton, the war in Iraq may have been lost on the memo pads of the Pentagon.

Consider [another famous "leaked" Rumsfeld memo](#), which made headlines in October 2003. That memo didn't exactly sneak out the secretary's door; as *USA Today* reported, [Rumsfeld sent it to top defense officials and handed it to congressmen](#). In the span of 13 paragraphs, the memo asked 16 often-unrelated questions, including this impenetrable gem: "Have we fashioned the right mix of rewards, amnesty, protection and confidence in the US?" I don't begin to understand the question, but I'm pretty sure the answer is "no."

"Memos have one purpose in life," according to the [award-winning Online Writing Lab at Purdue University](#), "Memos solve problems."

As a former White House chief of staff, Rumsfeld should know that most basic of rules. Presidents don't read memos for pleasure; for that, they have Albert Camus. A memo reaches the president only when the stakes are high, the choices are difficult, and all other means of resolution have failed.

That makes Iraq a good topic for writing the president. But the Rumsfeld memo doesn't do the one thing a presidential memo is supposed to do—help the Decider decide. Instead, Rumsfeld's

"recommendations" are more confusing than the Iraq debate itself.

The *Post* called it an "unusually expansive memo," but national security adviser Stephen Hadley's term—"laundry list"—seems more on point. Rumsfeld offers 15 "Above the Line" options, and six "less attractive" ones. He says many of the above-the-line options "could and, in a number of cases, should be done in combination with others"—but he doesn't say which ones, or why. He doesn't make a case for the above-the-line options, or against those below the line.

Not only does the memo fail to give the president any clearer idea what to do in Iraq, it doesn't give a clear idea what the secretary of defense thinks. Rumsfeld's memo is a blue-ribbon commission report gone bad—the septuagenarian without the executive summary.

In contrasting Rumsfeld's memo with "the lawyerly memo" from Hadley, the [Times](#) says:

**At the Pentagon, Mr. Rumsfeld has been famous for his "snowflakes"—memos that drift down to the bureaucracy from on high and that are used to ask questions, stimulate debate and shape policy.**

Fortunately, his successor appears to understand that secretary of defense is [not a snow job](#). If you can't help the Decider decide, a blizzard of memos only leads to drift. ... **1:55 P.M.** ([link](#))

## Friday, Dec. 1, 2006

**Belly of the Beast:** Last year, the big rage was *sudoku*. These days, the most popular Japanese craze in Republican circles is [seppuku](#)—the "belly-cutting" ritualistic suicide better known as [hari-kiri](#).

Republicans have been practicing all week long. On Iraq, James Baker has generously offered to hold the sword; all President Bush has to do is fall on it. Bill Frist changed his mind about doctor-assisted suicide, pulling the plug on his presidential bid rather than pretend a miracle would revive his chances. Yesterday, it was RNC Chairman Ken Mehlman's turn, in [a speech to GOP governors about how Republicans had offed themselves in the midterm elections](#).

Mehlman is a master of apologies. Last year, he told the NAACP [how sorry he was](#) for Republicans' divisive, racist Southern strategy of the last three decades: "Some Republicans gave up on winning the African American vote, looking the other way or

trying to benefit politically from racial polarization. I am here today as the Republican chairman to tell you we were wrong." In yesterday's speech, he was so busy atoning for Republican losses, he forgot to apologize for the [divisive, racist Southern ad](#) that helped Republican Bob Corker hold the Senate seat in Tennessee.

As Bush's former campaign manager, Mehlman was careful to honor his role as presidential apologist. He praised the Republican ground game for winning 13 of the 22 closest races, even though the dismal performance of the president and Congress deserve most of the credit for making what should have been cakewalks so close.

Mehlman also repeated the White House line that they'd beaten the historical spread: "Since the 1860s, the party of the incumbent President has lost an average of 45 House seats and five Senate seats during the second midterm." Don't despair, Mr. President: Ulysses S. Grant lost 96 seats in his sixth year, but he still got to be buried in Grant's Tomb.

But after running through the customary excuses, Mehlman made a damning admission: "If 2006 taught us anything, it is that a good ground game alone cannot be depended upon to push us over the top. We need to remember ... all of us ... that it is good policy that makes good politics." From a longtime disciple of Bush and Rove, that is the ultimate denunciation of the Bush administration and Rovism: Bush and the Republicans lost because their policies didn't work.

Mehlman claimed that Democrats, not Republicans, are supposed to be the ones who think government is the answer to every problem: "We Republicans don't believe that ... but sometimes, over the last few years, we've behaved as if we do. What does that lead to? It leads to defeat, and it leads to temptation, and it leads to a government that is bigger and more intrusive than any of us would like."

The saddest part of Mehlman's speech, in fact, was his struggle to name a single Bush accomplishment worthy of Republicans' own mythical tradition. Reagan, he says, made Republicans "the party that would change government, not sustain it." Gingrich offered "a detailed list of congressional and governmental reforms that took power away from the smoke-filled rooms and returned it to the people."

And what has Bush done to make Republicans the party of reform? Mehlman's answer:

**"President George W. Bush reorganized our entire security system, creating the Department of Homeland Security."**

No wonder Republicans feel like [killing themselves](#). The only hope their own chairman can give them that they're not the party of government is that Bush created the largest, costliest new federal bureaucracy in American history.

When the GOP's cheerleader thinks a bloated bureaucratic nightmare with 170,000 employees is a shining example of "limited government" and "our Party at its best," even Republicans seem to be saying [sayonara to conservatism](#). Stick a sword in it—it's done. ... **1:48 P.M.** ([link](#))

**Tuesday, Nov. 28, 2006**

**Traitor to His Class:** As they survey [the ruins of the conservative movement](#), Republicans ponder what might have been, if only Bush hadn't blundered so often and Congress plundered so much. A study in today's *New York Times* provides shocking evidence of the latest conservative betrayal. According to the latest available IRS data, [the richest Americans have fared worse under Bush than any other income group](#).

If the Republican revolution promised anything, it was that after years of oppression and neglect, rich people would finally have the chance to get ahead. But the *Times* reports that life is tough on Easy Street:

**"Incomes after 2000 fell the most among those at the top of the income ladder. The top one-tenth of 1 percent, about 130,500 taxpayers, reported their average income fell almost 17 percent, to just under \$4.9 million each in 2004."**

Even Bush's harshest critics would have to concede that the president has done everything in his power to help the rich. He cut tax rates for the upper brackets. He cut the capital gains rate from 20 percent to 15 percent. He gutted the estate tax and virtually eliminated the tax on dividends.

From 2001 to 2004, Bush gave the rich a new tax cut every single year. Yet as the *Times* points out, even with all those trillion-dollar tax cuts, the richest Americans saw their after-tax incomes plunge by 12.1 percent.

In his 2004 campaign, John Edwards called Bush's economic theory "[the most radical and dangerous economic theory to hit our shores since socialism a century ago](#)." It's now clear that for the very rich, even socialism might have been a better deal.

This is shattering news for Democrats and Republicans alike. What is the point of supply-side conservatism if it can't even



make the rich richer? For that matter, where is the joy in railing against it? Supply-side economics never made any sense to begin with, but now its logic isn't worth the napkin it was written on. Trickle-down theory turned out to be no trickle, just down.

President Bush is famous for setting big goals and failing to meet them. Now we know he can't meet the easiest of goals, either. The rich have been getting richer for centuries. Moreover, in contrast to its other pursuits, the Bush administration's efforts to help the rich were a model of persistence and consistency. No pesky resistance tried to stop them; no clumsy Rumsfeld botched the execution. They did their best, yet still they failed.

In response, the rich are voting with their feet—or perhaps their footmen. In 2004, Bush carried voters with incomes above \$200,000 by 63 percent to 35 percent. This year, the Republican margin shrunk 20 points, to 53 percent to 45 percent. That was the sharpest Democratic gain of any income category. More and more rich people are coming around to Bill Clinton's view that "if you want to live like a Republican, you have to vote like a Democrat."

While the very rich keep seeing their incomes go down, the cost of being rich keeps going up. The PNC Christmas Price Index, which tracks the price of everything from 12 drummers drumming to a partridge in a pear tree, reported this week that [the cost of the 12 days of Christmas has jumped to an all-time high of \\$18,920](#). PNC says that a tight labor market means wages for piping pipers and other skilled workers are up, while the burst in the housing bubble "has dampened demand for luxury goods, such as gold rings."

Ronald Reagan used to say that in the 1960s, Democrats fought a war on poverty, and poverty won. In this decade, Republicans fought a war on rich people's poverty, and poverty won again.

Once upon a time, the United States was the world leader in making people rich. Not anymore. The annual World Wealth Report keeps track of High Net Worth Individuals (HNWIs), otherwise known as millionaires. According to the 2006 report, South Korea, India, and Russia are producing new millionaires three times faster than we are. Last year, the United States even fell behind Canada.

By examining "how much it costs HNWIs to live extremely well," the World Wealth Report shows just how hard it can be to [keep up with the Gateses](#):

**"HNWIs around the world have two things in common: a deep concern about preserving their wealth and an abiding desire to ensure growth of their wealth for the benefit of future generations and benefactors. ... The 'admission and**

**maintenance charges' to a life of privilege cannot be overlooked when discussing impacts to HNWI wealth."**

While the gap has shrunk in the past two years, the report says that in 2003, the inflation rate for luxury goods was 5.5 percent higher than the Consumer Price Index. The report monitors an annual basket of luxury goods—including "5-star hotels, spa visits, and boarding school tuitions." As a percentage of wealth, rich Americans pay 60 percent more to live like Paris Hilton than Asian-Pacific millionaires do.

As they look toward 2008, that gives Republicans a new mantra: Stop the class warfare! Let Democrats whine about the middle-class squeeze. The upper-class squeeze—now that's an issue that Bill Frist and Mitt Romney can run on. ... **4:33 P.M.** ([link](#))

**Thursday, Nov. 23, 2006**

**Crystal Ball:** Move over, [Mort Kondracke](#). You heard it here first: [as predicted](#), Flyer and Fryer held on to defeat Plymouth and Rock, 27 percent to 22 percent, [in this year's White House turkey naming contest](#). Corn and Copia, the other food item on voters' menu, finished third with 21 percent, ahead of deserving founder Ben and Franklin at 18 percent. Washington and Lincoln ended up first in war, first in peace, and last in the turkey standings, with 12 percent.

In what may be an early glimpse of a kinder, gentler Bush, the president dispensed with his annual neck-and-neck joke. He has given up pretending the election was close. Instead, Bush joked that it was probably better to be called Flyer than Fryer. He said the turkeys' owners "did a fine job raising these birds," then petted Fryer's neck and called it "a fine-looking bird."

Bush also revealed that although Barney had enjoyed chasing Flyer around the Rose Garden, his favorite toy is a soccer ball. That makes the president an honorary soccer dad, too late to win back any suburban swing voters.

**Bates Motel:** Flyer and Fryer have flown off to greener, Barney-free pastures in Disneyland. They don't know how lucky they are. With no help from Washington, some states are finding their own ways to reduce the turkey retiree burden. The *Montgomery Advertiser* reports on Alabama's solution: [coyotes](#).

Every November, Bill Bates, a leading Republican who runs the largest turkey farm in the state, brings the best bird from his flock of 20,000+ to Montgomery for the governor to pardon. Bates, who has been doing this since segregationist days, doesn't

need an online naming contest. He gives his best bird the same name every year: Clyde.

While a pardon may be the dream of every turkey worth his salt, the *Advertiser's* account suggests it's not easy being Clyde. The paper reports that many of Bates's prized turkeys "ate so much and got so fat that they had a hard time even waddling around the farm." Others apparently "have been known to drown during storms when they lift their beaks to the open sky."

But the pardon of Clyde '05 proved to be the cruelest hoax of all. After being honored by the governor, Clyde '05 went on display at a farmers' market in Montgomery. PETA complained about his shabby treatment, so Bates brought him back to the farm. A few months ago, a coyote got into his pen and had an early Thanksgiving dinner. "Poor Clyde never had a chance," Bates told the paper. "There wasn't much left but feathers and bones."

Since then, Bates has installed a new security system—barbed wire. But if more coyotes had time to read blogs, they might have left Clyde alone and followed [this hot tip from Huffington Post: Tofurky](#). Made with "organic, non-genetically engineered soybeans," Tofurky has been "[America's Leading Turkey Alternative Since 1995](#)."

The 2007 "Gobble the Vote" naming contest is 364 days away, but we already have a frontrunner: Tofurky and Clyde. You heard it here first. ... **1:27 A.M.** ([link](#))

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## the highbrow

### Dakota Fanning

All shook up over *Hounddog*.

By Meghan O'Rourke

Wednesday, January 24, 2007, at 12:51 PM ET

If all you knew about Dakota Fanning was that she starred as Fern in *Charlotte's Web*, I suppose it could come as a shock that her controversial new film, tentatively titled *Hounddog*, isn't a movie about charming canines, but the story of a pre-adolescent girl caught in a cycle of abuse who, in the most talked-about scene, is raped by an older boy. Before the film debuted at Sundance this week, it ignited a [firestorm](#) of debate, with protesters registering their [distress](#) that Fanning had been exposed to such provocative subject matter. But the truth, as anyone who has recently been to the cinema knows, is that Dakota Fanning has been making dark and creepy movies for years. Over her seven-year career, she has become a small, blond embodiment of America's fond hope that scarred children can be restored to childish innocence. It was only a matter of time before the trauma she faced would be rape.

From the start, Fanning has played the preternaturally mature child who could toe the cold waters of trauma but just as swiftly retreat to the broad sands of innocence—with a shiver, perhaps, but nothing more enduring than that. In films like *The War of the Worlds*, *Hide and Seek*, and *Man on Fire*, she became an emblem of button-cute purity threatened—but not overcome—by the ordeals and evil that are, more properly, part of the adult world. They are roles that enact our voyeuristic curiosity about how far the boundaries of innocence can be extended. In the intensely violent *Man on Fire* (2004), she is a neglected, love-starved child who is kidnapped for ransom money, and watches her beloved bodyguard (and only true friend) get brutally shot in front of her as she cries his name. She is later rescued, but he dies for her. In *Hide and Seek* (2005) she plays a troubled 9-year-old whose mother has recently died; terrible things happen, but in the end, she appears to find some relief from her emotional suffering. ("Dakota Fanning is the most SCARY thing I have ever seen," a viewer [posted](#) on IMDB, in apparent approval.) In *The War of the Worlds* (2005), she watches as aliens destroy her world, transforming it into a landscape literally flowing with blood, and her father kills a man in order to save her life, while she sits nearby. She is brutalized and subdued, but by the film's end—when she reaches the cozy brownstone where her mother is—she appears ready to be absorbed again by the consoling rhythms of domesticity; one feels that even her toys are intact.

What complicates the trauma in the *Hounddog* is Fanning's decision to portray a rape victim at precisely the juncture in her own life we're uncertain how to conceptualize: pre-adolescence. Had the news arrived that a 9-year-old Fanning were flouncing around in her underwear in an upcoming movie, protesters who are alleging that the film is unmistakably "pedophilic" might have had a firm leg to stand on. Had the news arrived that a 15-year-old Dakota were doing the same, her defenders (including her mother and her agent, who are reportedly hoping for an Oscar nomination) might more persuasively have been able to argue that she made the choice with full autonomy, taking it on as a substantive artistic "challenge," as her agent put it. But she is 12. In her press pictures, she still looks like a scrawny child, gap-toothed and big-eyed. (Little wonder, then, that bloggers have posted outdated photos of her, playing up the contrast between her childishness and the supposed brutality of the film.) Protesters of the film may be genuinely concerned that acting out a rape scene in a film is traumatic to Fanning. But what some are presumably also anxious about is that watching Dakota in a rape scene is traumatic *to them*; in today's world of hypersexualized celebrity adolescence, can a fling with a creep or tawdry table-dancing be far away?

The strangest thing about the pre-release debate may have been observing Dakota Fanning herself defending her choice with the savvy articulateness of a child raised in Hollywood's echo chamber. In curiously perfect sound bites, she winningly explained her decision to play the part to the *New York Times*

("The bottom line was, I couldn't not do it," she remarked. "I was the perfect age"). Elsewhere, she [pointed out](#) what seemed to her a puzzling failure of logic, noting that *Hounddog* is "no darker than *Hide and Seek* or *Man on Fire*! I still am going through difficult things in those films as well, and nobody seemed to talk about that!" She's right that the new film isn't truly a departure from her earlier work. But it is a resolutely unambiguous extension of her child-actor roles into the realm of the adolescent. And it's this lack of ambiguity that has stirred controversy: She's crossed the sexual Rubicon. Taking on this character is a violation of the subtle enactment of anxieties about survival and innocence that had formerly gone—quite pleasingly—unstated. Whether or not she is fully aware of it, Fanning, the actor, is officially leaving childhood behind in the eyes of the public.

And she may not be fully aware of it. Take, for example, the fact that in the *Times* she [defended](#) her choice to play the role of the young girl, Lewellen, by reassuring her interviewer that Lewellen "is still very innocent, she's still a child, but she's also a little bit wise beyond her years." There's an odd paradox at work. Fanning invokes Lewellen's innocence as a way of comforting us that she *herself* has not yet reached the realm of sexuality and still stands at the brink of it. But to know to do as much is, in a way, to be out of the garden already. That she comprehends the various dimensions of the role is not reassuring proof of *her* childish innocence. It only makes it all the more impossible for the viewer to imagine her going back to the cocoon of childhood, rather than moving forward into the trials of adolescence.

From this perspective, whether or not *Hounddog* is a film about redemption and healing doesn't exactly matter; nor does it matter whether Fanning wore a bodysuit while filming; or whether Jodie Foster and Brooke Shields, two child actresses to play sexually graphic roles in the 1970s, survived their experiences whole. Such niceties are beside the point (and the announcement of them, not surprisingly, didn't reduce the pitch of the protests). The problem for an American audience weaned on this waif, and chock-a-block with repressed feelings about adolescent sexuality itself, is that Dakota Fanning the actress (if not the character she plays) has *chosen* to take on this graphic role. She has opened Pandora's box. Once she has become part of the sexual economy of adolescence—about which Americans are so clearly conflicted, living as we do in a hypersexualized era that is also peculiarly hyperprotective of children—she can't go back.

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## the zeitgeist checklist

### Zeitgeist Checklist: Barack Obama, Presidential Explorer

What Washington is talking about this week.

By Michael Grunwald  
Saturday, January 20, 2007, at 7:07 AM ET

#### Talk About a Botched Execution!

Iraq. Critics express outrage over another [botched execution](#), as Saddam Hussein's half-brother is decapitated by his noose. How is that a botched execution? If Hussein's half-brother had expressed outrage, that would've been a botched execution. Still, President Bush says the incident shows that Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's government "still has some maturation to do." Maliki vows that someday his government will be mature enough to blunder into a foreign quagmire to prove he's tougher than his dad.

#### We'll All Be Grateful in January 2009

White House. In an [interview](#) Wednesday night on PBS' *NewsHour*, Bush says average Americans have made sacrifices during the war because they "sacrifice peace of mind" when they watch TV. Especially Americans who watched *NewsHour* on Wednesday night. Bush also suggests that Iraqis aren't grateful enough to Americans. That's not a joke. He really said that.

#### Edna Doesn't Balance Her Budget, Either

Surveillance. The Bush administration finally [agrees](#) to stop its warrantless wiretapping of Americans but defends its new program to snoop around their financial records. Vice President Cheney says the program is vital to national security and adds that Edna J. Fleischman of Grand Forks, N.D., really didn't have to pay so much for that muffler.

#### White House Dogcatcher? White House Brie-Taster?

2008. Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., [announces](#) that he's forming a presidential exploratory committee but confuses supporters by vowing "to be the best Joe Biden I can be." And Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., says he's considering another run for the White House. That's not a joke, either. Well, it is, but he did say it.

exciting athlete in years, [drops](#) another 50-point game. Fans love how Arenas shouts "Hibachi!" every time he launches a three, to announce that he's heating up. Maybe Bush should shout "Bordello!" every time he launches a policy.

### How Do You Say "Baba Boeey" in Mandarin?

Space. China [shoots down](#) a satellite with a ground-based missile, triggering protests from rival nations that fear a new space-based arms race and from a billion Chinese who can no longer listen to Howard Stern.

### Somebody Loan This Guy a Clue

Democrats. House Democrats [complete](#) their 100-hour agenda, passing bills to lower student-loan rates, eliminate oil-industry giveaways, and let the government negotiate with drug companies. Minority Leader John Boehner, R-Ohio, scoffs that Democrats are just passing easy bills with overwhelming public support, which explains why so many Republicans voted against them and why Bush has threatened to veto them.

### Hell Seems Unseasonably Chilly, Too

Pentagon. Legal advocates demand an apology from a Bush administration official who attacked attorneys for Guantanamo Bay detainees—and he [provides](#) it! What's next, a confession from O.J.? A serious acting award for Eddie Murphy? Ethics reform in Congress? Yes, it has been an odd week.

### It's Hard To Be Impartial About a Man Named Scooter

Crime. The defense [delays](#) jury selection in the I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby trial, objecting to any potential jurors with negative feelings about the Bush administration. The judge agrees to limit the jury to members of the Ijaw, Ovimbundu, Ariaal, and other isolated tribes without negative feelings about the administration, but Libby insists on a jury of his peers, consisting solely of faceless bureaucrats responsible for geopolitical catastrophes.

### Maybe He Should Wear a Zero on His Shirt

Sports. Wizards guard Gilbert Arenas, Washington's most

### He's Dying Out There!

Death. Legendary *Washington Post* humor columnist Art Buchwald, his comic timing unimpeded by the mere fact of his expiration, [announces](#) in a video obituary: "Hi, I'm Art Buchwald, and I just died." Buchwald's [passing](#) is a reminder of the bygone days when journalists were beloved, and *Washington Post* humor columns were humorous.

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## today's blogs

### Surging Disapproval

By Sonia Smith

Thursday, January 25, 2007, at 5:04 PM ET

Bloggers are fit to be tied over a Senate committee's nonbinding resolution disapproving of the troop surge for Iraq. They're also following the goings-on in Beirut and are trying to figure out what the gay-sheep study means.

*Surging disapproval:* The Senate foreign relations committee [thumbed its nose](#) at the president Wednesday, voting 12-9 for a nonbinding resolution of disapproval against the troop surge. Nebraska Republican Chuck Hagel was the only senator to stray from his party.

Many are fuming at Republicans for voting against the resolution after voicing displeasure with Bush's plans. Liberal John at **America Blog** [seizes on this hypocrisy](#): "So, the Senate Republicans are opposed to the Bush escalation plan, are willing to voice that opposition publicly, but they feel that if they actually vote their opposition then somehow this will magically signal our allies, our troops, and our enemies that we are divided and in disarray over Iraq." At the nonpartisan **After Downing Street**, John Isaacs [criticizes](#) the Republican committee-members: "[T]he fact that so many could not bring themselves to vote for a non-binding resolution shows the magnitude of the task ahead to convince Republicans that they have to vote to stop the war in Iraq."

Live-blogging the hearing, D.C. snarkster **Wonkette** was [bored](#): "[I]t's terribly exciting, in a non-binding sort of way. Chris Dodd and his evil eyebrows have just proposed an amendment in which he'll request—nay, demand!—that the President not



ignore the Senate, which he has promised to do. ... Their joint resolution will force the President to... respond to them. Checks and motherfucking balances!"

Republican James Joyner at **Outside the Beltway** [parses](#) the implications: "It's very difficult, both from a separation of powers standpoint and from a political one, for Congress to force a president to abandon an ongoing war. The tide has definitely turned ... for a prospective GOP presidential candidate [Sen. Chuck Hagel] to vote for a rebuke of his president's policy."

The Dartmouth junior at **Joe's Dartblog** [dubs](#) the Democrats' assertion that the surge is not in our national interest "absolutely ghastly." Others are similarly horrified. "The FRC majority want to assure us that they 'support the troops' while simultaneously undercutting their mission, bucking up their enemies, and leaving them on the front. ... They claim that no increase in forces or any other plan will work. Yet they refuse to cut off funds to force their return," [vents](#) Cry Me a Riverbend at **Iraqi Bloggers Central**.

[Read](#) more about the nonbinding resolution.

*Student violence in Beirut:* As international donors [met](#) in Paris to discuss reconstruction aid for war-torn Lebanon, the country experienced more [violence](#), with a deadly [confrontation](#) between Sunnis and Shiites at a Beirut university. The government instituted a [curfew](#) and braced for further destabilization.

At **Candide's Daily Journal**, Lebanese-American liberal Pierre Tristram [draws comparisons](#) between the current unrest and the civil war: "This is how it was, in those acrid early days in 1975: the strikes. The protests. The burning tires. ... And this is how we knew the 'protests' in Beirut, between Hezbollah and the government, would eventually turn. To fire, riots, shootings, and if the hotheads prevail, as they seem always to prevail in Lebanon, civil war all over again. I've been looking at the pictures coming out of Lebanon. They're the pictures of 1975. Only the car models have changed. "

Writing at **Pensées du Rik**, Henri [ruminates](#) on the situation in Beirut, his current location: "Speaking of the army, it is now out in strength, but I don't see it starting to shoot on people. ... At some point it will either attempt to restore order by force or split along sectarian lines. How easy it is the Iraqify Lebanon, after Iraq was Lebanized."

Posting just after the curfew was announced, Wissam at **Blacksmiths of Lebanon** [reports](#): "It is interesting to note, according to eyewitness accounts, that the troublemakers do not engage in skirmishes in their own neighbourhoods. For example a Shia from Barbour (a mixed Shia-Sunni neighborhood) would go to Tarik Jadideh (a mostly Sunni area) to look for trouble and

vice versa. I guess they do put some stake in their property values!"

Islamoskeptic Patrick at **Clarity and Resolve** uncharitably [proclaims](#) that "Lebanon's brief interlude of sanity" is over, writing, "That's how it's looking. It's certainly worth noting how any geographical location with a sizable Muslim population somehow ends up in one of two political situations: chaotic turmoil and violence or enforced stability under a ruthless autocrat."

Right-wing Shawn Wasson at **BareKnucklePolitics** has [pictures](#) and [video](#) from the student riot.

[Read](#) more about the unrest in Lebanon.

*The science of sheep:* A scientist studying the sexuality of sheep has seen his research [twisted](#), drawing him uncomfortably into the spotlight.

Law prof and moderate **Ann Althouse** [wonders](#) what all the fuss is about: "Don't we accept the idea of sheep breeders doing what they can to get sheep who will in fact breed? Should someone who objects to efforts to cure human beings of homosexuality resist efforts to manipulate sheep? ... Shouldn't gay rights advocates care when they sound like the religious fundamentalists they usually deride?"

Mouseydeu at **The Sietch Blog**, a group blog, [feels](#) this research is important: "I do feel that such scientific research is of interest to us all to understand our nature. In some ways, this could be seen as a positive source of affirmation for the gay community that it is a biological factor, not one of environment as some ignorant opponents would argue."

[Read](#) more about the sheep controversy.

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## today's blogs Cedar Chips Are Down

By Michael Weiss

Wednesday, January 24, 2007, at 6:16 PM ET

Bloggers in Lebanon respond to the latest round of Hezbollah-encouraged rioting in and around Beirut. Also, there's something about a State of the Union address that apparently happened last night.

*Cedar Chips Are Down:* Hezbollah militants, under the guise of a "general strike," [rioted](#) throughout Beirut Tuesday, protesting

the democratically elected government of Lebanon's Prime Minister Fouad Seniora. Men wearing ski masks and operating under the command of cleric Hassan Nasrallah blocked roads leading to the capital, while rioters on the city's streets burned tires and threw carted-in rocks at Lebanese soldiers.

Abu Kais at diaspora blog **From Beirut to the Beltway** [offered](#) this portrait of the chaos in his hometown Tuesday: "The Lebanese army so far has been letting the protestors block the roads for a while, to then re-open them, although not in Beirut so far. This seems to be their 'neutral' strategy. In fact, as of 7:30 AM Beirut time, most of the roads and tunnels in Beirut are blocked, including the airport road. The sky is filled with black smoke from the burning tires, and visibility is zero. Universities and schools are open, and so are most businesses. But the morning commute has been disrupted, and the army has failed to secure safe roads for citizens. There are unconfirmed reports of stoning at several locations by protestors. There are also reports of citizens leaving their cars at home and walking to work."

**Michael Totten**, a blogger who has done extensive traveling in and original reporting from Lebanon, [reports](#): "Up until today Hezbollah has modeled its 'resistance' to the elected government after the March 14 demonstrations to oust the occupying Syrian army. The March 14 movement, though, never did anything remotely like this. That's because they are, for the most part, liberal and democratic while Hezbollah is a Syrian-Iranian terrorist army. Today should be a moment of clarity for the willfully obtuse."

Observing that Hezbollah's call to "intifada" has coincided with its transportation of rocks and debris for throwing at Lebanese soldiers, "JoseyWales" at **Lebanonesque** is [frustrated](#) by Seniora's administration: "Is anyone surprised? ... These are the very same people who told us that the roads, specifically the airport's, would be kept open by the authorities and the army. Check the army's web site and the latest 2 headlines are: Army Commander meets US Ambassador Feltman, and Army Commander meets the Skiing Federation."

Beirut's Jamal at **Jamal's Propaganda Site** is more [forgiving](#) of Lebanese authority: "At the end of the chaotic day calm was restored. 3 people were dead and a hundred or so injured which is tragic; but given that the whole country (and not any country) was engulfed in street fights involving guns, I must say the army and the security forces did a commendable job. If riots of this scale broke out in any American city, the amount of deaths and injuries would have been multiple times more, not to mention the looting that would have happened."

Mark at **The Ouwet Front**, the Web portal for the Lebanon Forces, a Christian right coalition, [describes](#) one prominent urban brawl between supporters of the group's leader Samir Gangea and supporters of the erstwhile anti-Syrian dissident turned pro-Syrian Hezbollah ally, [Gen. Michel Aoun](#). [Note: "FPM" = Free Patriotic Movement]: "I was stuck on my way down to Beirut, there were barely few FPMers blocking the roads, it was very easy to simply remove them and clear it, but NO we have to wait for 3 hours until tons of LFers regroup on the spot and call for reinforcements. I am not asking the Army to beat the demonstrators but to force them to clear the freakin' roads !!" Also, check out Mark's [gallery](#) of photographs.

[Read](#) more about unrest in Lebanon.

*Sedative of the Union*: President Bush [delivered](#) his State of the Union before a Democratic-controlled Congress for the first time on Tuesday. Evenly split between plans for his domestic and foreign agendas, the speech was perhaps most notable for its relative modesty and early paean to Nancy Pelosi, the first female House speaker. Liberal or conservative, live-bloggers and post-mortem analysts were underwhelmed.

Liberal Steven Benan at **The Carpetbagger Report** [writes](#): "Bush, for all of his many tragic flaws, is capable of delivering a decent speech, just so long as we put the merit of his ideas aside while listening. With this in mind, last night was just ... boring. Anticlimactic. Void of soaring rhetoric and almost anything of any interest at all. The speech and its delivery felt obligatory. The president might as well have just skipped the event altogether — he showed up, rehashed some old ideas, and left."

Kudos to Bush for his delivery, says conservative Ed Morrissey at **Captain's Quarters**, [but](#) "[t]he meat of the speech impresses me less. I'm a little troubled that he only gave Iran and Syria a passing mention. Iran would be one of the issues on which he could demand bipartisanship, since the Democrats spent the last two electoral cycles complaining that he hadn't done enough about Teheran."

Bush's conciliation of traditionally leftist causes—like mandatory fuel standards and the development of alternative energy—has got righty Jonathan Adler at the *National Review's* **The Corner** saying [not so fast](#): "Increasing automotive fuel economy standards will do little to offset these additional costs, and will also restrict consumer vehicle choices. ... I also question the environmental wisdom of artificially increasing the demand for biofuels, which will mean thousands of acres will remain (or be converted to) crop production that would

otherwise revert to (or remain in) wildlife habitat."

[Read](#) more about the State of the Union address. In *Slate*, John Dickerson [said](#) Bush had "the posture of an unhurried man"; Fred Kaplan [called](#) the speech "maddening"; and Jacob Weisberg [explained](#) the address's "overall limpness."

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## today's blogs

### **Dream Deferred**

By Christopher Beam

Tuesday, January 23, 2007, at 6:07 PM ET

Bloggers wax prophetic about the Oscar nominees and condemn the murder of Armenian editor Hrant Dink in Istanbul.

*Dream deferred*: The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences [announced](#) its Oscar nominations Tuesday. *Dreamgirls* drew eight nominations—more than any other film—but didn't get a nod for best picture. Meanwhile, *Borat's* up for best adapted screenplay, and Martin Scorsese has yet another crack at best director. Bloggers emit huzzahs, moans, and, of course, prophecies.

David Weigel at *Reason's Hit & Run* [isn't surprised](#) by much except the *Dreamgirls* snub: "Most people who still care about the Oscars will probably be happy with the nominations, as 1)*The Departed* was a huge hit 2)*National Lampoon's Redondo Beach Vacation* (a.k.a. *Little Miss Sunshine*) was also a hit and 3)black people don't watch the Oscars."

At VH1's **Best Week Ever** blog, Michelle Collins [feels](#) the hurt: "Was *Dreamgirls* cheesy? Of course. Over the top? How could it not be. But exciting and fun and dramatic and tear-jerking? Yes. Clearly, this is some sort of Hollywood backlash against 'good times.'" Rachel Sklar at the **Huffington Post's Eat the Press** is [shocked](#) by the shafting: "Wow, 'Babel' instead of 'Dreamgirls' in so many key places; the Oscar clip show is going to be intense and boring this year, with way too few sequins."

Sometime film critic John M. Scalzi at **By The Way...** provides [extensive analysis](#) of each category, including best director: "Look: Scorsese's *due*. Everyone knows it. And what's more, this year the stars are lining up for him. Fears isn't a serious threat because *The Queen* is not a serious contender for Best Picture. Eastwood already has two directing Oscars and (I suspect) would probably tell people to vote for Scorsese anyway, because what does he need a third for? And Alejandro González Iñárritu, good as he is, doesn't have the constituency Scorsese has. ... If Scorsese doesn't win, I will buy a hat and eat it." Melvin Crabtree at **Crabbie's Hollywood** [rips](#) into the best actress

nominees: "How boring is this? Meryl Streep, Judi Dench and Helen Mirren. Ugh. And Kate Winslet. If that chick were any duller she'd be Rachel McAdams. The only halfway exciting name in the bunch is Penelope Cruz."

TV comedy writer **Ken Levine** [offers](#) some pithy one-offs: "Diana Ross must've been on the nominating committee. ... If Eddie Murphy does win don't expect a repeat with NORBIT. ... Is this finally the year for Martin Scorsese to win Best Director? He's the perfect winner too because he's the only guy who can thank 47 people in under ten seconds."

[Read](#) more about the Oscar nominees.

*Turkey shoot*: Armenian newspaper editor Hrant Dink was [shot](#) dead in Istanbul Friday, after being prosecuted for challenging the Turkish government's take on the 1915 Armenian genocide. One gunman reportedly [confessed](#) to the shooting, while tens of thousands of mourners [surged](#) into the streets for Dink's funeral. Bloggers think the consequences could be grave.

Amos at Middle East group blog **Kishkushim** [sees](#) "two ways to read the recent murder of the Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink. Some fear that this is the beginning of an open season on those who, like Dink, challenge the ultra-nationalist vision of Turkey. On the other hand, the public and literary condemnations of the murder may also signal the self-assertion of Turkish liberals."

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan responded to the murder by announcing, "A bullet was fired at freedom of thought and democratic life." Michael van der Galien at the **Moderate Voice** [thinks](#) he's full of it: "[T]he Turkish government should honor Hrant Dink by getting rid of the ridiculous law that says that one is not allowed to insult the Turkish identity (which was used against Dink). Until that time I will simply regard Erdogan's words to be *hypocritical*."

**Little Green Footballs'** conservative Charles Johnson [complains](#) of a "media blackout" on the subject of the killer's motives: The press is "pushing the 'Turkish nationalist' angle in the assassination of Armenian editor Hrant Dink, as if 'Turkish nationalism' were completely unconnected to its Islamic roots."

Hugh Fitzgerald at the conservative **Jihad Watch** [considers](#) Dink's murder the last blow to Turkey's E.U. membership: "Call off the farce. And this should also be the time when the Bush Administration reads Turkey the riot act about Kurdistan, and starts to make plans for that independent state ... And if it doesn't accept that? Then Turkey, whose military is entirely dependent on American re-quipping, American spare parts, American training, can see that American connection go up in smoke from the top of Mount Ararat."

[Read](#) more about Hrant Dink's murder.

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## today's blogs

### She's In

By Laurel Wamsley

Monday, January 22, 2007, at 6:24 PM ET

Bloggers jump on the chance to be nonchalant about Hillary Clinton's announcement that she is running for president. They react skeptically to President Bush's proposal to tax employer-provided health benefits, and violently to a California assemblywoman's proposal to make spanking a crime.

*She's In:* With Sen. Hillary Clinton's utterly unsurprising announcement that she's forming a presidential exploratory committee, bloggers take a moment to consider how Hillary has changed since 1992 and whether she could be elected.

M.J. Rosenberg liked the style of her announcement, done on her Web site rather than at a press conference or late-night show. "Whoever came up with HRC's announcement strategy deserves real kudos," [praised](#) Rosenberg, who works in Washington on Israel-Palestine issues, at [TPM Café](#). "I like the way she downplays the whole thing. No drum rolls. No Bill. Nothing flashy. Just her on a couch talking to the people. ... I've always been skeptical of her chances but things are changing."

Ed at conservative [Captain's Quarters](#) was [less impressed](#) by the senator's vocal stylings. "No one seriously thought she'd take a pass, and all this does is confirm what everyone already knew. It's interesting that she committed this early, though. ... The early announcements ... by people like Barack Obama may have forced her into an early commitment."

Liberal [Matthew Yglesias](#) urges the blue masses to steel themselves against the GOP insult-o-rama that is about to kick into gear. "[B]efore Kerry was super-lame, there was Al Gore and he was ... super lame," he [writes](#). "And now here I am catching up on my Corner reading and look how personally unappealing Hillary Clinton turns out to be. ... No matter who it is the Democrats nominate, that person is going to wind up mocked as obviously the wrong the choice; obviously just an absurd person who absurd primary voters picked over dozens of more appealing choices."

As far as whether she can win, Kevin Drum at lefty blog [Political Animal](#) thinks she's got at least one [big advantage](#): "She has nowhere to go but up. Seriously. Every nasty thing that can possibly be said about her has already been said. ... Rush Limbaugh will spew his usual swill to the dittoheads, but for the most part all the old attacks will seem, well, old."

Read [more](#) about Hillary's first steps toward the presidency.

*No tax left behind:* In his State of the Union address Tuesday, President Bush will [outline](#) his idea for a "revenue-neutral" plan that would make employer-provided health insurance taxable and would use that revenue to give a tax break to those who buy insurance for themselves.

Conservatives like Optimistic Patriot wonder what the president is thinking by proposing a tax on working people. "Does he think raising taxes is a good way to bolster his flagging popularity?" he [asks](#) at [New England Republican](#). "His plan is to raise taxes on the 200 million or so Americans with employer sponsored insurance to help offset the costs of the 40 or so who don't. Giving up your steadfast support for lower taxes is not going to improve your administration's prospects, Mr. President."

[D-Day](#), a TV and film editor in Santa Monica, thinks the tax code is bearing [too much](#) weight: "The tax code is a blunt instrument, not a laser. ... This would amount to a tax on the middle class to pay for the health care of the poor, with the winners in our society absent from the exchange."

On the left, Ezra Klein, who writes frequently on health-care issues, finds himself [defending](#) the president's plan. "Bush is taking a tentative first step towards a traditionally progressive end: Making the health care system more equal, and untethering it from employers," he writes at the blog of the liberal [American Prospect](#), [TAPPED](#). "... If employer benefits cease being so subsidized, and their true cost and inefficiency comes clearer, the case for reform will strengthen."

Read [more](#) about Bush's proposed health-insurance plan.

*Spare the rod!* A Democratic assemblywoman in California has proposed a [law](#) that would make spanking young children a misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail or a \$1,000 fine.

The Artist at [Art of the Blog](#), a libertarian Texan, wants to [strike a deal](#) with the two parties: "the Nanny Left can have this law. Go ahead. Make spanking illegal. In return you have to let the Nanny Right have a law. Maybe it's sex before marriage is now illegal. ... How can either side not see that trying to run people's lives like this is anathema to everything America stands for?"

At [Summa Philosophiae](#), a site devoted to philosophy and the Scriptures, Susan comments that spanking is [too quickly defended](#). "Many Christians will quote the 'spare the rod' verse, or 'all discipline seems painful..' and so on and will justify spanking very young children with all sorts of rules and qualifications...", writes the mother of three. "When it comes right down to it, and if parents are honest, most spanking happens in the heat of the moment when the parent is annoyed."



This is nothing more than selfishness on the part of the parent and this is what the child learns: If you are annoyed with someone's behavior, strike out at them."

And Glenn Reynolds, the law professor at **InstaPundit**, blogged for libertarians everywhere with his [assessment](#): "I'd have more confidence in the California legislature's ability to run people's lives if it were better at running California."

Read [more](#) about California's proposed spanking ban.

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## today's papers

### Dead or Alive

By Daniel Politi

Friday, January 26, 2007, at 5:43 AM ET

The [Washington Post](#) leads with news that the White House has authorized the U.S. military to [kill or capture](#) Iranians who are believed to be working with Iraqi militias. President Bush approved the program last fall as part of a larger effort to prevent the spread of Iranian influence across the region. The [Los Angeles Times](#) leads with the way in which Muqtada Sadr has been [avoiding clashes](#) with U.S. and Iraqi forces in the past few weeks. His followers are participating in the Iraqi government and some officials from his party are even meeting with U.S. officials. The [Wall Street Journal](#) tops its world-wide newsbox, and nobody else fronts, the latest from Lebanon, where the army has [imposed a curfew](#) in Beirut after at least three people were killed in clashes that began at a university between those loyal to the government and Hezbollah supporters. This raises concerns the Lebanese government can't maintain any semblance of order, just as donors pledged \$7.6 billion in aid to help the country rebuild.

The [New York Times](#) leads with a look at the extent to which the Bush administration has used [secrecy](#) while defending its domestic eavesdropping program. Some lawyers and judges are starting to push back and say that much of the secrecy is unnecessary and ultimately impedes lawsuits objecting to the program from moving forward. The first appellate argument in the lawsuits challenging the program will begin Wednesday. [USA Today](#) leads with data that show [airline delays](#) reached a record high last year. By several measures the delays seem to be higher than in 1999 and 2000, when they were so frequent that lawmakers threatened to take matters into their own hands. Planes were delayed a total of 22.1 million minutes last year.

For the past year, military officials have been detaining Iranian "agents" in Iraq and then releasing them after a few days, which the Bush administration felt didn't go far enough. While some believe that hitting Iran hard in Iraq could dissuade the country

from pursuing nuclear weapons, others believe that angering Iran would put more U.S. troops and citizens across the region at risk. There have been no known uses of the new authority, which excludes diplomats and civilians, but the military has apparently been pressured to use it more aggressively.

There are several interesting tidbits throughout the [story](#), but the *Post's* Dafna Linzer leaves one of the best for the end. Two administration officials separately compared the Iranian government to the Nazis and Iran's Revolutionary Guard to the "SS." In addition, the officials used the term "terrorists" in talking about Guard members, which could make them targets in the "war on terror."

Everyone seems to be skeptical as to why Sadr decided to lay off confrontation for now. Some U.S. officials fear this could all be part of a strategy to lay low while the pressure is on, but the change of tone is undeniable. One of the leaders in Sadr's movements even endorsed President Bush's new plan for Iraq.

Over in the *Post's* op-ed page, Gary Anderson does a little role-playing and imagines how a [planner with Sadr's Mahdi Army](#) might react to Bush's Iraq plan. Anderson lays out a few possible courses of action, but the one he says would serve "long-term interests" involves stopping any visible attacks, and instead targeting U.S. and Iraqi troops through snipers and bombs. This would keep "our fingerprints off such operations because the Sunnis will probably do this regardless of what we do."

The *Post* fronts a dispatch from Baghdad that looks at the way many Iraqis see Iran's [influence](#) in their country differently from U.S. officials, who talk only about military involvement. The two countries have a burgeoning commercial relationship, and many citizens of both countries feel a kinship to their neighbor. "The economic power between the two countries, it's enormous," said Iran's ambassador to Iraq, who refers to Americans as "the others." (*TP* assumes he didn't mean to make a reference to *Lost*, even if some similarities are quite striking.)

The *LAT* and *WP* front, while everyone else reefs, the latest from the Scooter Libby trial. Yesterday, Vice President Cheney's former spokeswoman testified she told Libby that Joe Wilson's wife worked at the CIA [days before](#) he supposedly first learned of Valerie Plame's identity from a reporter. The former spokeswoman also revealed Cheney was in charge of the effort to discredit Wilson. The *Post* puts the straight news story inside but fronts a [Dana Milbank](#) column that looks at the way in which yesterday's testimony "pulled back the curtain on the White House's PR techniques."

Everybody mentions Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's announcement that the administration will ask for \$10.6 billion in [aid for Afghanistan](#), which is more than what the *Post* reported [yesterday](#).

USAT fronts an interview with Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who confessed she [misses](#) Sandra Day O'Connor and the lack of another woman on the bench makes her feel "lonely." Ginsburg recognized that "this is how it was for Sandra's first 12 years" but noted "neither of us ever thought this would happen again. I didn't realize how much I would miss her until she was gone."

The NYT fronts, and the LAT goes inside, with a new study that reveals [smokers](#) with a specific brain injury can immediately stop puffing without getting any cravings. One man described how his body "forgot the urge to smoke." Researches hope this will help them develop more efficient treatments for smokers who want to quit.

The LAT's Rosa Brooks\* was convinced there was a [secret message](#) hidden in the State of the Union address, but she couldn't figure it out. Then she decided to watch a Baby Einstein DVD, and it all became clear: "It was a cartoonish world of puppetry and sleight of hand, simplistic language, frequently repeated words, soothing imagery. And it meant nothing, nothing at all."

**Correction, Jan. 26:** This article originally identified the writer of the *Los Angeles Times* column on Baby Einstein products and the State of the Union address as Ruth Marcus. The writer is Rosa Brooks. [Return](#) to the corrected sentence.

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## today's papers

### Cheney in Wonderland

By Daniel Politi

Thursday, January 25, 2007, at 5:30 AM ET

The *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *USA Today* lead, and the *Wall Street Journal* tops its world-wide newsbox, with the Senate foreign relations committee approving a [nonbinding resolution](#) that declares the administration's plan to send more troops to Iraq is "not in the national interest." The resolution was approved 12-9, with only one Republican, Sen. Chuck Hagel voting with the Democrats. Although the vote numbers might make it seem like the committee was divided, in fact, most senators agreed the plan was not a good idea but many Republicans disagreed with the strategy or wording of the resolution. The *New York Times* leads with a look at how some big states are likely to move up their presidential primaries to make them more relevant. This shift could lead to fundamental changes in the way presidential campaigns operate.

Both the NYT and WP [emphasize](#) in the lead that the Senate foreign relations committee vote came a day after President Bush asked Congress to give his plan a chance. The full Senate

could vote on the resolution next week. But now there's another contender in the resolution race, this one put forward by Republican Sen. John Warner of Virginia with several Republican co-sponsors. Although the resolutions are largely similar, the LAT does the best job of pointing out [the differences](#). Warner's resolution doesn't automatically discount all troop increases in Iraq, stating that the 4,000 planned for Anbar province may be necessary. It also does a thorough job of recognizing the president's power as commander in chief, which could go a long way in gathering support from Republican senators.

California, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey are currently considering moving their primaries earlier in the calendar year. Since these are some of the most expensive (and expansive) media markets, it would force candidates to gather enough money and support to compete. The conventional wisdom is that this move would make the first, smaller, states a little less relevant and benefit those candidates with big clout and deep pockets, although some disagree. Experts are still analyzing, but as a Democratic consultant tells the paper, "The nominating process in 2008 is not a little different. It's fundamentally different."

Whatever the senators end up voting on, it won't much matter to the administration, Vice President Cheney told CNN yesterday. Most of the papers include Cheney saying Congress "won't stop us" but the *Post* goes a step further and fronts a [separate story](#) that looks at the whole interview. Apparently everyone is wrong about Iraq. According to Cheney, although "there's problems" in Iraq there's also "been a lot of success." Cheney challenged CNN anchor Wolf Blitzer throughout the interview and accused him of wanting "to bail out." The vice president said many in the media, along with several lawmakers, want to "write off" Iraq and "declare it a failure." The paper notes the vice president's attitude was very different from that expressed by Bush at the State of the Union address (video available [here](#)). Cheney wasn't only angry about Iraq, he also got a little peeved when Blitzer asked him about his daughter's pregnancy.

In other Iraq news, the LAT fronts a large picture of the latest offensive by U.S. and Iraqi forces into Baghdad's Haifa Street, where they were attempting to push out militias. As the *Post* reminds readers high in the story, a fight took place in the neighborhood [two weeks ago](#). Like before, some neighborhood residents accuse U.S. troops of [helping Shiite militias](#) by driving Sunnis from their homes.

The LAT goes inside with an interesting dispatch from one of the paper's local journalists, who describes what he had to deal with as he carried out some [errands throughout the day](#) in Baghdad before heading to work. Unlike most of these pieces, this isn't one of those intense stories of how an everyday situation turns tragic. It's interesting precisely because it talks about how doing everyday things has become complicated, even when there isn't a

bombing or kidnapping. It illustrated that even when it isn't directly seen, violence is always present in Iraq.

The *Post* fronts word from sources who say the Bush administration is working on a series of new initiatives to [help Afghanistan](#) as it anticipates a new offensive by the Taliban this spring. The White House will ask Congress for about \$7 billion to \$8 billion to help pay for more security, as well as an increase in reconstruction work, which would mark a significant increase in the amount of money dedicated to helping Afghanistan. As opposed to Iraq, most Democratic lawmakers want the United States to increase its commitment to Afghanistan.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office released a report on the federal budget yesterday, saying the budget deficit will fall this year and could disappear by 2012, and the papers illustrate how one story can be covered in two strikingly different ways. The *Post* takes a tongue-in-cheek attitude toward the [announcement](#) (published on A11), stating right in the lead that "virtually nobody—not even top CBO officials—believes it." That's because the CBO estimates make a lot of assumptions about such things as tax cuts and the cost of war, that everyone knows won't hold up. The *NYT*, on the other hand, doesn't ignore the problems with the estimate, but still decided to put the story on [Page One](#).

The *NYT* fronts an interesting look at what can happen when science meets the [news cycle](#) by examining the way research into the sexuality of sheep turned into some predicting it could lead to the "breeding out" (as the *Sunday Times* put it) of homosexuality in humans. Despite assurances to the contrary, the researchers and their university began getting tons of protests. The paper waits until nearly the end of the story to point out how researchers often have to talk about potential human applications when writing their grants or in conversations with reporters to make their work more interesting, which might be worth a deeper look since that seems to be a large part of the problem.

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## today's papers

### A Modest Proposal

By Daniel Politi

Wednesday, January 24, 2007, at 6:22 AM ET

All the papers lead with the State of the Union address, where President Bush urged bipartisan support for what the *New York Times* calls "a modest agenda" [on domestic issues](#) and asked lawmakers to give his new plan for Iraq a chance to work. *USA Today* says Bush spent "[less than half](#)" of his speech talking about domestic-policy issues, mainly education, energy, tax breaks (or increases) for health insurance, and immigration. All

the papers note the changes on Capitol Hill were evident last night from the beginning of the address when the president congratulated the Democrats and noted he had the "high privilege and distinct honor ... as the first president to begin the State of the Union message with these words: '[Madam Speaker](#).'"

The *Washington Post* notes that as opposed to Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton, both of whom [admitted mistakes](#) when they faced a Congress where their parties had lost in midterm elections, Bush "appeared unchastened last night and took no responsibility for his party's defeat or errors in office." But the politically weak president wasn't as ambitious as he has seemed in the past during this annual event. As the *NYT* [notes](#), the address "was limited in ambition and political punch at home." The *Los Angeles Times* sums up the theme of the speech nicely with its [headline](#): "Bush Seeks Compromise, Except on Iraq Strategy."

Speaking of Iraq, Bush recognized the changing nature of the conflict and declared, "This is not the fight we entered in Iraq, but it is the fight we are in." The *NYT* notices the president's justification for being involved in Iraq has [changed](#) quite a bit since he gave the address four years ago. Now it focuses on trying to prevent the violence in Iraq from spreading to other countries in the Middle East. Almost recognizing this change, Bush insisted to lawmakers that "whatever you voted for, you did not vote for failure." (*Slate's* [Fred Kaplan](#) says Bush's statements about the war "were at best puzzling, and at worst, maddening.")

Today, the Senate foreign relations committee is expected to approve a nonbinding resolution opposing Bush's plan to send more troops to Iraq.

There wasn't much new in the address. Everybody notes the [biggest piece of news](#) to come out of last night—and, remember, this is all relative—was a call to decrease gasoline consumption in the United States by 20 percent by 2017. He proposed to do this by increasing fuel efficiency and promoting alternative fuels. The *Post's* Steven Mufson does a good job of putting the energy proposals into context and [notes the 20 percent reduction](#) Bush mentioned is of "*projected* annual gasoline usage, not off today's levels." Although Bush talked about dealing with "the serious challenge of global climate change," he focused on transportation when it's, in fact, "other parts of the economy" that are responsible for two-thirds of greenhouse gases.

Even though the White House tried to talk up the energy part of the address, the *Wall Street Journal* points out that "achieving its goals rests on the uncertainty of technological breakthroughs and the administration is promising relatively little money to subsidize" the shift. The *LAT* notices "contradictions" in Bush's [energy plans](#) and quotes Rep. Henry Waxman, who said the

proposals were "the latest in a string of disappointments from this administration."

Bush also urged Congress to approve a change in immigration law, which the *WSJ* points out, has a [greater chance](#) of passing now that the Republicans are no longer in control of Congress. Despite this greater possibility, the *LAT* [notes](#) that there were no details or specifics in the president's proposals, which "did little to advance the debate, leaving it to Congress to work out a solution."

In a blunt piece of analysis, [McClatchy](#) says Bush's "proposals were mostly familiar, and on energy, notably small-bore."

The papers describe the Democratic response given by Sen. Jim Webb as "blunt" and "forceful." The [freshman senator](#) talked about his family's history of military service and accused Bush of leading "a mismanaged war." He also criticized Bush's economic policies and talked of the growing gap between the rich and poor in the country and said the middle class "is losing its place at the table." Webb emphasized Democrats are willing to work with the president as he leads the way to change economic and foreign policy. And he [warned](#) that if Bush fails to take the initiative "we will be showing him the way."

The *LAT*, *NYT*, and *WP* all front the trial of I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, and they all focus on how the defense tried to portray him as a "scapegoat." Libby's lawyers contend the White House wanted to [blame Libby](#) in order to save Karl Rove, who was viewed as essential for the Republicans. Although everyone agrees this will likely be an important point in the trial, the *NYT* notes up high that the defense [did not make clear](#) what kind of connection exists between these allegations and the charges Libby faces of making false statements to the FBI and perjuring himself before a grand jury. *Slate's* John Dickerson [notes that the trial](#) "has opened a window into an administration that in 2003 was deeply at war with itself."

All the papers note five [security contractors](#) were killed yesterday in Iraq, four of whom were aboard a helicopter that crashed. It is still unclear whether the helicopter was shot down, but it is the second time in less than a week that Americans died as a result of a helicopter crash. According to the *Post*, the military announced the death of [three U.S. servicemembers](#) yesterday.

Also yesterday, the nominee to be the next top commander in Iraq, Army Lt. Gen. David Petraeus, told senators he is [confident](#) the new military plan can work and emphasized the "situation in Iraq is dire" although he made sure to say it is "not hopeless."

The *NYT* fronts a dispatch out of Baghdad that amounts to a progress report on the Iraq parliament, where lawmakers are still finding it [difficult](#) to convene because, most of the time, there is

no quorum. The paper reports that "nearly every session since November has been adjourned" because most lawmakers don't show up for work even though they receive salaries and benefits worth about \$120,000, which seems like a ridiculously large sum for Iraq.

Everyone notes that Hezbollah and its allies in Lebanon surprisingly and quickly took control of major roads across Lebanon to enforce a strike that aims to [topple the government](#). The *Post* [calls it](#) "the most dramatic escalation yet in the two-month campaign led by Hezbollah."

The *Post* fronts the death of E. Howard Hunt, the former CIA employee who organized the [Watergate break-in](#). Other highlights of his career include involvement in the overthrow of the Guatemalan president in 1954 and being the planning director for the group of Cuban exiles who tried to overthrow Fidel Castro via the Bay of Pigs.

The *NYT* notes the death of [Ryszard Kapuscinski](#), a Polish writer. Kapuscinski spent his career reporting on conflicts in the developing world. His intense narrative style that gave readers a unique view of current events in some of the most remote parts of the world garnered him a wide international audience. He was 74.

**The British are coming!** Everyone notes that the nominations for the Oscars were announced yesterday. *Dreamgirls* led the pack with [eight nominations](#), but not for best picture, which is very rare (according to the *NYT*, "it is the first film in many decades" to be in this situation). *Babel* got seven nominations. In a Page One article, the *LAT* notices there will be a big foreign angle to this year's award show because several of the pictures nominated take place [overseas](#). Also, many of those nominated are not from the United States. Most notably, four out of five of the women up for the best actress Oscar are not American.

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## today's papers

### State of the Union: Irate

By Joshua Kucera

Tuesday, January 23, 2007, at 4:22 AM ET

Almost everyone leads with a preview of tonight's State of the Union address, and all the stories have pretty much the same angle: President Bush is less popular now than at any point in his presidency and so has little political capital with which to advance his agenda. The *New York Times* off-leads that story and gives its top spot to an [analysis](#) of how Hillary Clinton's decision to pass up public money for her presidential campaign could be the "death knell" of the public campaign-financing system.



Three new polls have Bush's overall approval rating ranging from 28 percent to 35 percent. The surveys have all sorts of eye-popping numbers: According to the [Washington Post/ABC poll](#), 51 percent of voters *strongly* disapprove of Bush's performance. In the [Wall Street Journal/NBC poll](#), 65 percent of voters say they want U.S. troops out of Iraq in the next year.

The White House remained unbowed. From the [NYT](#): "George W. Bush as a president," spokesman Tony Snow said, "is not somebody who is going to cease to be bold." This unceasing boldness is beginning to reach historic proportions, several of the papers note. Only Jimmy Carter has had a worse rating in the [NYT](#) poll. The [Post](#) goes back further: "Only twice in the past six decades has a president delivered his annual speech to the nation in a weaker condition in the polls—Harry S. Truman in the midst of the Korean War in 1952 and Richard M. Nixon in the throes of Watergate in 1974."

The cause of the unpopularity, of course, is Iraq, and the [USA Today](#) [lead story](#) focuses on how key Republicans are abandoning Bush on that front. Sen. John Warner of Virginia, a leading voice on defense issues, endorsed a resolution yesterday opposing the troop increase in Iraq. The [NYT](#), [WSJ](#), and [WP](#) stuff that story.

The [Post's](#) [lead](#) looks at how Bush may try to use his relatively popular domestic agenda to reach out to Congress, focusing on issues like health care, immigration, and education. The [Post](#) says "bold ideas" could also be in the offing on energy and the environment, but it doesn't know what they'll be. They won't, the [Post](#) says, include caps on greenhouse-gas emissions but could be a boost to ethanol or raising gas-mileage standards. It notes Iraq may have already so poisoned the political atmosphere that consensus will be difficult to reach even on domestic issues.

The [Journal](#) has a good front-page [story](#) on industry officials beginning to recognize that global warming is in fact caused by human activity, and angling early to influence the legislation that they feel will inevitably regulate greenhouse-gas emissions. Most industrialists favor a pollution permit market, believing that gives them the most flexibility.

Sen. Clinton's decision to forgo public financing in favor of more lucrative private donations was made "quietly," says the [NYT](#), and "little noticed," said the [Post](#), which also [fronts](#) a similar story. Well, someone noticed: The [Los Angeles Times](#), in a [story](#) on Monday's front page. Everyone notes that both Barack Obama and John McCain may also eschew public money.

Only the [NYT](#) [fronts](#) the massive car bombs in a Shiite market in Baghdad yesterday, which killed at least 88. The [Post](#) fronts a good [story](#) by ace military reporter Tom Ricks on the strategy of the new top general in Iraq, David Petraeus. The story is chock full of details of Petraeus' plans, from unnamed "military planners and officials familiar with [his] thinking." Highlights

include a greater importance placed on protecting the population than on fighting bad guys, and placing more U.S. soldiers outside of megabases and in Iraqi neighborhoods. The [NYT](#) has an evocative [look](#) at how that latter plan may work—in one unit's stroll around its new neighborhood, the soldiers are shot at three times in an hour. Still, it's too early to say if it will pay the expected dividends in gaining the trust of the population and gathering intelligence on enemies.

The [LAT](#) takes a skeptical [look](#) at the evidence behind claims by the Bush administration and intelligence officials alleging that Iran is funneling sophisticated weapons to insurgents in Iraq. In a front-page story, the paper says that the claims made in Washington don't always jibe with what commanders in Iraq say, and that the United States has refused to provide any documentation of Iranian weaponry, while often releasing photos of other seized ordnance. And the Iranians [say](#) that, in fact, the chaos is crossing the border from Iraq into Iran, that ammunition and "illegal equipment" is moving into Iran.

Everyone notes that one of the top officials in the recently deposed Islamist government in Somalia [has turned himself in](#) in Kenya.

**Does a glue gun work in zero gravity?** Martha Stewart has rendered her judgment on the décor of the International Space Station, [USA Today](#) [reports](#). In a segment on her television show to be aired today, "Stewart noted later that there are limited options for spiffing up the station, whose interior is a jumble of computers and research gear. 'You can't hang curtains. Everything has to be tied down,' she pointed out. 'It could be, maybe, modernized a little bit and made a little more sleek inside.' " She also empathized with being cooped up and having to eat institutional food. " 'I know just as well as anybody that for five or six months, you can get along with a limited diet,' says Stewart, who spent five months in federal prison for lying about a stock sale. 'You just have to go with the flow, I'm sure.' "

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## today's papers

### Deadly Pretenders

By Daniel Politi

Monday, January 22, 2007, at 5:05 AM ET

The [Washington Post](#) leads with word that the deadly attack in the city of Karbala, Iraq, on Saturday was carried out by a group of men who traveled in a convoy and apparently [disguised themselves](#) as Americans using U.S. military uniforms and badges. Adding two Marines that were killed in Anbar province Sunday, at least 27 U.S. servicemembers died in Iraq over the weekend, including 12 as a result of a helicopter crash Saturday. [USA Today](#) leads an interview with President Bush where he

said there are [no guarantees](#) that all U.S. troops will be out of Iraq by the end of his presidency. "We don't set timetables," he emphasized. Continuing with a frequent theme, Bush said he'll tell Americans in his State of the Union speech that "what happens in Iraq matters to your security here at home." The *Wall Street Journal* tops its worldwide newsbox with Bush promoting tax deductions for those who buy health coverage outside of the workplace during his radio address Saturday. The plan also calls for workplace health care to be counted as income, which would be taxable.

The *Los Angeles Times* leads with word that situations in Iraq and Afghanistan have forced the U.S. military to greatly reduce its efforts to [detect and stop](#) illegal drug shipments from entering the United States. For example, the Pentagon has decreased the amount of time it spends doing surveillance flights over some key drug routes by more than 62 percent. The *New York Times* leads with an unsurprising look at how intense the [campaign for the White House](#) has become even though there's still "a full year before the first vote is cast." Most of this stuff has been reported before: how it's the first time in more than 50 years that there's no presidential or vice presidential incumbent, the way candidates need more money than ever, how this all makes it harder for an unknown candidate to get any attention, etc. The paper mentions that all the talk of presidential campaigns so early in the game will make it more difficult for Democratic leaders to highlight their successes in Congress.

In addition to being disguised, the men who attacked the base in Karbala also drove vehicles generally used by foreigners. As the *NYT* notes inside, it's not uncommon for insurgents to disguise themselves as [Iraqi security forces](#), but this appears to be the first time they impersonated U.S. troops. Once inside, the attackers targeted Americans and were able to kill five before driving away. Military officials said they're still investigating the attack in Karbala as well as the helicopter crash.

During the 27 minute interview with *USAT*, the president emphasized that problems in Iraq won't prevent him from [tackling](#) "big domestic issues." Besides health insurance, Bush will apparently talk about old favorites such as education. In addition, the president said he'll (once again) talk about alternative energy and vowed to pressure for a "bold initiative that really encourages America to become less dependent on oil." Bush also said he is willing to sit down with Democrats to discuss the future of Social Security with "no preconditions."

The Department of Defense defended its decision to decrease its involvement in the war on drugs, saying it is "a lower priority than supporting our service members on ongoing combat missions." The Coast Guard and various Homeland Security agencies have been trying to make up for this shortage, but officials recognize they don't have the necessary resources.

Everybody notes New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson is the latest Democrat to announce his plans to [run for president](#). Richardson would be the first Hispanic president. The *Post* points out that Richardson joins other "second-tier candidates" like Sens. Joseph Biden of Delaware and Christopher Dodd of Connecticut.

The *Post* fronts, and the *NYT* reefer, Sen. Hillary Clinton's first public event after declaring that she's running for [president](#), where she touted a piece of health-care legislation at a Manhattan health-care clinic. It was an understated affair, but the papers mention that it gave a glimpse of how Clinton will likely focus on her experiences as a lawmaker and a mother during her campaign.

The *NYT* off-leads a look at the way in which Theodore Kaczynski (the Unabomber) is trying to lay claim to his more than [40,000 pages of writings](#) to allow the public to read them in their original form. The government wants to sell "sanitized versions of the materials" on the Internet to raise money for four of the Unabomber's victims. But Kaczynski has begun a legal battle where he cites the First Amendment to argue the government cannot take control of his writings and therefore cannot sell or change them.

*USAT* mentions inside that Sen. Jim Webb of Virginia, who will deliver the Democratic response to the State of the Union, is in favor of [cutting off funds](#) to rebuild Iraq and, instead, use the money to pay for recovery related to Hurricane Katrina. According to Webb: "How can we keep sending billions of dollars over to Iraq and not fund a really energetic effort to help places like New Orleans?"

The *LAT* fronts a look at how, despite their initial fears, the new Democratic Congress hasn't been so bad for [businesses](#). Lobbyists from big businesses are having no trouble meeting with important lawmakers and getting their voices heard. And more significantly, it seems this lobbying is working because several businesses were able to get important concessions from Democrats as the lawmakers worked on their 100-hour plan.

The *Post* goes inside with word of [growing tensions](#) between House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and several of the Democratic members over her management style, which many characterize as overly aggressive. Among other complaints, some say she's not being hard enough on Iraq, while others claim she made a mistake by not giving Republicans more say in legislation. The *Post* predicts this friction is likely to increase as House members move away from their popular legislation that had no problem passing and start dealing with more controversial issues.

**Back to the interview ...** After Bush affirmed he had read about Lyndon Johnson's experience in Vietnam, the *USAT* reporter, David Jackson, asked whether there were any [important lessons](#) from that time. "Yes, win. Win, when you're in a battle for the security ... if it has to do with the security of your country, you

win." After emphasizing that his legacy "will be wrtten long after I'm president," Jackson asked whether Bush saw himself as a possible Truman. Bush replied: "I've got two years to be president. I guess people with idle time like yourself can think about this. I've got a job to do, and I'm going to do it."

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## today's papers

### Hillary's Everest

By Jesse Stanchak

Sunday, January 21, 2007, at 6:36 AM ET

The *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* each lead with Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton announcing her intention to run for President. While Sen. Clinton is technically only launching an exploratory committee, the papers all treat it as the official start of her campaign, understandable since the sound bite from her announcement video is "I'm in and I'm in to win." The *New York Times* fronts [Hillary](#), but leads instead with reports that the Pakistani government may be [aiding a resurgent Taliban](#).

Everyone points out that Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., announcing an exploratory committee last week may have forced Clinton's hand. The papers all argue Clinton had to act now to keep potential donors from defecting to Obama's ranks, as billionaire philanthropist George Soros did last week. The *WP* reports that Clinton's announcement was timed to undercut next week's State of the Union address. All the papers call Clinton the presumptive primary frontrunner, before adding all the usual caveats about Clinton's chances in a national race, her slimmer profile in several early primary contests and the generally [unpredictable nature of presidential primaries](#). The *NYT* plays up the divided loyalties of former President Clinton staffers, donors, and supporters who'll have tough choices to make in the months ahead. For the *WP*, this angle is a separate story, focusing on Illinois Democratic Rep. Rahm Emanuel, the mastermind of the Dem's congressional takeover last fall, who got his start in Bill Clinton's Whitehouse, but has a longstanding friendship with Obama. The *WP* also teases inside features on Hillary's support from [women voters](#) and on the [technical prowess](#) of her Web site. Sen. Clinton's announcement came the same day that Sen. [Sam Brownback](#), R-Kan., [announced](#) his candidacy and one day before New Mexico's Democrat Gov. Bill Richardson is expected to add his name to the list of presidential wannabes.

The *NYT* claims that Pakistani intelligence agents are collaborating with Taliban forces in the border province of Quetta, while Pakistan naturally denies that this is so. The paper acknowledges, however, that its evidence for this is anecdotal and the report does hinge on unnamed and vaguely described sources. It's also unclear exactly what aid the government may be giving the Taliban, whether it's direct support or just a policy

of leaving well enough alone in the border provinces. The paper's argument hinges on Pakistan's history of supporting militant religious movements as a way of maintaining control in remote areas, along with the present fears of some locals that Pakistani intelligence officers will punish those who oppose the Taliban. The paper makes a good case for the subject's importance, but there's no smoking gun yet and the lack of specificity in the report is frustrating, if understandable. Still, *TP* can't help but wonder if maybe this story needed more time, or if another piece would have been better suited for the top spot.

The *WP* and the *LAT* each off-lead, while the *NYT* fronts, the third-deadliest day for U.S. troops in Iraq, with at least 19 soldiers killed. The bulk of the troops perished in a helicopter crash, which the *LAT* and the *NYT* say killed 12, while the *WP* is presumably working from an early report that counted 13 men aboard. Though the military is saying the cause of the crash is under investigation, the *LAT* reports that the helicopter was downed by insurgents using a rocket or some other ground-based weapon. The *WP* tells a similar tale, but admits that the single hearsay account it has of the event cannot be verified independently. The *LAT* reports that the deadliest day yet was Jan. 26, 2005, which saw 37 dead, including 31 from a helicopter crash. The *WP* counts 164 soldiers dying in similar crashes since the beginning of the war.

The *NYT* [off-leads](#) (and the *LAT* [teases](#)) with a preview of a new health-care initiative President Bush intends to propose in his upcoming State of the Union speech. Under the plan, health benefits received from an employer could be taxed if coverage exceeded a certain amount in order to pay for a tax credit for those who pay out-of-pocket for insurance. Democrats are nonplussed.

A staggering array of business interests have cropped up around treating diabetes, [reports](#) the *LAT*, turning the disease into an \$8 billion-a-year industry. As one source puts it: "From a business perspective, diabetes is the perfect disease ... consume tons of disposable products, and there is no cure. It is a license to print money."

Under the fold, the *NYT* [predicts](#) that New Orleans will settle at about half its pre-Katrina population. But this may be in the city's best interest, the paper says, since the majority of people not returning after the storm are poor and/or jobless, making the town's economy more sustainable without them. Still, some residents are worried that a smaller town will have a smaller cultural footprint.

The *WP* [reports](#) that President Bush was at the forefront of crafting the troop surge strategy for Iraq, taking a hands-on approach to the plan while disregarding the opinions of some of his most trusted advisors.

How did an avowed [socialist](#) get elected to the Senate in this day and age? Let *NYT Magazine* tell you all about it in their delightfully tongue-in-cheek profile of Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt.

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## today's papers Lust and Marriage

By Ryan Grim

Saturday, January 20, 2007, at 5:16 AM ET

The [New York Times leads with](#) the outline of new oil legislation in Iraq that would give wide powers to the central government over contracts and revenues. The [Washington Post](#) has the Supreme Court's decision to rehear campaign-finance arguments in its lead slot. The [L.A. Times leads with](#) the introduction of a bipartisan bill to move California's primary to February 2008 in order to boost the state's clout. The *NYT* fronts a large photo of [people mourning a popular Armenian editor](#) assassinated Friday. The [Wall Street Journal](#) mentions the oil bill, the arrest of a Muqtada Sadr aide, and friction between Democrats and Bush over Iraq atop its worldwide news box.

[The NYT piece has one](#) laugher in it—the oil law "would appear to settle a longstanding debate"—but otherwise thoroughly lays out the positions of the relevant parties. The Kurdish region has been independently negotiating contracts and exploiting its oil reserves, occasionally [without bothering to tell the central government](#), let alone get approval or share revenue.

They have little interest in changing that situation and only agreed to the deal, perhaps, because "in Iraq's chaotic wartime environment, even laws that do get passed can have little impact," as the *Times* puts it. (*TP* might ask if that could be a workable definition of a "failed state.")

George Will must be pleased that the Supremes [will be revisiting the McCain-Feingold campaign-finance reform](#). (*TP* puts the [over-under](#) for number of columns he [wrings out of it](#) at 2 and a half.) The central reform of the legislation is at issue: Can interest groups mention the name of candidates in "issue ads" that are exempt from the legislation's restrictions? The law says no, as did the court three years ago. But that was before swing vote Sandra Day O'Connor was replaced by a less-swinging judge, Samuel Alito Jr. A ruling is expected before the 2008 presidential primaries.

If California [moves its primary from June to February](#) a number of issues—climate change, healthcare, immigration, weed-smoking—would be raised in profile. The bill has the support of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who has previously vowed to up California's influence on the national and global stage.

The intense cost of campaigning in California—a *Times* source puts it at \$6 million to \$8 million per candidate—could dim the hopes of shoestring candidates, while boosting Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, who raise money when they sneeze.

How's [this for chutzpa?](#) An increasing number of companies' executives are getting busted stealing money from shareholders by backdating their stock options. Lock 'em up? Not hardly. Instead, the *WSJ* reports above the fold, companies are taking away the stock options but giving executives bonuses to make up for the loss.

Speaking of chutzpa, the [WSJ has an A2 analysis](#) of the upcoming State of the Union address that concludes: "Odds are he wants this time to prompt the Congress—and the country—to start thinking beyond Iraq to what he clearly sees as the next big problem. And that lies next door in Iran." [The NYT fronts a complementary](#) piece in which the new chair of the Senate intelligence committee, Democrat John Rockefeller IV, calls the idea of attacking Iran "bizarre."

"To be quite honest, I'm a little concerned that it's Iraq again," he's quoted saying, adding that a coming report from his committee on the administration's failure to heed CIA warnings about possible disintegration in Iraq is "not going to make for pleasant reading at the White House."

The slain Armenian editor, Hrant Dink, had previously been charged by Turkey for anti-Turkish remarks. That's still a crime in Turkey, which continues to officially deny the Armenian genocide of World War I. It is undeniable, [yet the Times gives the issue](#) the he-said-she-said treatment, absurdly reporting Turkey's historically, factually, and morally indefensible position that "the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Armenians resulted from hunger and other suffering in World War I." That is not a difference of historical interpretation; it is a lie. (*Editors' note: "Today's Papers" writer Ryan Grim erred in his analysis of the Times' piece. Contrary to the Slate assertion, the Times treats the Armenian genocide as fact, not historical interpretation. The newspaper's decision to mention the Turkish government's official stance—that "the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Armenians resulted from hunger and other suffering in World War I"—does not amount to an acknowledgment of that view's legitimacy. Slate has decided not to alter the original text, since doing so would be more confusing to readers than explaining the error.*)

The [arrest of a top aide to Shiite cleric Muqtada Sadr](#) came just in time to be denounced in Friday prayers throughout Shiite areas of Iraq. Sadr is a high-ranking government official and ally of Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki. The *LAT* reports that it was unclear if Maliki knew or approved of the raid. Sadr, who controls several ministries and the largest and most stable section of Baghdad (Sadr City), is a prime target of President Bush's surge, which is intended to stabilize Baghdad. Got that?



The city edition of [the NYT leads with](#) the coming closure of 21 parishes in New York mostly due to undercrowding issues.

The *LAT* fronts a piece on the bagged-greens industry, focusing on a method of processing that increases risks of spreading veggies contaminated by E. coli across the country. The industry surely won't like this quote from Michael Doyle, a food-safety expert recently hired by Taco Bell to review its safety guidelines: "I quit eating bagged lettuce years ago," Doyle said. "After seeing how bagged lettuce was harvested and prepared, my impression was it's not very sanitary."

For fans of HBO's drama *Rome*, *WSJ* has a chat with a [Caesar historian on the show's accuracy](#).

**And speaking of Roman orgies ...** When is prostitution not prostitution? When it's marriage, of course. But a common problem associated with marriage is that it lasts, you know, for a pretty long time. (*TP* got hitched last weekend and is definitely not referring to his own marriage.) The *Post*'s Nancy Trejos, in a story [you have to read to believe](#), reports that Shiites in Iraq are developing a solution to this problem—which, again, is certainly not a problem for *TP*.

Some Shiites are apparently arguing that Islam allows for an unlimited number of "mutaa relationships"—temporary marriages—as long as you're a man. The relationships seem to involve little more than sex and the exchange of money. "According to Shiite religious law," writes Trejos, "a mutaa relationship can last for a few minutes or several years." Now that's thinking of everything.

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## war stories

### He Still Doesn't Understand the War

Bush whiffs on Iraq again during the State of the Union.

By Fred Kaplan

Wednesday, January 24, 2007, at 12:31 AM ET

What a dispiriting State of the Union address! So many disasters, so little time left to repair them, so few insights into what caused them or what to do about them now.

President Bush may not have felt obligated to discuss Iraq in detail, having laid out his new plan in prime time less than two weeks ago. But to the extent he talked about the war, his words were at best puzzling, and at worst, maddening.

For example, the president did nothing to clarify the "surge"—the deployment of 20,000 more U.S. combat troops over the next few months. It's unclear whether even this administration believes in the plan or knows how it will work. The new defense

secretary, Robert Gates, has said in recent days that the surge might be needed only through the summer, after which withdrawals might begin. However, at hearings this morning before the Senate armed services committee, Lt. Gen. David Petraeus, the new commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, stressed the need for patience. The new troops will need time to get to Iraq; more time to understand the neighborhoods they'll be securing; more time to conduct operations and secure the area; and still more time to build on the security. These tasks, he said, will be "neither quick nor easy."

So which is it: a brief blip, as Secretary Gates assures us—or a very long haul, as Lt. Gen. Petraeus sternly warns?

"I ask you to give it a chance to work," the president (uncharacteristically) pleaded tonight. In service of this support, he proposed to set up a "special advisory council on the war on terrorism, made up of leaders in Congress from both political parties," to "share ideas for how to position America" to meet today's challenges and to "show our enemies abroad that we are united in the goal of security."

The thing is, there already are advisory councils. They're called the congressional committees on foreign relations, armed services, and intelligence. President Bush had his chance with the ideas of a bipartisan council, the Iraq Study Group headed by James Baker and Lee Hamilton. He dismissed them out of hand. Now he has to deal with the normal constitutional arrangements. That's democracy.

What is most head-shaking of all is that, after four years of this war, the president once more fell short of making its case. As in the past, he said that it's very important—"a decisive ideological struggle," he called it, adding, "nothing is more important at this moment in our history than for America to succeed." And yet he also said that America's commitment to the war is "not open-ended." How can both claims be true? If nothing is more important, it must be open-ended. If it's not open-ended, it can't be all that important.

One reason he can't argue for it is that it's not clear he understands it. "The Shia and Sunni extremists are different faces of the same totalitarian threat," he said. "Whatever slogans they chant ... they have the same wicked purpose. They want to kill Americans, kill democracy in the Middle East." He still seems to view the ever-mounting violence as reflecting a struggle between good and evil, freedom and tyranny. He fails to grasp the sectarian nature of the fight. (Does he really believe that the Shiites and Sunnis are the same—or that, besides the small minority of al-Qaida, they're "totalitarian" in nature?)

He then said, "Americans can have confidence in the outcome of this struggle because we are not in this struggle alone. We have a diplomatic strategy that is rallying the world to join in the fight against extremism."

This is mind-boggling. The largest "coalition" partner, Great Britain, plans to pull out by the end of the year. Most of the others have long since vanished. There is, clearly, no "diplomatic strategy," no "rallying" to recruit others to the fight. A diplomatic strategy and energetic leadership are precisely what everyone is waiting for. They are what President Bush once more failed to offer tonight.

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