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Advanced Search

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

books

The Perfect Novel You've Never Heard Of

Rediscovering Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Paramo*.

By Jim Lewis

Monday, March 10, 2008, at 7:17 AM ET

It's a very strange book; let me admit that at the outset. It's as primitive and uncanny as a folk tale, plain-spoken but infinitely complex, a neat little metaphysical machine—one of those small, perfect books that remake the world out of paradox, like *Waiting for Godot*, or *Nadja*.

When it was first published in Mexico City in 1955, it received a few tepid notices and sold poorly. Its author was 37 at the time, or 38. (No one seems to know for sure when he was born.) He was from Jalisco, near Guadalajara, and he'd published one mildly interesting collection of short stories a few years earlier. I suspect no one knew what to make of the new book, since it was entirely unlike—well—anything else. Perhaps the critics were astounded into silence; more likely, they were puzzled and a little bit blind. As for the author, he went silent and never wrote another book, though he lived on for more than 30 years, long enough to see himself credited with the invention of an entire movement, to see his only novel sell millions of copies, to receive mash notes from Nobel Prize winners.

In Latin America, he eventually came to be considered canonical, a master of modernism, but here in the United States, his reputation remains curiously split between those few who adore him and the many who have never heard of him. When I mention to people that I'm reading his book again (I've read it five or six times in the past few years), I invariably get one of two responses. A few will announce that it's one of their favorite books, but the majority will say, "*Pedro* ... what? By Juan ... who?" And to these latter I'll explain: *Pedro Paramo* by Juan Rulfo. A very great novel.

It begins, "I came to Comala because I had been told that my father, a man named Pedro Paramo, lived there. It was my mother who told me. And I had promised her that after she died I would go see him." First person, past tense, a perfectly lucid and concise setup. It doesn't last long. As the narrator—his name is Juan Preciado—approaches the outskirts of town, he's joined by a burro driver who mentions that Pedro Paramo is his father, too; together they enter town, and everything changes.

To begin with, Comala seems half disintegrated, like a newspaper that's been left out in the rain; and the people who live there are melancholy and diffident. A woman, a man, a priest: They're given names but left otherwise undescribed. They bring Preciado into their homes, but their homes are empty, and all the time they talk and talk, telling stories about the town, its history, its sorrows and scandals, and most of all about Paramo. They all have stories about Paramo, a bad man, a cacique, a rapist, a thief.

Peculiar things start to happen on the page, things I've never seen in a book. The tenses switch back and forth, past to present and back again, sometime in the space of a single paragraph, until time itself becomes senseless. The stories begin to refract,

shatter, and rebuild; pronouns multiply—I, he, she, you, stumbling over each other. Dialogue and thoughts are left unattributed. The perspectives shift from internal to external and back again, from Preciado to Paramo to Paramo's childhood love, Susana San Juan. "This town is full of echoes," one character says. "It's like they were trapped behind the walls or beneath the cobblestones. When you walk, you feel like someone's behind you, stepping in your footsteps. You hear rustlings. And people laughing. Laughter that sounds used up. And voices worn away by the years." And why? Because—the reader realizes this about the same time Preciado does—all these people are dead.

Soon enough (very soon, for the entire novel is only 122 pages in the English translation) Preciado is dead as well—from grief, it seems, or fright—but the book just keeps going, sustained by the babble of ghosts. They speak in unattributed dialogue, interrupting one another, overlapping, addressing one another; and every so often the fog of voices lifts, and a third-person narrator, clear as a 19th-century novelist, steps in—though in context his voice is every bit as disorienting as the others. Out of this babble emerge tales of love, of cruelty, of poverty and misfortune, of the revolution and the succeeding Cristero Revolt; and then Pedro Paramo is killed by one of his many bastard sons—Abundio, the burro driver from the beginning—and, just like that, the book is done.

Very strange, as I say; and yet one never suspects that Rulfo is being willfully elusive, or mannered, or gratuitously obscure. His work is built on an intricate lattice of time and space, but it doesn't seem planned so much as grown, something natural, inevitable, efficient, and effortless. All its paradoxes are innate. For example: It's the most morbid book I've ever read, since all of the living are dead; but it's also one of the most vivifying, since all of the dead are still living.

Rulfo himself died of lung cancer in 1986. We know a little about him—not very much. He was famous enough in his own lifetime to attract scholars and biographers, but private and mischievous enough to enjoy vexing and misleading them. We know this: that he was born to a well-to-do family in a small town southwest of Guadalajara and raised in the wake of the revolution. When he was 6, his father was killed by bandits; two years later, his mother died of heart failure. He was educated in an orphanage, a bookish child—"I spent all my time reading," he said, "because you couldn't go out for fear of getting shot"—who became a somewhat reclusive adult, at once retiring and proud. Something like Wallace Stevens, it seems: the peculiar genius with a day job. Rulfo worked for the Mexican government, then as a tire salesman for Goodrich, then, after his two slim volumes were published, as a bureaucrat again. He wrote a few scripts for television and films, and he was a dedicated amateur photographer; but his career as a novelist was done.

His reputation, though, was just beginning. In Mexico, as elsewhere, social realism was the inevitable companion of political upheaval. It was what you got until someone figured out how to make art again. Rulfo was that someone, and what he began was an entirely new style: a kind of rural modernism, eclectic in its influences (Knut Hamsun was one of Rulfo's heroes, and he once expressed an affinity with Faulkner) but specific enough to its time and place that it transfigured generations of Latin American literature.

Here's what Carlos Fuentes said: "The work of Juan Rulfo is not only the highest expression which the Mexican novel has attained until now: through *Pedro Paramo* we can find the thread that leads us to the new Latin American novel." And when Gabriel Garcia Marquez first arrived in Mexico City in 1961, a friend pressed a copy of *Pedro Paramo* on him; he read it twice that night and so often thereafter that, he has said, "I could recite the whole book, forwards and backwards." Moreover, he acknowledges, "The examination in depth of Juan Rulfo's work gave me at last the way that I sought to continue my books." And thus was Magic Realism born, although, in truth, Rulfo's own book is more diabolical than magical and more phenomenal than real; and, more importantly, none of his descendants are like him at all.

The '60s passed, then the '70s. There was supposed to be another book on the way, but that may have been a ruse on Rulfo's part. "I am not a professional writer," he once said. "I write when I feel like it." Apparently, he felt like it less and less, for when he died, little of the rumored second novel was found.

I was steered to *Pedro Paramo* by writer Ruben Martinez. (Thank you, Ruben.) I read it and then read it again almost immediately, and then again, and then again; I was trying to reverse-engineer it, but I never did figure out quite how it works. At the same time, I couldn't understand how Rulfo had escaped my attention for so long; it was like happening on a new primary color, entirely unlike any I'd seen before. But then I read something else Marquez had to say. He, too, didn't know Rulfo's name until he was given the book; he, too, was surprised. How could a book be at once so admired and so obscure? "Juan Rulfo," he said, "to the contrary of what happens with the great classic writers, is a writer whom one reads a lot, but of whom one speaks little."

Well, yes: So I have spoken about him a little and about his book a little more. He would have been 90 this year (or 91), and where are the celebrations in his honor? You'd think the author of *Pedro Paramo* had become one of its characters: a melancholy and slightly mysterious man, long since passed away, a voice from the grave with a story to tell, which he speaks with an insistence that only madmen, masters, and the dead can maintain.

chatterbox

A Shonda for the Quakers?

What does Eliot Spitzer have against George Fox?

By Timothy Noah

Monday, March 10, 2008, at 10:09 PM ET

Eliot Spitzer is known as "Client 9" to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. To prostitutes, though, he was [known by the alias "George Fox."](#) If the "companions" available via Emperors' Club VIP were anywhere near as sophisticated as [its Web site promised](#), then they likely recognized New York's high-profile governor. Even if they didn't, Spitzer's choice of pseudonym was kind of rude. [The real George Fox](#) is a somewhat hallowed figure in the annals of Christian faith. He founded the [Religious Society of Friends](#) (aka the Quakers) in England during the mid-17th century.

Fox was imprisoned repeatedly for his beliefs. Then his faith was dragooned into [selling oatmeal](#). Then Jimmy Stewart made fun of the way Quakers talk in *The Philadelphia Story* ("[Dost thou have a washroom?](#)"). Then Richard Nixon, one of their own, spurned their pacifism by ordering [the Christmas bombings](#). Now this indignity is visited upon the long-suffering Quakers. In considering his political options, Spitzer may still have friends. But I doubt he has any Friends.

Update, March 11, 2008: George Fox, the *New York Times* [reports](#), is the name of a donor and friend of Spitzer's. Told that the governor registered under his name at the Mayflower, this George Fox said, "That is the first I have heard of it." George Fox, the founding Quaker, who died 317 years ago, was unavailable for comment.

In other news, Spitzer [lent his name](#) five years ago to a special citation "for academic and personal excellence" at ... Brooklyn Friends School!

corrections

Corrections

Friday, March 14, 2008, at 10:53 AM ET

In the March 12 "[Culturebox](#)," Linda Hirshman stated that the name of the charitable organization started by Silda Spitzer is Children to Children. The organization's name is Children for Children.

In the March 12 "[War Stories](#)," Fred Kaplan called Thomas P.M. Barnett a professor at the Naval War College. He is no longer at the college.

In the March 11 "[Politics](#)," Jeff Greenfield misspelled the name of Macomb County, Mich.

In the March 10 "[Moneybox](#)," Daniel Gross wrote that high-end escort services advertise in *New York* magazine. *New York* stopped accepting such ads on Jan. 1, 2008.

In the March 10 "[Jurisprudence](#)," Emily Bazelon incorrectly identified Sudhir Venkatesh as an anthropologist. He is a sociologist.

In a March 10 "[Politics](#)," Chadwick Matlin stated that Barney Frank announced he was gay after it was revealed his personal assistant was running a prostitution business from Frank's home. Frank had come out publicly before then. Also, Frank lived at 8th Street SE at the time, not Corcoran Street NW, as the article originally asserted.

In the March 7 "[Press Box](#)," Jack Shafer erred in referring to a perpetrator being "charged with a civil complaint." No one can be charged with a complaint, only served. He also mistakenly stated that all copyright infringement cases are civil cases. Willful copyright infringement is a criminal offense.

In the introduction to the March 7 "[Today's Pictures](#)" gallery, Magnum Photos incorrectly stated that James J. Reeb was killed before the Selma-to-Montgomery, Ala., march. He died of injuries inflicted during the march.

In the Feb. 28 "[Explainer](#)," Michelle Tsai attributed dropped r's among upper-class New Englanders to the fact that the region's original settlers came from England. That's only one theory; some evidence suggests most British speakers were pronouncing their r's during settlement times.

In the Jan. 25 "[Explainer](#)," Nina Shen Rastogi stated that, with Israel's 2005 disengagement, the Gaza Strip came "completely under Palestinian administration." Airspace and coastal waters, however, remained under Israeli control.

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

culturebox

The Silda Spitzer Lesson

Don't quit your day job.

By Linda Hirshman

Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 12:19 PM ET

Wife again standing mutely at his side, Eliot Spitzer resigned from his office as governor of the state of New York. When Spitzer's wife, Silda, called Hillary Clinton for advice on how to be a good first lady a few years ago, she probably didn't realize how horribly relevant the connection would be. Now, another blond deer caught in the headlights standing by her man rotates endlessly on our TV screens while pundits like Dr. Laura debate whether she was good enough in bed and saner voices implore the public not to blame the victim.

Everyone is asking what he could have been thinking: Gary Hart, Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich, David Vitter, all caught, all paying a price—many a very high price. The guy had a perfect law-school test score. Don't they teach reasoning by analogy at Harvard Law School? But why not ask the same question about her? She went to Harvard, too. Eleanor Roosevelt, Jacqueline Kennedy, the first Mrs. Gingrich on her hospital bed. Silda Spitzer could not have been ignorant of the history of alpha-male politicians; she called Hillary herself. What could she have done? What can any woman do?

How about this: Don't quit your day job.

Silda Wall Spitzer was the poster child of the "opt-out revolution." A magna cum laude graduate of Harvard Law School, she was one of the highest-billing associates at the incredibly successful mergers and acquisitions law firm Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom. Later, she went to the office of the general counsel of Chase bank. But sometime in the 1990s, like many of the other women of her class, she decided to "opt out," to quit her job, in her words, as her husband began his electoral career to devote herself to raising their three daughters and to her philanthropies. [She](#) helped start the Children for Children Foundation, which teaches rich children social responsibility for the poor.*

It all looked so perfect—the beautiful, beautifully educated blond Upper East Side mom teaching the rich children at their private schools to share the lavish sums normally spent on their birthday parties instead of her working all night in the Skadden, Arps conference room doing deals. The exquisitely mannered Southern WASP smoothing the rough edges of her less refined husband (whose table manners were the subject of negative commentary in her *New York Times* profile a year or so ago) instead of counseling Chase in how to sell more variable mortgages. Who wouldn't envy her privilege, wealth, insulation

from harsh competition, and proxy power of her high-flying husband's position? *Real Housewives of New York City*, indeed.

What happened? Like all revolutionaries, the opt-out revolutionaries often wind up bleeding on the barricades. Sure, all marriages don't end in the arms of an international prostitution ring. Indeed, in the Spitzers' social class, the divorce rate is far from the 50 percent we so often read about. However, the rate of divorce, prostitution, online pornography, and the rest isn't negligible, either. And even if the marriage does not break up, women's decisions to make their social position completely dependent on the ambition, discipline, judgment, and steadiness of another human being is not only an act of extreme self-abnegation, it risks the very dramatic fall we have just witnessed in the Spitzer matter. Does anyone think that even as well-heeled a divorcée as Mrs. Spitzer would be the same force in philanthropic Upper East Side circles as the governor's wife?

It is true that Hillary Clinton managed to make lemonade out of her situation. But that ending is the rare exception to the narrative that is likely to describe Silda Wall Spitzer's social fall. And it pays to remember that Clinton was a mere six years away from her employment as a partner at the Rose Law Firm and a mere three years away from being the lead player in the first round of national health care when Bill took up with the intern. When she restarted her separate life, campaigning for the Democrats in 1998, she was offering more than her decade with a children's birthday-party philanthropy. Her steely resolve in face of Bill Clinton's depredations did not hurt her, but it was not the only asset she had.

Of course, the women who quit their jobs to tend their alpha-male husbands' ambitions could just hire a private detective to follow him around all the time. But I think I'd prefer the mergers and acquisitions practice myself.

Slate V looks at the art of the political confession:

Correction, March 13, 2008: *The original article incorrectly stated that the name of the charitable organization started by Silda Spitzer is Children to Children. The name of the organization is Children for Children. (Return to the corrected sentence.)*

dear prudence

He Wears the Skirt in Our Relationship

My husband has taken to cross-dressing for fun. Should I discourage him?

Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 7:12 AM ET

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

Dear Prudence,

Since last Halloween, I've been wondering about my husband. We dressed him up as a bride, and he made quite an attractive woman for our age (60)—almost no one recognized him. I had the lady at my salon do his nails, hair (wig), and makeup. He is a joker and doesn't take life seriously, and we had a ton of fun. My girlfriends and I talked him into staying in character all weekend as a woman and had a barbecue on Sunday with a group of our friends. Since then, my girlfriends love having "her" accompany us during our outings, lunch, and golf. He seems to be enjoying it more and more and is always interested in the next get-together. He sees it as a harmless prank and a challenge to pull off. He is not effeminate in any way when not in character and never has been. His male friends tease him but also think it is a riot.

—Should I Worry?

Dear Should,

I hope your husband looks better than Rudy Giuliani during his [cross-dressing forays](#). I myself tried to pass as a man for [this Slate piece](#) and found the experience both fascinating and disturbing. I happily retired my jockstrap after a single outing. Clearly, you were in on and enjoyed your husband's debut—after all, Halloween is about trying out alternate identities. But now that it's almost St. Patrick's Day, it's perfectly understandable that you're wondering when the outings with "Mildred" are going to end. His enjoyment of this new hobby doesn't necessarily say anything about his sexuality, but it sounds as if it is beginning to destabilize yours—especially if when you go get dressed, you find he's wearing your favorite Wonderbra. You're asking me if you *should* worry, but only you know if you *are* worried and feel the joke has gone on too long. If it has, tell your husband that for your sake, it's time he gave up being one of the gals.

—Prudie

Dear Prudence Video: Lusty Boss

Dear Prudence,

My wife and I have been married for more than a decade and have two young children. Recently, I have suggested ideas aimed at spicing up our sex life. These are not wild suggestions, and they involve just us. (For example, I have seen couples on TV have sex with the woman sitting on a running washing machine. Like I said, nothing overly wild.) My wife always responds that she's not interested. However, it's the reason she gives that gets to me. "I did it with someone else before I met you. It wasn't that great." I have an issue with the fact that she was willing to do these things with another man and is unwilling

to do them with her husband. I have expressed why this hurts. Her response is to laugh it off and say something like, "You had your chance before you met me. You should have done it then." I'm not complaining about the number of times we have sex. It's just that I am having difficulty dealing with her unwillingness to do with me things she did with other men. What should I do?

—Wanting More Spice Than Just Salt

Dear Wanting,

Your letter raises a number of issues: When your wife was single, did she have sex on the washing machine at the laundromat? When you suggested washing-machine sex, did you first offer to put in a load of whites? I can understand your frustration. Your wife's response to your request that you add some variety to your lovemaking ("I did that with Sven—in 1983") borders on marital malfeasance. Frankly, she should be glad that you want to pour the cayenne on her and are not looking to spice up your life by spending the equivalent of a mortgage payment [in Room 871 at the Mayflower hotel](#). And her notion that trying something different to keep things interesting is not part of married life—well, does she eat the same dinner every night, wear the same clothes every day? Since you've brought up sex directly and been rebuffed, try another approach. Say that with all your daily obligations, you two are in a rut and suggest a romantic weekend away. These weekends tend to result in more uninhibited sex, and if that happens, tell her how much you desire her and how you still feel you two can explore sexually together. If she is not responsive to the weekend suggestion ("I told you, I already had kinky sex with Oswaldo in my senior year of college"), then you should explain that this is so important to you that you would like a third party (for therapy, not a threesome) to help you two work it out.

—Prudie

Dear Prudence,

My parents are divorced, and my father remarried several years ago. Every time we visit with them, my father's wife comments that she'd like to have my two young sons visit on their own during the summer, which gets the boys excited about the idea. Although I'd like nothing more than to have some quiet, alone time with my husband, I have some issues. For one, both of them use marijuana daily. I need advice on how to tell them that this invitation, however appreciated, will not come to fruition, and it's not OK for them to invite the boys directly or, for that matter, even mention it when they are within earshot. We do love them, illegal habits aside. So how do I say no without pushing them away?

—Avoiding the Issue

Dear Avoiding,

Unless on the first day of school you want your boys to say about their summer, "And I learned to use a bong!" you will

keep them from ever being unsupervised with their grandparents. The way you address this with your father and stepmother is to say, "We love you, but you have a serious, illegal drug habit. I hope you can stop, but until you do my children will never spend time alone with you. I don't want to have to explain to my kids why they can't stay with you, so if you persist in suggesting in front of them that they visit on their own, we are all going to have to stop coming."

—Prudie

Dear Prudence,

I spend a good amount of money on things (clothes, books, toys) for my niece and nephew. My intention was that they use them until they grow out of them, and then I would get them back for my future kids. Every time I give new items, I politely remind my sister-in-law that I would "please like this back." Since my niece was born three years ago, I have been given only one item back. I have since discovered that she sells most of the things her kids outgrow. I understand they need to sell them to afford new clothes, but I am not made of money, either. How do I remind her that I want things returned, other than writing "Aunty wants this" on each piece?

—Not Made of Money

Dear Not,

There's nothing more gracious than giving a gift with "Aunty wants this" scrawled across it. Re-gifting is a useful and economical practice, but you've taken it to a new level: un-gifting. Since your sister-in-law is busy raising two children, she doesn't have time to keep track of what outgrown toys or clothes to return to you for your yet-unconceived children. If you resent the amount you spend on gifts for the kids, then give them less. But when you give, consider it gone.

—Prudie

Dear Readers,

Last week, [a woman wrote in to complain](#) about her unromantic fiancé. As evidence, she cited the box of wine and garlic bread he gave her for Valentine's Day. Many perceptive readers wrote to chide me for missing the fiancé's literary allusion. His gift was a reference to the [Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam](#): "A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou." Here's to garlic-scented romance!

—Prudie

did you see this?

Reporter Pummeled by Interviewees

Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 3:03 PM ET

dispatches

A Terror Tour of Israel

The human problem.

By Nathan Hodge and Sharon Weinberger
Friday, March 14, 2008, at 7:23 AM ET

From: Nathan Hodge and Sharon Weinberger
Subject: The Ultimate Mission

Posted Monday, March 10, 2008, at 1:46 PM ET

JERUSALEM—The tourists still haven't come back to Israel, despite the aggressive rebranding campaign ("[Hot Israel](#)") and the photo spread in *Maxim* magazine ("[Women of the Israel Defense Forces](#)").

The country had even gone a year without a single suicide bombing, but our garrulous taxi driver was complaining as he drove us from the Ben-Gurion airport to the Sheraton hotel in Jerusalem. "Now, it's mostly religious travelers—evangelical Christians and religious Jews," he said.

True to the driver's word, we arrived at the Sheraton to find the lobby crowded with Orthodox Jews celebrating the Sabbath. We had arrived in Israel neither as religious pilgrims nor as traditional tourists: We had signed up for the [Ultimate Counter-Terrorism Mission](#), a weeklong journey around the country during which we would learn about Israel's battle with terrorism. The trip was aimed at U.S. police officers and homeland-security professionals.

For Israel's tourism industry, the new millennium has not been kind. In 2000—what should have been a [banner year](#) for tourism and pilgrimages—the number of visitors to the Promised Land plummeted. The Second Intifada [kicked off](#) after the failure of the Oslo negotiations and former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount, keeping most tourists away. In an even worse signal to visitors, Israel's minister of tourism, [Rehavam Zeevi](#), was shot dead by Palestinians in October 2001. While the people with fanny packs began trickling back between 2003 and 2005, a series of suicide bombings and rocket attacks kept most casual tourists away. Then came the 2006 war in Lebanon, and the Israeli tourism industry tanked again.

So, what can a country do when its tourist industry is eclipsed by terrorism? The answer, it seems, is to market terrorism to tourists. In perhaps one of the strangest twists of Middle East politics, terrorism is being used to lure visitors back to Israel. Our itinerary—which promised participants such highlights as

an "observation of a security trial of Hamas terrorists" and briefings on "the realities of Israel's policy of targeted killings"—was not, at first glance, for the casual visitor. But in a way, it was. Israel has a long tradition of combining tourism and lobbying. Most famously, former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon [gave a helicopter tour to George W. Bush](#) during his 1998 trip to Israel while Bush was still governor of Texas. The two hit it off, and the visit is widely credited with reinforcing Bush's sympathy for Israel's security situation.

Who goes on a terror tour? At the bar on the first evening at the hotel, we sat next to George and Joan Kessel, a retired couple from Boca Raton, Fla., who were trying—with little success—to tell the bartender how to [mix a Gibson](#). "We just finished a mission at [Technion University](#)," said Joan, a stylishly dressed woman with her silver hair cut in a modern bob. "That one was really good."

We had never heard of the term *mission*, but we soon learned it is a generic word associated with organized trips to Israel. Typically, the trips—often aimed at Jewish Americans—are meant to educate the visitors on some aspects of Israeli politics or culture. In a sense, the Ultimate Counter-Terrorism Mission, rather than an aberration, is the logical extension of what Israel has done for decades: bring over Jewish Americans and other potential supporters in the hopes of demonstrating how vulnerable the country is to internal and external threats.

"We started organizing this a few years ago when tourism dropped off," said Avi Leitner, a lawyer with [Shurat HaDin Israel Law Center](#), an Israeli organization that sues terrorist organizations and countries on behalf of victims of terror attacks. But this year's tour was different; previous trips organized by Shurat HaDin were aimed at the regular tourist, featuring evening cruises, cookouts, and "luxurious bus transportation." This year's tour, organized with a Long Island-based homeland-security firm, [Shaneson Consulting Group](#), was aimed primarily at law enforcement.

Our group was what could only be described as eclectic. While police officers, for whom the tour was tailored, dominated the group, we also had the Kessels, a homeland-security contractor, a former dentist, a retired ophthalmologist, and two bounty hunters. Perhaps the most famous of our tour companions was [Richard Marcinko](#), the pony-tailed ex-Navy SEAL turned best-selling writer who was there as part of his security business, [Red Cell International](#). For the next week we would travel around Israel, including parts of the West Bank, in a massive tour bus, with a sign clearly marked "Ultimate Counter-Terrorism Mission" on the windshield—something that elicited more than a few snickers from the security-conscious members of the group.

If Israel has not always been able to convince the world of its righteousness, it has been particularly adept at marketing its

image abroad as a military powerhouse with superior technology. Israeli armaments manufacturer [Rafael](#) likes to advertise "60 years of experience in the war on terrorism." Even [Krav Maga](#), the martial arts form taught to Israeli soldiers, has found sweeping success in the United States with aerobics buffs. That image—partially dented by the [failures of the Second Lebanon War](#)—was on display throughout the tour. Indeed, part of the idea of the tour was to market Israeli hardware such as the [Corner Shot](#), a gun mount with a video monitor that allows assault teams to shoot around corners. But even the souvenir shops displayed the fetishization of the Israeli military. The shops were filled with T-shirts featuring military slogans ("Guns 'n' Moses"; "America, don't worry—Israel is behind you"). Our favorite souvenir was for sale at the gift shop of the Latrun military base: an IDF doll that played "We Will Rock You."

The days were packed full of visits to military bases, security briefings from members of [Mossad](#) and [Shin Bet](#), and stops for fine dining. In the evenings, we had additional lectures that gave us a James Bond image of Israeli operations. In an evening lecture at the hotel, Oren Ben-Lulu, a veteran of [Duvdevan](#), an Israeli commando unit that specializes in undercover work, described the intricate charades these units stage to arrest their suspects. Commandos would go into the West Bank disguised as Palestinians, sometimes even working in drag. Ben-Lulu, who stood more than 6 feet tall, joked that the "younger, better-looking guys" are assigned this job. Duvdevan even employs a well-known Israeli makeup artist to help.

Ben-Lulu, who is now an orthopedic surgeon, even recalled some of the more comical episodes from his career, which sounded like outtakes from *La Cage aux Folles*, not combat operations in an occupied territory—for instance, snatching a suspect at a wedding. "After the second wedding, we stopped doing it, because it's not very nice," he said. "You are ruining their wedding, actually."

Funerals, he said, were still fair game.

The whole point of this tour was to sell the Israeli model of counterterrorism. But as skilled as the Israelis are at this, it's hard to imagine U.S. troops dressing in drag to arrest terror suspects in Iraq. Perhaps when the United States gets to that point, it'll mean it has been there too long. Yet Israel, which finished 2007 without a single suicide bombing originating in the West Bank (and only one from Gaza), was claiming at least partial success. So, is it something worth emulating?

As we boarded the bus in the afternoon of our first day, Yossi Maimon, our tour guide, made an announcement. Ninety minutes earlier there had been a [bombing in Dimona](#), Israel's first suicide attack of the year.

From: Nathan Hodge and Sharon Weinberger
Subject: *Law & Order: IDF*

Posted Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 7:49 AM ET

OFER MILITARY BASE, West Bank—On the other side of the wire-mesh fence, Palestinian men and women lined up, waiting to attend the trials of family members. "Don't take pictures," said Avi Leitner, one of our tour organizers, reprimanding the group. "They're not animals."

For the average law-abiding American, knowledge of the criminal-justice system is largely formed by television. Unless you've got a law degree—or have been arrested—your knowledge of [Miranda rights](#), body-cavity searches, and court procedures is usually drawn from episodes of [The Wire](#) or perhaps reading news of Paris Hilton's latest arrest. But as part of our counterterrorism tour, we were being given a step-by-step (or bus-stop-by-bus-stop) introduction to the Israeli military justice system.

Military courts were set up after the 1967 [Six-Day War](#), when Israel took control of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, and the Golan Heights. The courts fall under the military commander for the region who makes the laws, appoints the judges, and sets up the judicial procedures.

The Ofer court, which has jurisdiction over a portion of the West Bank, is housed within a small trailer park on a dusty military base west of Ramallah. It's a simple setup: seven trailers, seven courts, with Trailer 3 reserved for appeals. There is no separate juvenile system; those under 18 [are tried in the same courts as the adults](#). Our tour group was ushered inside one trailer, where a proceeding was about to get underway.

For the court workers, it must have been a strange sight: a group of American tourists crowded inside the peanut gallery, with Leitner providing a running translation of the court proceedings. "He's a famous Palestinian lawyer," he whispered, pointing to the robed defense attorney, who was running his hands over blue prayer beads as he exchanged small talk with the judges and the prosecutor. "He only represents terrorists."

One man's terrorist is another man's petty criminal. The first suspect, who entered with his legs shackled, was accused of smuggling weapons and drugs across the border from Jordan; a second defendant, brought in a few minutes later, was accused of keeping weapons without a permit. In fact, many of the cases brought before the court are not terrorism-related; petty crime and illegal border crossings (to find work in Israel) are two of the most common offenses. That said, terrorism-related offenses have also surged over the last seven years. Since 2000, Israel's

total prison population has ballooned to 23,776 inmates, a growth of 248 percent.

In fact, most of what we were witnessing in court that day were discussions over scheduling (no small matter, since the dockets were booked up six months ahead). The proceedings had an improvised feel, an impression aided by the ramshackle trailer setting. On the Israeli side, everyone looked almost comically young: The prosecutor was wearing stylish glasses and tight pants, her dark, curly hair pulled back into a ponytail. The three judges lined up along the back could have passed for junior clerks in a U.S. court.

The approach to justice here is not quite Guantanamo Bay, but neither is it *Law & Order*. One thing, however, is similar to the television series: "Settle the case" is a common rejoinder in the military courts. "A tremendously high number of cases are plea-bargained," said Maj. Menachem Lieberman, a military judge at Ofer military base.

Israel's military-court system is attacked on many grounds, including [the high rate of plea bargains \(more than 95 percent\) and low rate of acquittals \(fewer than 1 percent\)](#). One of the most serious concerns is that many of the cases are built on confessions—later retracted in court—that are given to interrogators from [Shabak](#) (better known as [Shin Bet](#)), Israel's domestic-security agency.

Israeli military courts, [like the U.S. military](#), are still wrestling with how to use information gleaned from interrogation. The courtrooms are to a certain extent open—the Israeli press and some members of the families of the accused often attend—but the prosecution can request that the courtroom be closed and that the transcript be sealed when a Shabak member testifies.

Lieberman, for his part, said he preferred to keep the doors open, allowing interrogators to testify behind a curtain. "The judge sees him, the defendant—who anyway knows what he looks like—gets to see him," he says. "But the people in the court itself, the bystanders, they won't see him, that's fine."

At another stop on the tour, we were introduced to Haim Ben Ami, a former head of interrogations at Shin Bet. He strolled across the stage like a movie director explaining a difficult scene to his audience.

"There's no way to convince a person in an interrogation to make a confession only with a polite way of talking," Ben Ami said with a wave of his hands. "It should be something that forces him to this corner. ... He should suffer somehow."

The United States may now be grappling with [questions of water-boarding and enhanced interrogations](#), but in Israel, these

issues have been around for years. Torture is [illegal in Israel](#), but also like in the United States, the difference between torture, enhanced interrogation, and run-of-the-mill interrogation [is up for debate](#). As Ben Ami put it, "One box is torture? One smash is torture? Kick his balls once, it's torture? Twice, it's torture? Let's talk about it."

Ben Ami likes stories and has a flair for drama. Asked by a member of our tour what he would do if his own daughter's life were at stake, he tapped his prosthetic leg, noting that he had already been a victim of a terror attack (a grenade was thrown at him). But Ben Ami's best stories are about times when it might be useful to torture terrorists, like in the case of a pair of terrorists captured while crossing into Israel to set off a bomb in Tel Aviv. They were tortured during interrogation and gave up information on their comrades. Then what?

"So, I made a suggestion," Ben Ami said. "After the interrogation, we should bring these two guys back to the water, we put their head in water—bloop, bloop, bloop!—and let them float to Dead Sea. In the morning, two bodies in the Dead Sea, it happens."

Ben Ami's story, it turns out, was made up, a scenario meant to provoke discussion. Like a good TV show, it was often hard to tell where Ben Ami's stories crossed over into fiction. In his own version of a "ripped from the headlines" story, he recalled giving a lecture to law students at Harvard at the invitation of well-known professor [Alan Dershowitz](#). He recounted to the students Shin Bet's involvement in delivering a suspected terrorist to the U.S. Embassy in Lebanon in 1983. The Israelis, Ben Ami said, had knowledge of a planned attack on the United States, but they knew no details. As Ben Ami recalled, the Israelis told the Americans: "Take him, make an interrogation, and we wish you success."

Except the suspect wouldn't talk. "He said: 'Look, I wish to talk, but I'm very tired. I'd like to fall asleep for at least two hours.'" The suspect was taken, at his request, to a nearby apartment to sleep. The next day, the embassy was destroyed.

The story is a powerful argument in favor of torture—or at least enhanced interrogations—except for one problem: Like Ben Ami's other story of the drowned terrorists (and most stories involving a "ticking time bomb"), it's apocryphal. It never happened. Real life is never that clean-cut. Ben Ami, however, forgot to reveal that to the Harvard law students.

Realizing his mistake later that day, Ben Ami panicked. "I called Alan Dershowitz and said, 'It's wrong.'" As Ben Ami recalled, Dershowitz told him not to worry: "He said, 'No, it's a good story, leave it.'"

From: Nathan Hodge and Sharon Weinberger
Subject: Won't You Not Be My Neighbor?

Posted Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 6:51 AM ET

CHECKPOINT ELIYAHU, Israel—At first glance, Checkpoint Eliyahu looks like a tollbooth on the New Jersey Turnpike. Westbound traffic is backed up for a few hundred yards in the late afternoon rush; a few trucks are pulled over for spot inspections. But look closer: The tollbooth attendants are carrying M4 carbines, a concrete pillbox looms over the highway, and there is no E-ZPass lane.

Call it what you want—temporary security measure, border crossing, segregation wall—Checkpoint Eliyahu is part of the emerging geography of Israel and the Palestinian territories. The checkpoint, which straddles the highway between the West Bank towns of Qalqilyah and Nablus, is the perfect vantage point for viewing [Israel's security fence](#), the defining feature of this new landscape. Israel began fencing off areas of the West Bank in the summer of 2002, claiming a legitimate defense against infiltration by suicide bombers and other violent attacks. A visit to the fence is now a mandatory stop on any roadside tour of the Holy Land.

We had picked up our guide, Capt. Noa Meir, outside Qalqilyah, the small Palestinian town at the edge of the West Bank that has become one of the most dramatic examples of the wall. Qalqilyah was not simply walled off from Israel. Because of the location of Israeli settlements to the north and south, the Palestinian town was quite literally fenced in. Residents of the city, who once had extensive commerce with Israelis, aren't just separated from Israel; they are separated from the world.

Meir, a U.S.-born Israel Defense Forces spokeswoman, escorted our group over to the military watchtower that looms over a section of the wall outside the town. "The people defending us are not very happy we're here," she said. "There can be sniper fire." She distributed copies of "Israel's Security Fence: Defending Innocent Civilians From Terror," a brochure crowded with statistics and talking points. ("[T]he land used in building the security fence is seized for military purposes, not confiscated. ... [S]pecial arrangements have been made for Palestinian farmers separated from their lands. ... The security fence, whose only function is to provide security, does not seal off the West Bank.")

From Qalqilyah or Tulkarem, the western edge of the West Bank, it's only about 10 miles to the Mediterranean Sea. Yet

standing within spitting distance of an Arab town—one that elected a Hamas mayor, no less—clearly makes some members of our tour group uncomfortable, sometimes to comedic effect. We suddenly notice that Yossi Maimon, our tour guide and history lecturer, had a [Mini-Uzi](#) draped behind his back. One of the U.S. security consultants knelt nonchalantly in the dust. ("Don't want to be a sniper target," he explained to us later.) As we walked down the road, we half-expected someone to cry out, "[Serpentine, Shel! Serpentine!](#)"

We rode with Meir to Checkpoint Eliyahu, where donkey carts waited in line next to passenger cars. At the checkpoint, there is no solid concrete wall—the fence is more like a military frontier or demilitarized zone, with a layered series of barriers that includes a ditch to prevent vehicle crossings, tightly coiled stacks of concertina wire, and intrusion-detection fences with pre-tensioned wires that can detect the slightest movement. Israeli security forces monitor the buffer zone with an array of high-tech surveillance equipment: cameras, pressure sensors, and thermal-imaging devices. Bedouin trackers patrol the dirt roads adjoining the barrier, looking for errant footprints.

The portion of the fence between Qalqilyah and the Israeli town of Kfar Saba is a concrete barrier around 28 feet high. The main purpose, according to the Israelis, is to prevent snipers from firing into Kfar Saba or at commuters driving Highway 6, a toll road that runs along portions of the [Green Line](#). While the Israelis like to point out that the solid concrete walls form only about 4 percent to 5 percent of the total length of the security fence, those sections are emblematic of the Israeli government's effort to physically separate its population from the Palestinians.

As such, these sections have become a stop on the itinerary for [peace activists](#) and nongovernmental organizations. The wall even lured [graffiti artist Banksy](#), who called the security fence "the ultimate activity holiday destination for graffiti writers." They are also an attraction for pro-Israeli groups that want to demonstrate to visitors what they see as the unique security needs of the state of Israel.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the fence is that it does not correspond strictly to the Green Line—Israel's pre-1967 border—though Israel maintains that the wall does not denote a political settlement. While billed as a "temporary inconvenience" and "defensive measure," the wall has become a controversial form of eminent domain. "By taking 4 percent of the West Bank, we protect 75 percent of Israeli settlers," Meir said.

Israel views the wall as a success. Since the construction of the fence, the number of suicide bombings in Israel has come down dramatically. Meir pointed to the overall 90 percent drop in terrorist attacks since the construction of the fence and a parallel drop in casualties as proof of success. No suicide bombings have originated from Qalqilyah since the town was surrounded by the fence. (Before the barrier, several suicide attacks originated

there, including a [particularly deadly attack on a Tel Aviv disco](#) in 2001.) In 2007, not a single suicide bombing originated in the West Bank. "We're not stopping Palestinians from coming in; we're trying to stop terrorists from coming in," Meir said.

Success, however, becomes justification, and the law of unintended consequences is at work for both sides. Members of the militant Islamic group Hamas [swept municipal elections in 2005. Qalqilyah elected as its mayor a member of Hamas](#), who at the time was sitting in an Israeli prison. The town, which once had extensive commerce with Israel, is now off-limits for Jewish Israelis. The restricted access to Israel has meant lost income and unemployment for Palestinians, and the checkpoints reinforce for them the humiliation of occupation. The wall bottles in Palestinians, restricts their movement, and separates farmers from their land.

Israel's security fence may be a technical success, but building a barrier along 2,000 miles of border is a different matter. Not long after our trip to Israel, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced approval of Project 28, a high-tech network of towers and sensors in Arizona that forms the prototype of a "virtual fence" that could eventually span the U.S.-Mexican border.

With U.S. politicians clamoring to seal the border with Mexico, it's tempting for them to look at Israel's high-tech fence as a model for border security. Not surprisingly, Israeli firms that specialize in surveillance technology and security barriers are racing to enter the U.S. homeland-security market. A U.S. subsidiary of Israeli defense firm Elbit Systems is a [member of the Boeing-led team](#) that won the U.S. border contract in September 2006. Magal Security Systems, the Israeli company that builds the Perimeter Intrusion Detection Systems along Israel's borders, [opened an office near Washington](#) in late 2006 to focus on the U.S. homeland-security market.

But the history of walls is rife with mixed results: The Great Wall of China ultimately failed to stop foreign invaders; former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's electronic barrier in Vietnam could not halt Viet Cong infiltration; and the Berlin Wall lasted only 28 years. The United States' border experiment, as the newest entrant, has been [plagued by equipment and software glitches](#). Thus far, the Department of Homeland Security's "virtual fence" spans just 28 miles.

So, do walls work? We asked this question to Asa Gil-Ad, chief superintendent of Israel's National Police. He reminded us that the year's reprieve against suicide bombs had coincided with a rise in a new sort of terror attack: [Qassam rockets](#) launched from Gaza. "They don't need to come here, to send their people-missiles," he told us. "They have these missiles that they fire, so they can terrorize an entire region."

From: Nathan Hodge and Sharon Weinberger
Subject: The World's Most Dangerous Bus Station

Posted Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 7:14 AM ET

JERUSALEM—"If this is such a goddamned hotspot, then I don't like standing in the middle of the street," declared fellow terror tourist [Richard Marcinko](#) as we lingered near the front entrance of the Jerusalem Central Bus Station. In front of us, a crowd of Israelis surged through the metal detectors, busily shoving backpacks and bundles into the X-ray machines.

By Day 4 of our tour of terror, one thing was certain: Paranoia was getting the better of us. We saw potential "hotspots" everywhere, and the security line in front of the bus station was now a chokepoint where we would be stranded in case of attack. What better target than a group of foreigners traveling in a bus prominently labeled with the sign: "THE ULTIMATE COUNTER-TERRORISM MISSION."

Israel's mass transportation system is particularly high on the list of places to avoid, especially after reading up on the [wave of suicide attacks](#) aimed at buses and bus stations. It was precisely that series of bombings that led to the opening in 2002 of Jerusalem's [new bus terminal](#), which was designed to incorporate new security procedures (and accommodate increased commuter traffic). Today, every person who enters the station must pass through a metal detector and put their baggage through the X-ray machine.

Well, almost everyone. A few words were exchanged between our tour leaders and security, and our group was suddenly herded through the checkpoint with the wave of a hand. It helps to have a personal escort from the chief of security. Once past the gate, we entered the cavernous shopping-mall interior, where army conscripts on leave mingled with civilians shopping for mobile-phone accessories and lining up for slices of pizza. Just a few years ago, the bus attacks held Israelis in the grip of mass anxiety, a sort of collective nightmare that has become a rich, raw subject for everything from [documentary films](#) to [graphic novels](#). Today, the new bus terminal is one of the country's main transportation hubs, and everything has a sort of eerie placidity.

We were led through the underground parking lot to the main security command post, where a handful of guards were monitoring a bank of TV screens. A network of 84 closed-circuit cameras can peer into almost every corner of the bus station, but the security professionals in our group were less than impressed: Beyond the CCTV system, the bus station featured none of the fancy [biometric detection technology](#) that has been developed in

Israel. The chief of security even conceded that his security officers were not on the lookout for anything beyond "suspicious behavior."

Still, the security measures were strict, at least compared with a Greyhound terminal. We had more questions, but our guides were eager to show us the next attraction. "Come on, guys!" tour leader Yossi Maimon said. "We're going to see a bulletproof bus."

Rows of the hulking green vehicles, which ply the more hazardous routes to settlements in the West Bank, were lined up in the underground parking garage. Security comes at a price. A bulletproof bus—which features a blast-resistant hull and ballistic glass—costs twice as much as a regular bus, more than half a million U.S. dollars. While well-armored, they are [not invulnerable](#); they come equipped with GPS tracking systems and video cameras that allow army headquarters to hear and see inside the bus in an emergency.

To the casual observer, Israel's bus terminals have the level of security you might find at a U.S. airport. But security at the Jerusalem Central Bus Station was nothing compared with [Ben-Gurion International Airport](#), where we were also treated to a similar behind-the-scenes tour.

Ben-Gurion is supposed to be the gold standard for airport security. And it has an impressive track record: While there have been terrorist attacks directed at the airport, no aircraft originating from Ben-Gurion has been successfully hijacked. That makes it an attractive model for U.S. airports. Airport security directors from the United States [have visited Ben-Gurion](#) to study Israeli security; Boston's Logan International Airport even [hired its former director of security](#).

But if Israel is the model for airline security, then what we saw stood in surprising contrast to what is going on in U.S. airports. The U.S. Transportation Security Agency is pouring millions into new-fangled contraptions ranging from facial readers that will detect "[hostile intent](#)" to [shoe-bomb screening equipment](#). But walking through Ben-Gurion airport, we realized that the focus was not on the technology, per se. The system instead relies on layers of security that begin at the outer perimeter of the airport, which is cordoned off with the same kind of pressure-sensitive fencing used in Israel's security barrier. All vehicles pass through an inspection long before they approach the terminal.

Nahum Liss, the head of security at Ben-Gurion, did not go into great detail on what is the most controversial aspect of airport security in Israel: ethnic profiling. Just last year, Israel did away with tagging luggage by color, a system that was [accused of discriminating against Arabs](#), but Palestinians and Arab-Israelis still [frequently complain of extra screening](#). Liss, for his part,

claimed that profiling didn't focus exclusively on looking for terrorists; rather, they are looking for people duped into carrying something for a terrorist. "We can detect an attacker, we are not afraid of that," Liss told us. "We are afraid of other passengers who are naive or innocent. That is our big concern."

After an hourlong lecture by Liss, we were escorted into a back area, a dismal, utilitarian room decorated with tattered old posters, including one that read, "Have Faith in Israel." Those selected for an additional round of screening—based on profiling—are taken here for further questioning or body searches. A bottle blonde wearing the uniform of the Russian [devushka](#) (hot pants, Prada bag, and stiletto-heeled boots) emerged from a dressing room. In fact, one of the members of our tour group, a Japanese-American woman, had already paid a visit to this same room; upon her arrival, security officials were apparently suspicious of the visas for Afghanistan and Iran in her passport and had questioned her for half an hour. So, what, then, *is* the profile of a terrorist?

Halfway through our tour, we paused to take a break on the tarmac, where we realized that we—a motley group of foreigners with backpacks and digital equipment—had ambled through the world's most secure airport, including off-limits areas, without so much as a pat-down. No metal detectors, no X-rays, not even an ID check. Sitting in clear view of airplanes waiting for international flights, we wondered what could justify such a breach. Was this evidence of what Liss called a "common sense" approach to security or simply proof that no system is completely fail-safe?

As we walked out through the employee gate, we stopped at the bin of confiscated items—a huge collection of nail scissors and other forbidden objects. One of the things Liss mocked—even though Israel complied—were demands that such seemingly innocent items be confiscated. What is the point, Liss asked, of taking away nail clippers from a pilot who could easily send the plane into a suicidal plunge?

"There is no 100 percent security," he said. "If you want 100 percent security, you'll get zero percent aviation activity."

From: Nathan Hodge and Sharon Weinberger
Subject: The Human Problem
Posted Friday, March 14, 2008, at 7:23 AM ET

JERUSALEM—Spending a week on a tour of terror is not particularly relaxing. After a week listening to briefings on terrorism, our mood had darkened. As we walked past the cafes

of Jerusalem, we found ourselves staring suspiciously at large backpacks and at people with their hands in their pockets.

A simple stroll through Jerusalem became a constant reminder of terrorist attacks over the years: There's the intersection of King George Street and Jaffa Street—just a few blocks from our hotel—where, on Aug. 19, 2001, [a suicide bomber entered a crowded Sbarro restaurant](#), setting off an explosion that killed 15 and wounded 130. Even small cafes now employ a security guard to check bags and watch for suspicious behavior.

As we walked through the streets of Jerusalem on our final day, we wondered why Israel had been so quiet over the last year. This question went to the very heart of our counterterrorism tour: the notion that Israel has somehow figured out how to win, or at least hold at bay, the "war on terror." Over the course of the week, we had heard many explanations for the lull in attacks: the wall, the layers of security that protect key sites, and the legal system, which allows Israel to quickly lock up suspected terrorists.

But Roni Shaked, a former commander in Israel's Shin Bet, gave us what he felt was the real explanation behind Israel's success. "The main, main reason why it's quiet, I think, it's just because of the Israeli security service," Shaked had told us on the first day of the tour. "Because during those years, we understood how to fight against the new kind of terrorism, how to fight against the new phenomenon of terror, the suicide bombers who are in Israel."

According to Shaked, Israel's success rests on several decades' worth of experience infiltrating Palestinian society. Shaked even brought with him living proof: Sami, a Palestinian collaborator from Hebron, who had worked with Shin Bet for more than three decades. (Even though Sami's identity is well-known in the West Bank, we were asked to use only his first name for this article.) It did not particularly surprise us that Israel had collaborators (during one lecture, we were told that one-third of Palestinian prisoners were informers). But finding one who would want to speak to our group—whose tour guide lectured us on the "Arab mindset," the "myth of the Palestinian people," and even the evils of the "Arab goat"—was slightly surprising.

Still, for nearly an hour, Sami, the only Palestinian (and the only Muslim) to speak to the group during the tour, politely answered our questions. He said he first started working with Shin Bet after witnessing a grenade thrown near a holy site in Hebron in 1969. He was outraged by the disregard for innocent civilians. He eventually became a trusted agent, he recounted, even penetrating a terrorist cell to provide intelligence to Israel.

It was also not difficult to understand why a Palestinian would be outraged by the indiscriminate nature of terrorism or even cooperate with the Israeli government, but Sami's story could hardly be called typical. Even when the Israeli army accidentally

killed one of his children, Sami's allegiance remained with his handlers. "Two weeks after what happened, Hamas sent me people and said, 'Look what the Jewish people did to your son. Come and work with us.' I told them that I choose my way, and my way of life." What happened to his son, he told us, was God's will.

After numerous death threats, Sami eventually fled with his family from Hebron to Jerusalem. Now retired in Israel, and with Israeli citizenship, he told us that he receives a modest pension from the government. In the West Bank, he's a wanted man.

Sami is one part of how Israel has fought terrorism: infiltrating the West Bank and its terrorist organizations. But in Jerusalem, particularly the Old City, the police have gone one step further, creating a sort of [Panopticon](#), where visitors and residents are under persistent surveillance by closed-circuit cameras, military observation posts, and police patrols. Riot police are always on alert, and plainclothes officers patrol the maze of medieval streets while oblivious tourists enjoy their falafel.

On our last day, our group paid a visit to Mabat 2000, a monitoring station at police headquarters in the Old City, just behind the [Jaffa Gate](#). We were ushered inside the high-tech command post, where uniformed personnel watch a bank of TV screens and a "big board" that can zoom in on different points of interest inside the city. More than 300 cameras are installed at different points around the Old City in addition to sensors and listening devices. Directional cameras can zoom in on suspicious individuals, vehicles, or objects. Alarms and digital pings made the place sound like a 1980s arcade.

The Old City, to state the obvious, is a high-risk area. Four traditional communities—Muslim, Jewish, Armenian, and Christian—are crowded within its walls. And in addition to the profound emotional and political pull it exerts, the place is a magnet for god-botherers and end-timers as well as tourists. The police have a dedicated unit for the Temple Mount, where the Second Intifada [kicked off in 2000](#). The commander showed us some of the surveillance tape of the uprising. As in the opening credits to [The Wire](#), the video concludes with a Palestinian bashing the lens of the closed-circuit camera with a well-aimed paving stone. Eventually, someone shimmies up the pole and rips the battered camera loose from its housing.

It's a costly setup and one that has some obvious cracks at the seams: It depends on people. As anyone who has seen the [Transportation Security Administration](#) at work knows, watching security cameras can be a stultifying job. But this is Jerusalem; we were just a few hundred yards from the city's holiest sites, which are supposed to be guarded by the most alert, aggressive, and watchful security force. As we watched the commander give his presentation, one of the young officers on duty—a draft-age Israeli with a close-cropped haircut—quietly dozed off at his

post. Head resting on hand, he slid into his chair, oblivious to his commanding officer standing behind him.

At first glance, Israel is the ultimate high-security state. And the main purpose of the [Ultimate Counter-Terrorism Mission](#) was to sell U.S. security professionals on Israeli know-how and technology. Many of our stops and lecturers—including Sami—make frequent appearances on itineraries for visiting delegations. Israel boasts of its security: the fence, the seemingly impregnable Ben-Gurion airport, and a legendary intelligence network. But it comes at a price that Americans may not be ready to accept: metal detectors at the entrance to shopping malls, military courts, and [conscription](#).

In the meantime, Israel's war on terrorism is hardly peaceful. The military recently [stepped up raids](#) on the Gaza Strip, another spike in ongoing operations inside the Palestinian territories. There are constant nightly incursions: a [terror suspect arrested](#) one night, a [rocket lab discovered](#) on another. Suicide bombings have dropped precipitously, but rockets from Gaza now rain down on southern Israel, and, tragically, the temporary lull in terror attacks has done nothing to solve the underlying Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the plight of Palestinians. What, then, does Israel's fight against terrorism teach the United States?

We contemplated that question on Saturday morning when Talia Adar, a reserve police officer, took us on a tour of the Old City while most of our group took off for a day at the Dead Sea. After a walk through the four ethnic quarters, we followed Adar through the security checkpoint that leads to the [Western Wall](#)—regarded as one of the highest-risk areas in the Old City. We walked through the metal detector, manned by two bored-looking guards. We dutifully emptied our pockets and placed our bags on the conveyor belt of the X-ray machine.

One guard chatted on the phone, the other watched impassively as Adar, dressed in civilian clothing, walked through the detector with her gun concealed under her jacket. The alarm didn't go off; neither guard asked for her ID. After passing through the checkpoint, Adar turned back around to face the guards. "Why didn't you stop me?" she demanded, pulling out her police ID.

Adar upbraided the guards for a full minute, as they meekly made excuses. ("Well, he's on the phone ..." one protested.) As she lectured them, we thought about all the barriers, cameras, and sensors; we thought about the intelligence agents and informers; and we thought about all the wizardry, gadgetry, and gimmickry that Israel puts into stopping terrorism. Yet it could all come down to this: two bored guards at a checkpoint.

"Why didn't it go off?" Adar demanded, pointing to the mute detector, topped with a blinking red light.

"The alarm is broken," one guard replied sheepishly. "They haven't fixed it yet, but we're watching the light."

election scorecard

Positive Thinking

The deck is stacked in the Democrats' favor come November.
By Mark Blumenthal and Charles Franklin
Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 12:43 PM ET

The *Wall Street Journal* and NBC News unveiled a comprehensive new poll today ([PDF](#)) that suggests Democrats will be campaigning in a friendly political environment in November. The Democratic Party gives off better vibes than the GOP, with 45 percent of voters nationwide saying they have positive feelings toward the party. Only 34 percent say the same about the GOP. Nearly half the country has a negative opinion of the GOP.

The animosity toward Republicans doesn't carry over to John McCain, though. Forty-seven percent of the country feels positively about the Republican presidential nominee, slightly more than Hillary Clinton's feel-good rating of 45 percent. Clinton, though, has the highest marks for negative opinions, with 43 percent of the country saying they're not fond of the New York senator. Barack Obama and McCain's negative-feeling numbers are about 15 points below that.

One last stat: Only 17 percent of the country thinks the next president should take an approach similar to that of George W. Bush.

Posted by Chadwick Matlin, March 13, 12:43 p.m.

	Delegates at stake:	
	Democrats	Republicans
	Total delegates: 4,049 Total delegates needed to win: 2,025	Total delegates: 2,380 Total delegates needed to win: 1,191

Delegates won by each candidate: Obama: 1,611; Clinton: 1,480; Edwards (out): 26 <i>Source: CNN</i>	Delegates won by each candidate: McCain: 1,325; Huckabee (out): 267; Paul: 16 <i>Source: CNN</i>
Want more Slate election coverage? Check out Map the Candidates , Political Futures , Trailhead , XX Factor , and our Campaign Junkie page!	

A blind person may also be left off the government rolls if the source of his impairment was central as opposed to peripheral. That is to say, someone who was rendered virtually blind as a result of brain damage—someone whose cortex couldn't make sense of a visual scene, for example—would not be considered "legally blind," so long as his eyeballs themselves were functioning normally.

The strict definition now on the books wasn't codified [until the 1960s](#), although federal protection for the blind began with the [Social Security Act](#) in 1935. The act required that each state establish an agency to provide financial assistance to people with debilitating vision impairments. The legally blind are also protected under the [Americans With Disabilities Act](#), which ensures that they be accommodated in the workplace. Since World War II, the legally blind have also been allowed a [special deduction](#) (or, at one point, an exemption) on their federal income taxes. (Some states give additional tax benefits.)

By definition, legally blind people are prohibited from operating an automobile, as a driver's license requires a visual acuity of 20/40 in at least one eye. However, some states distribute licenses for other activities to the blind. In Texas, you can get a hunting license no matter what your vision (although to use it, you'll need an assistant), and many states offer free lifetime fishing licenses to the legally blind.

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

explainer Legally Blind?

How bad is David Paterson's vision?

By Alex Joseph

Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 6:25 PM ET

We're looking for a new Explainer—click [here](#) to apply for the job.

New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer announced on Wednesday that he would [step down from office](#) effective March 17. The man who will replace him, Lt. Gov. David Paterson, will be the [first legally blind governor](#) in U. S. history. What does it mean to be legally blind?

Your vision is 20/200 or worse in your best eye, even with corrective lenses or surgery. According to the [federal statute](#) that defines legal blindness, a person also merits the designation if he or she suffers from severe tunnel vision, with a visual field that measures at most 20 degrees in diameter. (An average person can see about 160 degrees without rotating his head.) In either case, however, the blind person must suffer that impairment for at least [12 continuous months](#). The government also won't recognize any disability that resulted from the [commission of a felony](#) or the ensuing prison term. So if Spitzer ends up in the slammer for, say, [illegal structuring](#) and then has his eyes gouged out in a prison fight, he may not meet the federal definition for legal blindness.

sidebar

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Help Wanted

We're looking for a freelancer who could spend up to two days a week writing "Explainer" columns for **Slate**. You'd have to be confident covering a wide range of subject matter, including science, religion, and politics; we'd also need you to provide excellent copy on tight deadlines.

If you're interested, please paste the following into the body of an email (NO ATTACHMENTS), and send it to danengber@yahoo.com by March 31, 2008:

- Your résumé.

- A list of 10 possible Explainer questions, culled from this week's headlines (with links to the relevant news stories).

- If you want, you can send links for up to three clips of your published work.

explainer

Deadly Sins 101

Is stem-cell research worse than sloth?

By Samantha Henig

Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 5:37 PM ET

The Vatican released a list of seven [new sins](#) on Monday. Dubbed the "social sins," they include conducting stem-cell research, polluting the environment, and causing poverty. Along with the [old standbys](#)—like lust, pride, and greed—these seven are considered to be [of the "deadly" variety](#). What kinds of sins aren't deadly?

The venial ones. The Catholic Church divides sinful behavior into two categories: mortal and venial. (The distinction wasn't widespread until the medieval period.) Mortal sins are those that the sinner knows are serious but nonetheless decides to perform. They include the seven deadly sins as well as countless others, like witchcraft or skipping out on Sunday Mass. Other indiscretions, including any that were carried out by an ignorant or unwilling sinner, fall into the venial category. So do lesser versions of the mortal sins; for example, mild overeating would be a venial sin whereas gluttony is deadly. With both types, you can wipe the slate clean with confession and repentance, but only unrepented mortal sins can condemn you to eternal hell.

Obviously there's some wiggle room as to what exactly qualifies as a mortal sin since the sinner's intention and awareness are taken into account. Beyond the basic mortal-venial divide, Catholics have carved out many gradations of sin severity and appropriate penance. A thousand years ago, a priest who heard a confession could refer to his [Penitential](#), a handbook issued by local churches outlining the gravity of each specific sin. Even then he wouldn't be bound by the guidebook, however, and today priests have the freedom to assign penance as they see fit.

Islam has a similar division between Kabira (grave sins) and Saghira (minor sins), with a widely agreed-upon list of 17 grave sins. Unlike in Catholicism, sinners appeal directly to God for forgiveness, without the middleman of a priest. As a result, the repentance process is less clear-cut: You can't just do your [Our Fathers](#) and regain purity. Rather, the grave sins and minor sins are tallied up over your lifetime, and at the end it's your overall track record—what sins you committed and how fervently you

repented—that determine whether you make it into paradise. That process is referred to as "the accounting," and the only certainty in the calculation is the one grave sin that cannot be forgiven: renouncing Islam.

Judaism also distinguishes between "heavy" and "light" sins. But both Islam and Judaism lack the central authority that the Catholic Church has to specify what behavior qualifies as which kind of sin. Any rabbi's or mufti's interpretation of which sins are the extra-bad ones is as valid as any other's. And since the Jews lack the fire-and-brimstone view of the afterlife present in Islam and Catholicism, the arithmetic of sin gets even more muddled: Even if all rabbis agree that adultery (which the Torah specifies as punishable by death) is a "heavy" sin, they probably won't have a uniform answer for what happens to an adulterer after death.

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

Explainer thanks Art Friedson, Frank Griffel of Yale University, Paul Griffiths of Duke University, and Francis E. Peters of New York University.

explainer

How To Prosecute Eliot Spitzer

Which federal laws might the governor have broken?

By Harlan J. Protass

Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 6:32 PM ET

According to widely published reports, New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer was caught on a federal wiretap last month arranging to meet with a high-priced prostitute at a Washington, D.C., hotel. Can prosecutors really make a federal case from the governor's tryst with an escort?

Yes. Spitzer may have violated any number of federal laws. If prosecutors do go after him, they're most likely to focus on the Mann Act ([18 U.S.C. § 2422](#)), federal structuring laws ([31 U.S.C. § 5324](#)), and federal money-laundering statutes ([18 U.S.C. § 1956](#)). These are described in more detail below.

The Mann Act: This series of laws, passed in the early 1900s in response to [hysteria over "white slavery,"](#) proscribes the knowing persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of "any individual to travel" from one state to another "to engage in prostitution, or in any sexual activity for which any person can be charged with a criminal offense." If, in fact, Spitzer arranged for Emperors' Club VIP "employee" [Kristen](#) to travel by train from New York to Washington, D.C., to engage in illegal sex (and, particularly, if he paid for her train ticket), his actions

would almost surely fall within the range of conduct prohibited by the Mann Act.

A violation of 18 U.S.C. § 2422 is punishable by up to 20 years' imprisonment. Under federal sentencing guidelines, however, Spitzer would probably face just 15 to 21 months if convicted. By pleading guilty and accepting responsibility for his conduct, he might reduce that prison term to 10 to 16 months. Because of where that 10- to 16-month range falls on the [sentencing table](#) associated with federal guidelines, he could receive a split sentence of five months' imprisonment and five months' home detention—just like the one [Martha Stewart got](#).

Structuring: Financial institutions are required to file [currency transactions reports](#)—known as CTRs—with the IRS for all transactions involving \$10,000 or more in cash. 18 U.S.C. § 5324 prohibits "structuring," the act of engaging in a series of financial transactions designed to avoid the filing of a CTR, such as withdrawing \$9,500 from the bank each day for a week. If Spitzer withdrew funds from his bank to pay for illicit trusts in amounts designed to skirt the \$10,000 threshold (or if he deposited those funds in Emperors' Club VIP's accounts), then he might also face federal structuring charges.

A violation of 18 U.S.C. § 5324 is punishable by up to five years' imprisonment. Under federal sentencing guidelines, however, the jail time Spitzer would face depends largely on the amount that he actually structured. If, for example, he engaged in structured transactions of up to \$70,000, he could face 15 to 21 months' imprisonment. (He'd face more time if he structured more money.) Once again, a guilty plea could reduce that prison term to 10 to 16 months (with the possibility of the same split sentence).

Money Laundering: Among other things, federal money-laundering laws prohibit engaging in financial transactions involving "dirty" money that are designed "to conceal or disguise the nature, the location, the source, the ownership, or the control of the proceeds of" illegal conduct. There's been no suggestion that the money Spitzer allegedly paid for sex was dirty. But his payment to shell corporations controlled by Emperors' Club VIP may constitute money laundering (or, at least, participation in a money-laundering conspiracy) to the extent that he knew those shell corporations were used to disguise the source or use of the money he paid.

A violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1956 is punishable by up to 20 years' imprisonment. Under federal sentencing guidelines, however, Spitzer would probably face 27 to 33 months imprisonment if his money laundering involved up to \$70,000, a prison term that could be reduced to 15 to 24 months if he pleads guilty and accepts responsibility for his conduct. (Like structuring, the more he laundered, the longer the prison term.) If he is charged as part of a wider money-laundering conspiracy, however, all bets are off: He could face a much longer prison term because he

could be held responsible for all of the funds laundered by all of his co-conspirators (which, in this case, comprises more than \$1 million).

Of course, Spitzer—aka Client 9—is not the only person mentioned in the [criminal complaint](#) who faces these potential federal charges. Clients 1 to 8 and Client 10 also do.

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

Slate V looks at what happens when a politician has to apologize for a scandal.

explainer

How Do You Go Off the Record?

Why Samantha Power couldn't take back her monstrous gaffe.

By Michelle Tsai

Monday, March 10, 2008, at 6:43 PM ET

Samantha Power [stepped down](#) from her position as Barack Obama's foreign-policy adviser Friday, after she was quoted in the *Scotsman* calling Hillary Clinton "[a monster, too—that is off the record—she is stooping to anything](#)." Although Power tried to retract her comment mid-sentence, the paper published the quote as a headline. How do you go off the record with a journalist?

Ask to go off the record, discuss what that means, and don't reveal any secrets until the journalist has agreed to the understanding. The same basic guidelines would apply with most reporters, but there are no rigid and universal rules; in the end, it always comes down to individual judgment. The *New York Times* style guide talks about the attribution of information and granting of anonymity—i.e., how to accurately present the information and sources you have—but doesn't issue specific advice for how to negotiate with a source by going off the record. Neither does the *Scotsman* have any written rules on the subject.

Both parties—reporters and their sources—should agree to going off (or back on) record in advance. It's also important to spell out the terms; this *Slate* "[Chatterbox](#)" column showed how even reporters at the same paper interpret the rules for "off the record" differently. Same for sources: [Scooter Libby](#), for instance, often said "off the record" when he meant "on background." The talk can take place before an interview starts and then be quickly rehashed—"Can we go off the record now?" "Yes."—when the source is about to make the sensitive comments. In that sense, Power would have been on less-shaky ground had she switched the order of her words and said, "This is off the record—she is a

monster, too," instead of, "She is a monster, too—that is off the record." Sometimes a reporter will ask about the nature of the information before proceeding or stop to consult with an editor.

Decisions about how to apply off-the-record standing, especially when it comes to sensitive areas like presidential politics, are often negotiated on a case-by-case, source-by-source basis. The more important a story or source, the more carefully both parties stick to the rules. But the Power quote falls into a gray area for some reporters. For instance, what happens if the source declares she's going off the record and doesn't wait for confirmation from the reporter before blurting out something important? Some journalists would keep it off the record, while others would refuse; either way, they'll probably try to negotiate with the source to restate the information for the record. Ideally, a reporter ought to stop the conversation before anything is said.

Can a source take back something that was accidentally said on the record? No, in most cases, but it's ultimately a matter of opinion. Some editors may argue that since Power tried to go off record midsentence, it was essentially the same as if she had made the request before calling Clinton a monster. There's also leeway given to trusted sources and to people who aren't used to speaking with the media or are under intense pressure—say, a parent whose child was just in an accident or an illegal immigrant talking about her employment status. A public figure like Samantha Power, who represented a presidential candidate, however, might be expected to know the rules.

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

Explainer thanks Naftali Bendavid of the Chicago Tribune, Roy Peter Clark and Kelly McBride of the Poynter Institute, Mike Gilson of the Scotsman, and Craig Whitney of the New York Times.

family

The Babka Identity

Testing kid nostalgia by trying to re-create a beloved cake.

By Emily Bazelon

Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 5:45 PM ET

A few years ago, when my kids were small and we lived in New Haven, Conn., we had a beloved Friday afternoon routine. We went shopping at a grocery store called Edge of the Woods, which has a bakery. We had a standing order for challah and chocolate babka, and Eli and Simon, then preschool and toddler age, got adept at picking it up themselves. Eli could just reach the bell on the counter. Simon could just say the word *babka*.

When we got home, they got a piece for dessert and also clamored for babka at breakfast the next morning.

After we moved to Washington, D.C., I mourned this Friday ritual. I couldn't find a good bakery near our house—or anywhere else in the vicinity, really. Finally, I gave up and started making my own challah. (This sounds more impressive than it is; challah always rises because there's sugar in it.) But I couldn't replace the babka. When friends visited from New Haven, the kids always asked for a special delivery. And then one of us, I forget who, wondered aloud if we could get the recipe.

Eli and Simon seized on the idea. For months, they periodically reminded me to call the bakery. In many ways, they'd settled into their new Washington lives. After all, they were only 5 and 2 when we moved. But here they were expressing kid nostalgia. I liked the idea that they missed the same thing I did. And I wanted to test it: If I could re-create the cherished chocolate babka, would it ever be just as good? Or does nostalgia, for kids as well as adults, inherently mean preferring the past?

After several calls to Edge of the Woods, I emerged from delicate negotiations with the chief baker and owner without the recipe but with its history: The babka recipe came from an old Jewish baker named Louis Gitlitz (the spelling is a guess, but [scroll down here for another apparent fan](#)), and they'd been making it at Edge for almost 20 years. My next line of attack was to order [Joan Nathan's Jewish Holiday Cookbook](#), a cooking bible for my tribe. From it I learned that a "*babka* is a high cake, but '*babka*' is also a word for grandmother in Polish, Russian, and Yiddish." Now I was really hooked.

But the babka in the book, like all the other ones I found online and in the store, looked different than the one I wanted to make. The other babkas were thick and chewy and dense, and baked in Bundt or loaf pans. Some of them had nuts or jam along with chocolate—not acceptable if you are Eli and Simon. Our New Haven babka was light and airy, consisting only of dough and chocolate and a yummy sugar-butter-flour topping, which, I learned from Nathan's book, is called streusel. Also, it was made in a low, aluminum pan.

What to do? My husband, Paul, figured out the answer: We'd conduct not only a nostalgia test but also a science experiment. Edge of the Woods agreed to send a babka to us by overnight delivery, to arrive the following weekend. This seemed like the moment to enlist professional help. Joan Nathan is a friend of my grandmother (and a friend of my grandmother, though she's of a younger generation, just so you appreciate the full web), and though she'd never met us, she invited Eli and Simon and me to bring over our babka for breakfast, with a kind and much appreciated, "I'll make coffee!"

The babka, when it arrived and was served with due ceremony at Joan's kitchen table, was oddly missing its streusel. The children felt the absence, but I decided this was a good thing, because it gave me an edge going into the babka bake-off. Joan and I looked at the recipe in her cookbook (there's another one in [her recent New York Times piece](#) on babka, but it's more sophisticated and contains almond paste and apricot preserve or rum-soaked raisins, hence unsuitable for my children). We decided that I should simplify her recipe a bit, and she encouraged me to buy some good bittersweet chocolate. And then, winning my heart completely, she said that she liked my kids and that if I made the dough ahead of time at home (it's supposed to refrigerate overnight), I could come back and she'd show me how to put the babka together, in the lower pie shape the kids preferred.

I've never baked with a professional cookbook writer before, and I worried that my dough looked raggedy and would be hard to work with. But when I reappeared at Joan's house, I was relieved to discover that she also melts butter by putting it in the microwave. Also, babka construction proved to be easier than I thought. I've never made pastry or a yeast cake like this one, and I thought I would have to melt the chocolate ahead of time, which would make it hard to handle, but instead the recipe called for grating, and *voilà*, a little shake-shake over the rolled-out dough and I was all set. We experimented with different shapes and ended up with what Joan's assistant, Sandra DiCapua, dubbed "pizza babka," because we cut it into six segments before baking.

Now for the tasters. I brought the babka home, let it rise a bit as instructed, and put it in the oven. While it was baking, I confessed to Eli that I felt nervous. Since he and Simon liked the old babka so much, my babka, I feared, would inevitably be the lesser babka. (Yes, I sound [just like Seinfeld's Elaine](#).) "You think the old one can't be improved on, I know," I said. Eli looked nonplussed. "You can improve on it, Mom," he said. "You can."

And there you have it: the nostalgia test, aces. As for the science experiment, that went well, too. The kids gobbled up the babka. Simon pronounced it MUCH MUCH better than the other babka (he talks in capital letters), though I think the missing streusel was a confounding variable. Eli declared my babka "not as good," then "good," by the next morning "better," and finally, when asked to square all these reviews, "Different. But still good." He's right. I promised to make it again.

Watch Slate V's new series "House Calls With Dr. Syd"

fighting words Prince Valiant

Britain's Prince Harry should've stayed in Afghanistan.

By Christopher Hitchens

Monday, March 10, 2008, at 1:18 PM ET

The extraordinary thing—and also the alarming thing—about the hasty [withdrawal of Prince Harry](#) from his front-line duties in Afghanistan is the way in which everybody seems to assume that it was the only right thing to do. It was all very well, apparently, for the junior of the two royal princes to share in the risks and duties shouldered by his fellow soldiers in the Household Cavalry, yet not for a moment longer than his valor could be kept a secret. At that point, he was supposed to make a rapid exit and take his valor with him.

Just examine the nonlogic that supposedly underlies this decision. Once young Harry's presence in the southern Afghan province of Helmand became known, it has been argued, he and his unit would at once become "bullet magnets" for the Taliban/al-Qaida alliance. Thus, to keep him in the field, when it was known that he actually was in the field, would be to endanger both him and his comrades in arms. What piffle this is. Helmand province is (now that British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has so briskly evacuated most of Basra) one of the most dangerous places on earth to be a member of the British armed forces. Every British soldier, and indeed civilian, in the region is by definition a "bullet magnet" for the fundamentalists. But there is no reason to think that these nasty elements would, or no less importantly that they *could*, bring any extra firepower to bear because they thought that a Windsor princeling might be in the offing. In any case, absent day-to-day press and TV coverage of his movements in advance (an option suggested by no one), it is hard to see how the mere knowledge that a member of the British royal house was somewhere in Helmand province would be of any operational use at all to the other side. One might even surmise that the jihadists are not as obsessed with coverage of British royalty as is the international media.

Yet to the chief of the British defense staff, the marvelously named Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup, it was somehow self-evident that the lad had to be evacuated from the scene—and with all speed at that—just as soon as Matt Drudge [revealed](#) not his whereabouts but his mere presence. So, now we have Buckingham Palace and the British defense staff going to panic stations on a Matt Drudge trigger. That this might look like a hugely advertised scuttle or a retreat—and thus be vastly encouraging to the Islamist gangsters who are trying to retake Helmand from the legitimate government of Afghanistan—seems to have occurred to nobody. We are apparently determined to act all the time as if the Islamists who blow up girls' schools and destroy cell-phone towers and murder aid workers and vaccination teams are 10 feet tall. Only a few weeks ago, Condoleezza Rice [paid a visit](#) to Afghanistan that was not

announced in advance and that saw her mostly confined to a few tiny enclaves on U.S. airbases. Are we certain that our obsession with "security" is not in fact making us insecure?

To take another not unimportant question: What is the point of deploying Prince Harry in the first place? Surely, it is at least partly to demonstrate that Britain's hereditary rulers do not scorn to share dangers and rations with their soldiers and that an equality of sacrifice may be respected even if inherited inequalities are not thereby dissolved. Everybody gets this point. When Buckingham Palace was damaged during the Nazi bombardment of London, the queen mother is at least supposed to have said that she was glad of the hit because now she could look the blitzed docklands of the East End "in the face." But perhaps I should now write that everybody *used* to get this point. The old imperatives are now replaced by newer and slicker ones, of PR and press management and "heightened security," and it just wouldn't make a story if the young man insisted on staying in the same trenches as his fellows. Many Americans ache with shame at the very few famous political-class names in our own front lines (among them a McCain). What if these deployments, too, were to be canceled as soon as they made print?

It might still be mentioned, though, as a word of encouragement, that young Harry himself said that he was "disappointed" in being hauled back so quickly, while members of his regiment told reporters that they were "guttled" to see him go. But silence there in the ranks! Do you want to become a bullet magnet? (Of course, if you *don't*, you do always have the even more prudent option of not volunteering in the first place.) If this capitulation had involved his older brother, Prince William, the headline word might have been *abdication*.

Perhaps it's wrong or trite for me to play for a little on the overlap between Prince Harry and Prince Hal/King Harry, England's most celebrated martial monarch, but there's more to it than just the banal coincidence of name. Until very recently, if you saw Harry's name in a headline, it was because he'd been found facedown in yet another nightclub. His decision to transcend all that and to submit himself to the training and put on the uniform was, as the earlier Harry puts it so bluntly to Falstaff at the close of *Henry IV, Part II*, proof positive "that I have turned away my former self" and that his former riotous companions should "[p]resume not that I am the thing I was." Having taken a fresh resolution and exchanged frivolity for the sterner forms of ardor, "Harry the King" is most often credited with the speech that Shakespeare awards him on the eve of Agincourt. Here, and speaking to those "which hath no stomach to this fight," he warmly urges all faint-hearts to quit at once because "[w]e would not die in that man's company/ That fears his fellowship to die with us." He famously ends by speaking of the "few" and "the band of brothers." This much-overdone scene of bombast is nothing, I find, to the understated words in which Henry has already replied to Montjoy, arrogant herald of the French monarch, in Act III, Scene VI:

The sum of all our answer is but this:
We would not seek a battle as we are;
Nor, as we are, we say, we will not shun it.

I am not a monarchist (and I have a soft spot for Falstaff and no liking for imperial expeditions in search of enlarged Plantagenet kingdoms), but Shakespearean virtues can also be republican and democratic ones in the face of theocracy and tyranny. Anyway, they make for much better reading than the media-conscious calculations of British officials and politicians who seem determined to cry before they have even been hurt.

foreigners True-to-Life Stories

Have political autobiographies made us more susceptible to fake memoirs?
By Anne Applebaum
Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 2:15 PM ET

Thanks to chance and circumstance—because people left them, sent them, or lent them—a trio of autobiographies landed on my desk last weekend: Valerie Plame's [Fair Game: My Life As a Spy, My Betrayal by the White House](#), George Tenet's [At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA](#), and Peter Gay's [My German Question: Growing Up in Nazi Berlin](#). Though Plame and Tenet were published in 2007, and Gay in 1998, I hadn't read any of them before.

Motivation to pick them up was, however, provided by Margaret B. Jones and Misha Defonseca. For those who missed their stories, Jones, a half-Indian drug-dealing gang member who grew up in foster homes, according to her [well-received memoir](#), last week turned out to be Margaret Seltzer, an all-white suburbanite who grew up with her family. Defonseca, a Jew who survived the Holocaust by living with wolves, according to her [acclaimed autobiography](#), is in fact Monique De Wael, a Catholic who spent the war in Brussels. The two revelations—coming in the wake of JT Leroy, James Frey, [Benjamin Wilkomirski](#), and other hoaxes—inspired much criticism of the publishing industry ([why do they fall for it?](#) [why don't they fact-check?](#)) and some excellent parodies. (See *Slate's* "[advertisement](#)" for Margaret B. Jones' next volume: "She brought down Sen. Joseph McCarthy, founded the Black Panthers, and wrote Ronald Reagan's Berlin Wall speech—all before taking over the notorious Crips gang in South Central ...")

But maybe these extreme examples should inspire some other questions, too. How "true," for example, are real autobiographies, written by real people, describing real events? Coincidentally, I was first taught to ask this question by Gay,

now an emeritus professor of history, during a seminar on autobiography that he taught some 20-odd years ago. As I recall it, we were debating Rousseau's *Confessions* when Gay pointed out some element of the story that could not possibly have been true. He then invited us to think about why, in that case, Rousseau had changed it. For unconscious emotional reasons? Or consciously, in order to shape his reputation?

Reading Gay's own idiosyncratic autobiography, it's evident that he had such historical uses and abuses of autobiography in mind while he was writing it. During his account of growing up in, and emigration from, 1930s Berlin, he frequently questions both his recollections and his motives for recording them. He confesses to prejudices—most notably a hatred for the Nazi regime—that might color his account of his pre-Nazi early childhood. He admits to important gaps in his memory.

By contrast, Tenet's and Plame's books show no such hesitations, no such uncertainties, and certainly admit to no prejudice. Tenet does concede that "no such undertaking is completely objective," but he calls his book "as honest and as unvarnished as I could make it." Plame doesn't even go that far, offering instead, by way of introduction, a rollicking account of her CIA recruitment (and, bizarrely, a very large number of irrelevant childhood photographs).

But I have no intention of picking on Tenet and Plame, much though they might deserve it, just because I stumbled on their books last weekend. After all, what struck me about their memoirs was not their uniqueness, but their very similarity to other books in the "political memoir" genre, recent examples of which include the autobiographies of both Clintons; *Leadership*, by Rudy Giuliani; *No Retreat, No Surrender*, by Tom DeLay; and *The Audacity of Hope*, by Barack Obama (but not his first, quirky, pre-fame book, *Dreams From My Father*), just to name an arbitrary few.

Beyond "setting the record straight," none of these books was ever intended to have deeper literary or historical significance. They don't do careful self-analysis, but neither do they add much to the bigger picture. They don't necessarily lie, but they are intended to shape public perceptions of the author, which is why many read like extended versions of those candidate-life-story films one sees nowadays at political conventions. Some—I'm thinking here of [Bill Clinton's hefty memoir](#)—seem designed to decorate coffee tables, not to be read at all.

So, why don't the publishers who produce them come in for more criticism? And why aren't authors more often parodied? ("He achieved peace in Northern Ireland, fixed the American health-care crisis, and singlehandedly dismantled the New York City trash collection mafia—all the while remaining a perfect husband and father and *never accepting a single penny from lobbyists ...*")

Or maybe the publishing industry shouldn't get all the blame. We've all gotten used to the idea that life stories can be "sold," that lives that contain accidents, deviations, and inexplicable moments of uncertainty—as all lives do—can be crafted, shaped, and presented to the public by marketing specialists—and yet still remain "true." No wonder we're so easily taken in, nowadays, by fraudsters, hucksters, fake drug dealers, and children who claim to have been raised by wolves.

gabfest

The Cultural Gabfest on the Eliot Mess

Listen to *Slate's* critics debate the week's news.

By Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and John Swansburg
Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 11:55 AM ET

Listen to Cultural Gabfest No. 3 with critics Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and John Swansburg by clicking the arrow on the audio player below:

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

Our newest podcast, the Cultural Gabfest, is back just in time to take on the Eliot Spitzer meltdown and how it's echoing through the media. Critics Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and John Swansburg also discuss the recent rash of fake memoirs and a breakout blog that claims to shed light on stuff white people like.

Here are links to some of the items mentioned in this week's episode:

["The Fake Memoirist's Survival Guide"](#) on *Slate*

[A Fan's Notes](#) by Frederick Exley

The [Stuff White People Like](#) blog

[Stuff White People Like](#) on NPR's *Talk of the Nation*

Dana Stevens' recommended movie: [Chop Shop](#)

John Swansburg's recommended fake memoir: [Amazons: An Intimate Memoir by the First Women To Play in the National Hockey League](#) by Cleo Birdwell (aka Don DeLillo)

Stephen Metcalf's recommended TV show: [Top Gear](#) from BBC America

Posted by Andy Bowers at 11:55 a.m.

March 7, 2008

To play the March 7 Political Gabfest, click the arrow on the audio player below:

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

Emily Bazelon, John Dickerson, and David Plotz gather in *Slate*'s Washington studio to discuss Hillary Clinton's comeback, John McCain's White House photo-op, and Margaret B. Jones' fake memoir.

Here are some of the stories mentioned in the podcast:

David Greenberg's "History Lesson" on how [Democrats always take forever](#) to pick a nominee

A *Slate* [V discussion of Tuesday's results](#), featuring Emily Bazelon, Dahlia Lithwick, and Melinda Henneberger
Slate's [coverage of fake memoir week](#) (check out the links at the top of the page)

Charlotte Allen's "Outlook" [essay](#) and the [outraged response](#) on "XX Factor"

"Trailhead" on [Yes, Pecan ice cream](#) and the [hijacked conference call](#)

Gabfest listener Neal Jahren was nice enough to set up an unofficial Facebook fan page for the show. If you'd like to join the discussion there, [here's the link](#).

If you have ideas for the most appropriate sports metaphor for the Democratic slugfest, or if you'd just like to tell us what you think about the show, our e-mail address is gabfest@slate.com. (E-mail may be quoted by name unless the writer stipulates otherwise.) **Posted by June Thomas at 6:16 p.m.**

Feb. 29, 2008

To play the Feb. 29 Political Gabfest, click the arrow on the audio player below:

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

Emily Bazelon, John Dickerson, and David Plotz gather in *Slate*'s Washington studio to discuss whether Hillary can stage a comeback in the race for the Democratic nomination, how McCain can confront Obama on Iraq, and the death of conservative legend and regular *Slate* reader William F. Buckley Jr.

The Gabfest begins by exploring the perilous delegate math that faces Hillary Clinton and how *Slate*'s [delegate calculator](#) can help you sort it out. It continues with a discussion of Hillary's appeal to women. Emily Bazelon points to [Tina Fey's defense](#) of

feminism, and John Dickerson alludes to Cokie Roberts' [explanation](#) on ABC's *This Week With George Stephanopoulos*. Finally, the *Slate* editors discuss how Obama has grown throughout the campaign—both in his [debate performance](#) and in his ability to handle [incoming fire](#) from political opponents.

The discussion then turns to John McCain and Barack Obama's weeklong quarrel over the Iraq war. David Plotz believes Democrats would be wise to stay away from the topic of Iraq during the general election.

Finally, the Gabfest panelists offer their memories of conservative icon William F. Buckley Jr., who died this week. Buckley had a close relationship with *Slate*: He was a regular reader, kept a *Slate* "Diary," and engaged in a "Dialogue" with the magazine's founding editor, Michael Kinsley.

Things turn grim during the Gabfest's cocktail chatter. John Dickerson highlights a [new study](#) showing that one in every 100 American adults is in prison. David Plotz recaps a *Newsweek* [article](#) on stagflation, and Emily Bazelon laments the [retirement](#) of legendary *New York Times* Supreme Court reporter Linda Greenhouse.

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

Posted by Andy Bowers on Feb. 29 at 2:30 p.m.

Feb. 28, 2008

Here's the sophomore outing of our newest audio program, the Cultural Gabfest, with critics Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and Julia Turner. To listen, click the arrow on the audio player below:

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

In this edition, the panelists discuss the aftermath of the Oscars, the challenge Barack Obama poses for comedians, and Lindsay Lohan's Marilyn Monroe impression. Here are some of the links for items mentioned in the show:

[Daniel Day-Lewis' Oscar acceptance speech.](#)
[Saturday Night Live's Obama/Clinton debate sketch.](#)
[Lindsay Lohan's New York magazine photo shoot.](#)
[Julia Turner's Oscar fashion dialogue with Amanda Fortini.](#)
[The Encyclopedia Baracktannica.](#)

Posted by Andy Bowers on Feb. 28 at 3:07 p.m.

Feb. 22, 2008

To play the Feb. 22 Gabfest, click the arrow on the audio player below:

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

John Dickerson beat back his flu and joined Emily Bazelon and David Plotz in *Slate*'s Washington studio for a discussion of John McCain's "bad day," the latest developments in the Democratic race, and the wide world of foreign affairs.

The top story on this week's agenda was the widely assailed [New York Times article](#) describing advisers' concern about the appearance of impropriety in the relationship between Sen. John McCain and lobbyist Vicki Iseman during the 2000 presidential campaign. David said that while you feel for a guy who is wrongly accused, McCain's constant claims of ultrahigh [ethical standards](#) are also becoming a mite tiresome.

Then came the [Texas debate](#) between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. The Gabfesters felt both candidates put in a strong performance and gave credit to Clinton, who instantly had the audience in the palm of her hand when she [said](#), "Everybody here knows I've lived through some crises and some challenging moments in my life." But Clinton also lost points when she brought up the [plagiarism accusation](#) against Obama and was booted.

The Gabfesters talked about [emotion and reason](#) in campaign rhetoric. David said there was something frightening about Obama's ability to wield emotion so effectively in his speeches.

Finally, the world seems to be teeming with upheaval, with Page One stories appearing about [Cuba](#), [Kosovo](#), and [Pakistan](#) in recent days.

Our e-mail address is gabfest@slate.com. (E-mail may be quoted by name unless the writer stipulates otherwise.) **Posted by Jonathan Rubin on Feb. 25 at 2:35 p.m.**

Feb. 15, 2008

To play the Feb. 15 Gabfest, click the arrow on the audio player below:

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

John Dickerson has the flu this week, so Christopher Beam joined Emily Bazelon and David Plotz to discuss presidential

politics after the Potomac primaries and the latest news from Guantanamo.

Here are some of the *Slate* stories mentioned in the podcast:

Chris' "Trailhead" posting on the myth of "[shmoshmentum](#)" Jack Goldsmith and Eric Posner on the [Guantanamo trials](#) "[Obamamatopoeia](#)"—the English language, Obamafied

Our e-mail address is gabfest@slate.com. (E-mail may be quoted by name unless the writer stipulates otherwise.) **Posted by June Thomas at 3:16 p.m.**

Feb. 8, 2008

To play the Feb. 8 Gabfest, click the arrow on the audio player below:

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

On today's agenda: Mitt Romney exits the race, the Democrats remain in a stalemate, and the Gabfest finds a slogan, sort of.

Here are some of the *Slate* stories mentioned in the podcast:

John reflected on Romney's [best speech](#)—unfortunately, the one in which he announced the suspension of his campaign.

Our Gabfesters talked about [who emerged victorious](#) after the Democratic primaries and caucuses held on Super Tuesday, and the precarious future of the race as the specter of a brokered convention looms.

Emily's piece on [what the exit polls said](#) about Super Tuesday voters who supported Hillary Clinton.

William Saletan on [Barack Obama's breakthrough with white voters](#).

Emily also spoke about the [controversial essay](#) by Robin Morgan that apparently resonated with Chelsea Clinton, which she discussed in a "[XX](#)" [Factor post](#).

A *Slate* piece about [how mobsters get their colorful nicknames](#).

Our e-mail address is gabfest@slate.com. (E-mail may be quoted by name unless the writer stipulates otherwise.) **Posted by Alex Joseph at 2:10 p.m.**

gardening

Habitat for Harmony

How to garden the way nature intended.

By Constance Casey

Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 4:08 PM ET

We've taken such a lot of meadow and forest to use for suburban houses and second homes that we're losing the birds and insects and critters that used to live there. It seems only right to give some greenery back.

So here is a modest proposal to consider as you plan what to have in your garden this summer. Every *Slate* reader with a yard should plant a small tree, a couple of shrubs, and a few plants that provide food and shelter to birds, insects, toads, and other creatures. Start small. We'll do this in a back corner area about the size of a queen-sized mattress. (I do mean *we*. I'm going to take a corner of my niece Nell's Brooklyn, N.Y., garden.)

With bird and butterfly species dropping like flies (a comparison they wouldn't appreciate), making a haven for creatures seems like an obvious good idea. Why aren't more people doing it already?

Look at houses along a suburban road, and you'll see that most homeowners accept what the developer has given them. Usually, this consists of a few evergreens close to the house's foundation, a lawn, and a lonely tree plunked in the middle of the lawn. To a weary migrating songbird, hungry honeybee, or wandering butterfly, this looks unpromising, sterile. There's little shelter, not much food on offer, and a marked lack of mating material—no bird or butterfly party going on at which to meet a mate. (Butterflies look languid and aimless, but they're in a desperate hurry to reproduce.)

I was struck by a news photo, back when John Roberts was being vetted for the Supreme Court, of our future chief justice walking to the street through the front yard of his Bethesda, Md., home. It was a very bare yard, painfully tidy; you could call it socially conservative. From the looks of things, many homeowners from Bangor, Maine, to San Diego, Calif., have a similar fear of looking different from their neighbors or being a little freed-up, generous, or, dare I say, liberal in their planting. (At one point, I considered photographing the front yards of each of our Supreme Court justices to see if the garden plots reflected their different temperaments and likely decisions. I've been holding off on this for fear of being apprehended as a security risk.)

A habitat garden has to have a variety of plants, densely planted. (Think of what a mourning dove looks for when it's trying to get

away from a cat.) The effect, I admit, could seem scruffy. But don't think unkempt; think cottage garden.

Another fear some homeowners have is that by welcoming birds and butterflies, they might also be inviting caterpillars and beetles and garden snakes. The conservative gardener might think, "I just want to avoid being a disgrace to the neighborhood; I didn't sign up to be part of the ecosystem." Face it, we were all signed up at birth. The preferred organic strategy is to invite everyone (except deer) in and let the birds and the insects and the spiders and the (nonvenomous) snakes fight it out among themselves.

If you want birds nesting in your trees, you have to have bugs. Most birds (except sea and shore birds) raise their young on an insect diet.

In those suburban yards where you do see color and variety, sometimes the garden is intended to please and impress other people rather than wildlife. Many visitors might say, "I love your big pink roses." Not so many will note the variety of birds enjoying your yard. Fewer still will get excited about the butterfly cocoons or the wasps disposing of the eggs and larvae of garden pests.

Habitat gardens, though they can be pretty, are not what you usually see in *Architectural Digest* or even *Fine Gardening* as models to emulate. In addition, it is the rare nursery owner who is knowledgeable about native plants, though that is changing.

If you're willing to join me in this experiment with natural and native rather than super-tidy or super-showy, here's how to do it. Choose small trees and shrubs that provide berries to eat and a dense network of branches to conceal a nest. Add nectar-rich flowers for butterflies, honeybees, hummingbirds, and beneficial insects. A little shallow water would be appreciated; it can be no more than a concave stone that you'll splash with a bucketful of water every once in a while to prevent mosquito larvae.

Why should the plants be primarily native? For one thing, you're trying to create a distillation of the original landscape that is (or was, before the bulldozers) around your plot. That landscape will consist of the plants that co-evolved over thousands of years with native birds and insects. You need not join the native-gardening crusade; keep your pink roses and peonies and tomatoes, preferably closer to the house. This postage stamp of habitat can be at the back of your yard or along part of an edge.

[From this list of 10](#), choose one small tree, a few shrubs, and a couple of flowering plants for your wildlife experiment.

The immediate benefit of such a planting is that you'll have your own little wildlife preserve to watch. Once planted and watered attentively for the first year, these plants take little watering, no

grooming (just cut off dead stuff if necessary), zero pesticides, and, given not-terrible soil to start with, no fertilizer.

Perhaps seeing hummingbirds will be so thrilling that you'll put some red sage in with your milkweed, then you'll go buy Alabama Crimson honeysuckle or trumpet vine to grow up a pole near the front door. You may be perceived by your neighbors as eccentric; then again, you may be seen as a leader in the next wave.

If the 40 million or so gardeners in the United States each were to plant at least one of these mattress-size plots, there would be not quite a quilt, but at least a pattern of welcoming green dots across the country. (The plan will work for city gardens, and even a container planting can attract wildlife.)

So, Justice Roberts, I'm available for a consult on your front yard. Picture the native wisteria Amethyst Falls over your doorway and a grove of three river birches, native to Indiana, where you grew up, shielding the house from the sidewalk. We'll talk native plants and a little First Amendment on the side.

Send your habitat gardening tips to gardening@slate.com, and [discuss](#) this article in *Slate's* readers' forum, "The Fray."

sidebar

Return to [article](#)

TREES

Shadbush, also known as Downy Serviceberry (*Amelanchier*). White spring flowers, summer blueberrylike fruit, fall yellow and orange color.

Crabapple (*Malus*). Many cultivated varieties appeal to birds and bees. Birds seem to prefer the fancier crabapples, bred from Japanese parents, to the native crabapple, which is prone to disease. White or pink spring flowers, red fall color, red-yellow or orange clusters of small apples. Look for "disease resistance" on the tag.

SHRUBS

Fothergilla. Brushlike white flowers in spring, spectacular red and orange fall color.

Summersweet (*Clethra alnifolia*). Fragrant white or pink summer flowers. Catnip to bees. Yellow fall color.

Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*). Very pretty bright-red, bird-supporting berries that ripen in September and persist into January.

Fragrant sumac (*Rhus aromatica*). Nice tangle of stems for bird protection. Yellow catkins in spring, velvety pink summer fruit.

FLOWERS

Joe-pye weed (*Eupatorium purpureum*). Tall perennial with large clusters of purple-pink flowers that are a butterfly magnet. Also beloved by the good (pest-eating) wasps. Seed heads attract finches.

Anise Hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*). Tender perennial with licorice-scented foliage and beautiful fuzzy blue, purple, or white flowers in spikes. Attractive to hummingbirds, bees, and butterflies.

Milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*). Perennial with bright-orange, red, or yellow clusters of flowers that attract all kinds of butterflies and feed the Monarch butterfly larvae.

Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*). Red and yellow flowers with curved spurs nod over lacy foliage and attract hummingbirds.

These plants work for sunny to partial-shade areas in gardens in more than half of North America. To find appropriate plants for all regions, including desert, arctic, and tropical, go to www.wildflower.org, the site for the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. Or Google "native plant societies" in your state. Also, the newest book in the [Brooklyn Botanic Garden](#) all-region guide series, *The Wildlife Gardener's Guide* by Janet Marinelli, is very useful.

hey, wait a minute Orc Holocaust

The reprehensible moral universe of Gary Gygax's Dungeons & Dragons.

By Erik Sofge

Monday, March 10, 2008, at 6:35 PM ET

When Gary Gygax [died](#), the gaming community lost an icon, its founding genius. At least that's the story being told in [countless obituaries](#) this past week by writers as eager to praise Gygax as they are to out themselves—with faux embarrassment—as former nerds whose lives he changed with [20-sided dice](#). And lo, what a fascinating and tortured bunch we are, with our tales of marathon role-playing game (RPG) sessions in windowless

basements, our fingers hardened to nacho-cheese-encrusted talons, and our monklike vows of celibacy. Part testament to Gygax, part cathartic confessional, these obituaries are rapidly cementing his position at the head of the geek pantheon.

But it has to be said: Gary Gygax wasn't a visionary to all of us. The real geeks out there—my homies—know the awkward truth: When you cut through the nostalgia, Dungeons & Dragons isn't a good role-playing game; in fact, it's one of the worst on the market. Sadly, Gygax's creation defines our strange corner of the entertainment world and drowns out all the more innovative and sophisticated games that have made D&D obsolete for decades. (As a game designer, Gygax is far outclassed by contemporaries such as [Steve Jackson](#) and [Greg Stafford](#).) It's the reason that tabletop gaming is not only stuck in the pop culture gutter but considered pathetic even by the standards of mouth-breathing Star Trek conventioners. And with the entire industry continuing to collapse in the face of online gaming, this might be the last chance to see Gygax for what he was—an unrepentant hack, more Michael Bay than [Ingmar Bergman](#).

What's wrong with Dungeons & Dragons? It plays like a video game. A good role-playing game provides the framework for a unique kind of narrative, a collaborative thought experiment crossed with improvisational theater. But D&D, particularly the first edition that Gygax co-wrote in 1975, makes this sort of creative play an afterthought. The problem is most apparent in one of Gygax's central (and celebrated) innovations: "[experience points](#)." To become a more powerful wizard, a sneakier thief, or an elfier elf (being an elf was its own profession in early editions, which is kind of like saying being Chinese is a full-time job), you need to gain "levels," which requires experience points. And the best way to get experience points is to kill stuff. Every monster, from an ankle-biting goblin to a massive fire-spewing dragon, has a specific number of points associated with it—your reward for hacking it to pieces. So while it's one player's job—the so-called Dungeon Master—to come up with the plot for each gaming session and play the parts of the various enemies and supporting characters, in practice that putative storyteller merely referees one imagined slaughter after another. This is not Tolkien's Middle-Earth, with its anti-fascist political commentary and yearning for an end to glory and the triumph of peace. This is violence without pretense, an endless [hobgoblin](#) holocaust.

Here's the narrative arithmetic that Gygax came up with: You come across a family of sleeping orcs, huddled around their overflowing chest of gold coins and magical weapons. Why do orcs and other monsters hoard gold when they can't buy anything from the local "shoppes," or share a jug of mead in the tavern, or do anything but gnash their teeth in the darkness and wait for someone to show up and fight them? Who knows, but there they are, and you now have a choice. You can let sleeping orcs lie and get on with the task at hand—saving a damsel, recovering some ancient scepter, whatever. Or you can start slitting

throats—after all, mercy doesn't have an experience point value in D&D. It's the kind of atrocity that commits itself.

For decades, gamers have argued that since D&D came first, its lame, morally repulsive experience system can be forgiven. But the damage is still being done: New generations of players are introduced to RPGs as little more than a collective fantasy of massacre and greed. If the multiplayer online game [World of Warcraft](#) is the direct descendant of D&D, then what, exactly, has Gygax bequeathed to us unwashed, nerdy masses? The notion that emotionally complex story lines are window dressing for an endless series of hack-and-slash encounters? There's a reason so many players are turned off after a brush with D&D. It promises something great—a lively (if dorky) bit of performance art—but delivers a small-minded and ignorant fantasy of rage, distilled to a bunch of arcane charts and die rolls. Dungeons & Dragons strips the "role-playing" out of RPGs; it's a videogame without the graphics, and a pretty boring one, at that.

There is a way to wring real creativity, and possibly even artistic merit, from this bizarre medium—and it has nothing to do with Gygax and his tradition of sociopathic storytelling. In the mid-1980s, right around the time that Gygax was selling off his company, Steve Jackson began publishing the [Generic Universal Roleplaying System](#), or GURPS. Jackson's goal was to provide the rules to play games in any genre. More importantly, characters in this new system could be fleshed out down to the smallest detail, from a crippling phobia of snakes to a severe food allergy. And when it came to experience points, characters got whatever the "gamemaster" decided. They might earn points for succeeding at a given task or simply for playing their character in a compelling way. Of course, players could still take out their real-life bitterness in a fictional killing spree, and the game master might end up with a stumbling and incoherent story line. But GURPS created the potential for so much more.

There are other complex, challenging games out there, and GURPS is still in print. But the bloodthirsty Dungeons & Dragons franchise remains a bestseller. If it seems overly harsh to fault Gygax for his seminal work, keep in mind that in 1987 he helped create the gaming equivalent of [Plan 9 From Outer Space](#). In the now-infamous [Cyborg Commando](#), you play a man-bot battling an invasion of alien insects. Unfortunately, you seem to have been built for comedic effect, with lasers that shoot out of your knuckles and your brain inexplicably transferred to your torso. That frees up cranial space so you can suck liquids through your nose for further analysis. Not that there are any rules for said chemical analysis, or for much of anything, really. Gygax wasn't much for the details. In the end, his games are a lot like his legacy: goofy, malformed, and fodder for a self-deprecating joke or two—before being shoved in the closet for good.

hot document**The Emperors' Club's Front Company**

Gotten your "strategy planned" lately, har har?

By Bonnie Goldstein

Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 4:14 PM ET

From: Bonnie Goldstein

Posted Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 4:14 PM ET

Among the federal crimes Eliot Spitzer may have committed is a financial sleight of hand called "[structuring](#)." Spitzer made incremental [cash](#) payments to [Emperors' Club VIP](#), bypassing an available [PayPal](#) option ("using Visa or MasterCard"; see Page 2). Consequently, the [erstwhile New York governor](#) may never have clapped eyes on the [Web site](#) for [QAT Consulting](#), the shell company where all Emperors' Club remittances ended up. Had Spitzer clicked through to QAT (below and on the following three pages), he surely would have noticed that the company specialized "in all legal ways in arranging suitable and lawful USA offshore structuring." Given his crusading record as New York's attorney general, Spitzer now may be even *more* dismayed to be linked publicly with a financial shell game than he is to be associated publicly with prostitution.

As "Client-9," Spitzer paid \$4,300 for his Valentine's Eve tryst. Had he instead availed himself of QAT's "[marketing](#)," "[design](#)," and "[financial services](#)," he would have saved himself some money and might have experienced equal satisfaction. For example, had he procured "strategic planning" or "graphic design" (Page 3), he might have paid only "\$600-\$3000 depending on complicity [sic] of the project." If the former prosecutor had opted for "office design" assistance (Page 4), he'd have been able "to get exactly who you want" for the bargain price of only "\$800-\$1600." No doubt some clients needed their strategies planned or their offices designed two or three times a week.

Send ideas for Hot Document to documents@slate.com Please indicate whether you wish to remain anonymous.

Posted Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 4:14 PM ET

Posted Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 4:14 PM ET

Posted Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 4:14 PM ET

hot document**Eliot Spitzer's Escort Service**

Serving (until a few days ago) persons of "immense financial and influential affluence."

By Timothy Noah

Monday, March 10, 2008, at 6:40 PM ET

From: Timothy Noah

Posted Monday, March 10, 2008, at 6:40 PM ET

The *New York Times* [revealed](#) earlier today that Gov. Eliot Spitzer of New York arranged last month to meet a prostitute at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington. The prostitute worked through a high-priced, multinational escort service called Emperors' Club VIP, which was [named](#) in a felony complaint unsealed on March 6. (To read the complaint, click [here](#).) The Emperors' Club's Web site was taken down that same day, but *Slate* was able to retrieve a couple of cached pages (see below and Page 2).

The Emperors' Club termed itself a "social introduction service" that promised "private, risk-free dating" with "beautiful, educated companions of fine family and career backgrounds" to persons of "immense financial and influential affluence" (see below). The prostitutes were moonlighting "fashion models,

pageant winners, and exquisite students, graduates, and women of successful careers (finance, art, media, etc.)." Areas of operation included Manhattan and the Tri-State area, Los Angeles, Miami, London, and Europe (see Page 2). Before the Emperors' Club Web site disappeared into the ether, the Smoking Gun Web site was able to copy some additional pages, including one featuring photographs of some of the women on offer, operating under *noms de guerre* like Sienna and Daniella (see Page 4).

The Smoking Gun also [obtained](#) a copy of an FBI affidavit related to the case (see Page 3). This document includes a wiretapped conversation between "Rachelle" and "Kristen" (not pictured in the Smoking Gun's menu, alas) concerning "Client-9," whom the *Times* identifies as Spitzer. Kristen told Rachelle that she collected \$4,300 from Client-9 and said, "I don't think he's difficult. I mean it's just kind of like ... whatever." Rachelle answered that she'd heard otherwise. Client-9, she'd been told, "would ask you to do things that, like, you might not think were safe—you know—I mean that ... very basic things." Kristen replied, "I have a way of dealing with that ... I'd be like, 'listen, dude, you really want the sex? ... You know what I mean.'"

Got a Hot Document? Send it to documents@slate.com. Please indicate whether you wish to remain anonymous.

From: Timothy Noah
Posted Monday, March 10, 2008, at 6:40 PM ET

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idolatry
Catching Up With *American Idol*

Emo mullets, girl-on-girl photos, and other news you may have missed.
By Katherine Meizel
Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 7:35 AM ET

From: Katherine Meizel
Subject: Our Great National Pastime Returns
Updated Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 7:35 AM ET

It's a *Rocky* road to fame. That was the message of *American Idol*'s 2008 premiere, which took us to Philadelphia, a city, as Ryan Seacrest reminded us, that's the home of the Liberty Bell, the Declaration of Independence, and a certain fictional [boxer](#) who overcame a speech impediment to make five sequels. Speaking of going the distance, last night began *American Idol*'s seventh season, and, despite a spate of disheartening news ([disappointing album sales](#), [dropped recording contracts](#), [critique from Chris Daughtry](#)), the show is forging ahead like the little ... I mean, the freaking huge engine who couldn't give a flying Phil Stacey about the writers' strike. It's a good thing that reality TV writers [don't belong to the WGA](#), or we'd be missing out on such brilliant between-contestant segues as, "The judges need a dash of beauty. Instead, they're about to get a dose of Udi." Given script like that, I was surprised that the panel turned away contestant Paul Marturano and his disturbing dedication to Paula Abdul, which ingeniously rhymed "stalker" with "Peter Falk her."

Idol had its own fighters last night, including the [controversially professional](#) Kristy Lee Cook, who, in addition to already having had a bit of a singing career, trains for cage matches. She also loves horses, though maybe not that much, since she sold her best barrel horse to pay for her trip to Philly. That's right, she sold out her horse to get to Hollywood. Ain't that America? I guess I shouldn't judge; I sold my gerbil for a bus ticket

downtown last week, and all my goldfish have been in hiding since I mentioned Paris ...

Although there's been quite a bit of hype about all the changes this year, which promise singers playing real! live! instruments! and fewer guest coaches, the first *Idol* episode offered only business as usual. You had your tales of adversity: impressive weight loss, invalid parents, a compulsion to wear glitter and sing like Grace Slick. You had your too-loud singing and your too-soft singing, your homegrown ex-child-prodigies and your foreign accents, your too-old contestants and too-young mothers. There were moments of tenderness from the judges as sensitive teenagers wept in defeat and moments of rage as *Star Wars* fans cursed Simon from beneath their faux Princess Leia coiffures. Or their Princess Leia bikinis, as in the evening's most bizarre contrivance, a sequence involving the [iconic sci-fi S&M costume](#), a man named Ben, and Paula's fascination/disgust with his chest hair. (In a stunning coincidence, Ben's last name? Haar. If you can't guess, look it up in a [German dictionary](#).)

These audition episodes are the part of *American Idol* that I hate to love and love to hate, a three-times-a-week, month-long humiliation extravaganza that kind of makes the show what it is. It's something that other reality TV competitions rush through—the recent *Dance War: Bruno vs. Carrie Ann*, for example, got through this lengthy selection process in its first two hours. It's more efficient that way, but it's also, I think, less compelling television. *Idol* makes me cross my fingers and hold my breath hoping that the sweet kids turn out to be great singers and that the snotty ones get their comeuppance. And I suppose without these first installments, I'd have missed the experience of righteous indignation when the judges mocked Egyptian immigrant Alaa Youakeem and mispronounced his name over and over for what seemed like an eternity (OK, I'd mispronounce it, too—it starts with that 'ayn thingie I can't properly say without coughing). Is it bad to love *American Idol* because it makes me feel morally superior?

So, the show is back, a constant in my life, as predictable and comfortable as the SoCal winter. I would even go so far as to say that watching last night was [Chicken Soup for the American Idol Soul](#), or maybe comfort food like the five new unnecessary [American Idol ice cream flavors](#) (sadly, no Rocky Road). You can apparently vote for your favorite one—I'll go out on a limb and say that, for both the ice cream and the singing competition, my money's on the Cheesecake Diva.

From: Katherine Meizel
Subject: Emo Mullets, Girl-on-Girl Photos, and Other News You May Have Missed

Posted Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 7:35 AM ET

Welcome to the finals of *American Idol*, where *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*—starring Jason Castro as Blake Lewis, David Archuleta as Melinda Doolittle, David Hernandez and Ramiele Malubay as Antonella Barba, and Amanda Overmyer as Sanjaya Malakar's hair. Jason is the quirky, edgy one. David is the shy vocal genius pegged to win but doomed to be sent home early due to a fatal case of perfection—even the judges know this, congratulating David on every microscopic mistake that makes him seem "human." David H. and Ramiele have the kind of racy past that did in Antonella last season, and as for the coiffure comparison—well, it's not even just Amanda's two-tone style. Really, when I look at the 2008 lineup, it's been *all about* the hair.

Since January, we've seen head after head of long, silky tresses, bizarre bouffants, and daring 'dos. And those are just the boys. [Danny Noriega](#) and [Ramiele Malubay](#) had practically identical looks going during the semifinals, but there's only room for one emo mullet in this competition, so Danny had to go. [Robbie Carrico](#) was voted out in the wake of rumors that his attempt at grungy rocker hair was even more faux than his attempted rocking. Next up are Jason Castro's [dreads](#), which apparently are in constant danger of falling off at [inopportune moments in front of his girlfriends](#). And Amanda, working the same concept as *Project Runway* winner [Christian Siriano](#), seems to be sporting two self-contained hairdos simultaneously. For Siriano, it amounts to a *sideways* emo mullet—half Danny Noriega and half Anne Heche, or, as he described it, business on one side and party on the other—while what's happening on Amanda's head makes her look as if she is wearing Carly Smithson on top of a secret Blondie obsession.

It might seem like I'm indulging a senseless fixation on cosmetic detail, but as *Idol* sponsor Sunsilk would say, "Their hair tells their story." Danny's 'do spoke volume(s) about his willingness to [take on the responsibility](#) of shattering *Idol* taboos regarding certain expressions of gender identity and sexuality. Amanda's hair, to me, is a symptom of an identity crisis, which shows in her song choices (Kansas!), and I worry about her. And Robbie's image issues served as a harsh reminder that to rock out on *American Idol* you have to prove that you are *authentic*, a word that the judges wield like a "[Hammer To Fall](#)" *every single time* anyone sings Queen or Lynyrd Skynyrd or Bon Jovi.

Authenticity, I think, is also one reason why contestants are allowed to play instruments this year, to make them seem like real musicians. I'm not sure it works 100 percent, though. Sometimes it makes for an especially complete performance, like David Cook's striking "Hello"; and it did allow Brooke White to sing the kind of Carly Simon piano ballad that is usually neglected on the show. But often the instruments just seem superfluous—a topic upon which Simon has expounded more than once recently, all the while offering contestants the new idiosyncratic hand gesture Ryan calls a "[half moose](#)." Well,

I suppose it's better than the perennial [middle finger](#), and it would have been gratifying to moose off that driver who cut me off on the 101 yesterday.

Other highlights of the season so far: Paula fabulously Dancing Like There's No Tomorrow (and singing like she swallowed a vocoder); Jason Castro's lovely "Hallelujah," sung in the manner, and sometimes in exact imitation, of Jeff Buckley; the return of prodigal *Idol* Blake Lewis and his sweater vests. And there's been scandal, oh, yes: [stripping](#) and [Christmas obscenities](#) and [girl-on-girl photos](#); former [Star Search winners](#) and abortive prior [contracts](#). And yet the "most embarrassing stories" the contestants told during '80s week were sordid tales of forgotten lyrics and tragically unnoticed snot. As for the contestants with controversial previous experience, [Simon Cowell charitably insists](#) that they're all only on *American Idol* because they failed with those contracts, so it's not like the producers are stacking the decks with ringers or anything. Still, we're told, this is the *Best Talent EVER!*

I do think that the level of vocal skill this season has been a tad more even across the board than in the past, which makes it harder to choose and harder to lose each ousted contestant. We've said goodbye to some good voices, to the diacritically mysterious Alexandrea Lushington and Asia'h Epperson, to Jason Yeager's boy-band past, and Robbie Carrico's ... boy-band past. Hey, maybe Jason and Robbie can form a new boy band together! OK, I just went to [this site](#) to randomly generate a band name for them and got a list that included "Idol Turkey and the Rational Two-Piece." Forget Yeager and Carrico; I'm using that for *my* band.

And so, with the selection of the Top 12, the show has really only just begun. The next two months will see the competition intensify and bring the inexorable return of the brilliantly self-promotional philanthropaganza "*Idol Gives Back*," with a star-studded guest list including Brad Pitt, Mariah Carey, and Snoop Dogg. (Perhaps he will sing with Miley Cyrus!) And the biggest news of all: Almost a year ago, I was [whining in this space](#) about "British Invasion Night" without the British Invasion—well, this week we are finally going to hear the *Idols* take on the Beatles songbook. Here's hoping that Chikezie tries out a mop top.

juicy bits

So You Want To Open a Brothel

The keys to success, as gleaned from the Web site of Eliot Spitzer's favorite escort service.

By Josh Levin

Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 10:36 AM ET

On Monday, New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer [apologized](#) for failing

"to live up to the standard I expected of myself." The standard he failed to meet: completing a full term without making the acquaintance of high-priced call girls. According to [a criminal complaint](#) (PDF) filed in U.S. District Court, Spitzer paid \$4,300 for a night with "Kristen," an escort from Emperors' Club. Like any 21st-century escort service, Emperors' Club has a storefront on the Web—as of Tuesday morning, visitors to [emperorsclubvip.com](#) are informed that the site "has been disabled." Thanks to Google's cache feature, however, it's still possible to peruse the site's nongraphical elements. The membership guidelines, the promotional materials, and the model profiles are all still there for the browsing, offering a rare glimpse at the secrets of operating today's brothel for the well-to-do.

Ingratiate yourself with the target audience. "Catering to the most financially elite social circles in the entire world," the site's [welcome page](#) begins, "Emperors Club is the elite recreation venue and private club for those accustomed to excellence." Apparently, those accustomed to excellence do not, as you might expect, demand copy written by native English speakers. ("When seeking an evening date, a weekend travel companion, or a friend to accompany you to your next business or social event, our Icon Models are paramount preference.")

Build a feeling of community, but also exclusivity. For its members, Emperors' Club isn't a warehouse. It's a whorehome—a full-service institution that matches "customers with the ... finest concierge luxuries." Membership has its [privileges](#): "entrance to sold out events (Concerts, Sporting Events, Oscar Awards, Grand Prix ...)" and "a weekend date with your favorite celebrity (50% of Celebrity Date proceeds are given to charity / cause of choice)." But just like [Augusta National](#) and [the Order of Skull and Bones](#), Emperors' Club knows the key to maintaining a private club is keeping out the crumb bums. "We act for a select group of educated, refined and successful international clients," the site explains. The stats: "92 percent of Emperors' Club International Members are CEO / Owner / Partners of a large (often international) corporation."

Hire an elite workforce. "[Emperors Club Icon Models](#)," the site explains, are carefully selected based on "[q]uality and level of education, family background, intelligence, personality, ability to create an enjoyable atmosphere and physical beauty." Skeptical about the Icon Models' credentials? Not to worry—each of the ladies on staff has a detailed CV that appears to have been ghost-written by *Anchorman's* [Ron Burgundy](#). [Maglia](#) "speaks six of the world's leading languages fluently." [Alyssa](#) has "been educated at the finest Acting Academies." [Giada](#), who has a B.A. in tourism, is an "interior designer for some of Europe's finest estates." (The site doesn't have a listing for Spitzer's date, who went by the sobriquet "Kristen.")

Push the merchandise. If only selling an escort were as simple as listing her degrees and job titles. Today's discerning customer

requires both a rundown of likes and dislikes—[Drew](#), for one, lists her preferred chocolates as "Milk, Dark, White"—and narrative flourish to stoke the imagination. For lovers of song, there's [Emmy](#), "a fine country and folk musician. Her gifted voice and melodious harmony convey nature's beautiful appreciation at once. She is comforting ... rustic. From the warm-toned autumn leaves to the rising flowers of spring, Emmy casually reminds you to savor every second of our surrounding, abundant beauty. Emmy... be revitalized to triumph." If you're more of a gourmand, you might prefer [Trina](#): "A master of culinary tastes and combinations, her lithe fashion model frame shows not the elegant meals she delectably creates to savor, but only reveals the riveting years she spent as a professional ballerina."

Create a unique rating system. Roger Ebert has the thumb. [Michelin](#) has the star. Emperors' Club has the diamond. According to a page on "[Introduction Fees](#)," the club ranked its call girls from three to seven diamonds based on "individual education, sophistication, and ambiance." Prices range from \$1,000 for an hour with a three-diamond prostitute up to \$3,100 for a seven-diamond hooker; dawn-to-dawn rates go from \$10,000 for a three-diamond to \$31,000 for a seven-diamond. Bargain hunters take note: \$30,000 will buy you a trio of three-diamond prostitutes—that's a total of nine diamonds for less than the price of a single seven-diamond call girl.

Exploit all possible revenue streams. Most brothels stick to selling sex. Emperors' Club has a more diverse business model. Alongside the hooker portfolios, there's a [page inviting companies](#) to advertise on [emperorsclubvip.com](#). (To inquire about rates, please e-mail [ads@emperorsclubvip.com](#)). The site promises access to a well-heeled clientele, noting that members' gross annual income averages \$3.63 million per year. Perhaps Spitzer received some kind of financial aid—his [annual salary](#) is a scant \$179,000.

Nurture the mind as well as the body. For the john who just can't make up his mind, Emperors' Club's [site map](#) lists a buffet of options. Along with the requisites—"millionaire dating," "billionaire dating," "billionaire introductions"—there's a healthy supply of nonsexual fare, including private yacht charters and "authentic art for purchase." The site's [contemporary art page](#) claims that Emperors' Club represents "artists of superior mastery," linking to dedicated pages for [Andrew Wyeth](#) and [Jeff Koons](#). Emperors' Club is a model of efficient Web design: The site's [artist portfolios](#) have the exact same layout as the [prostitute portfolios](#).

Help your clients find true love. "We understand that some of our clients / members and represented models may be interested in long-term companionship / private dating on a more personal level," the site explains. "We are happy to contribute to such arrangements." How does Emperors' Club express its happiness on such joyous occasions? By demanding a "[buyout](#)"—"a

mutually agreed upon lump sum which the client / member transfers to the company to compensate the company for its role in and allocation of valuable resources which make it possible for this relationship to occur between the client and model."

Offer flexible payment options. According to the site's "[VIP rates](#)" page, there are Emperors' Club "Gift Certificates Available Upon Request."

jurisprudence

Why Is Prostitution Illegal?

The oldest question about the oldest profession.

By Emily Bazelon

Monday, March 10, 2008, at 7:12 PM ET

When he was attorney general, Eliot Spitzer had no trouble going after a "[sophisticated prostitution ring](#)." As governor, he apparently [had no trouble patronizing one](#). The hypocrisy speaks for itself. But what about the oldest question about the oldest profession: Why, exactly, is prostitution illegal?

The case for making it against the law to buy sex begins with the premise that it's base and exploitative and demeaning to sex workers. [Legalizing prostitution expands it](#), the argument goes, and also helps pimps, fails to protect women, and leads to more back-alley violence, not less. This fight over legalization has been waged in the last few years over international human-trafficking laws and proposals to make prostitution legal [in countries like Bulgaria](#), a movement that the U.S. government helped defeat. In 2004, the federal government expressed its position: "The United States government takes a firm stance against proposals to legalize prostitution because prostitution directly contributes to the modern-day slave trade and is inherently demeaning." The government also claims that legalizing or tolerating prostitution creates "greater demand for human trafficking victims." And yet, prostitution is legal in parts of Nevada, a companion to other cherished vices.

You don't have to be a moralist or a prude to buy the argument for banning prostitution. But if you're so inclined, it's an easy one to take apart. Martha Nussbaum, a law and philosophy professor at the University of Chicago, argues that lots of work involves the sale of bodily services and that lots of the work that poor women do involves bad working conditions. For her, it's all about context—there's a big difference between a street worker controlled by a pimp and a high-end call girl who picks her own clients, and the real question is how to increase poor women's access to decent and safe work in general. Legalizing prostitution "is likely to make things a little better for women who have too few options to begin with," Nussbaum writes.

The extremely pricey outfit Spitzer apparently used looks like an example of the high-end trade Nussbaum would distinguish from low-rent street work. The further defense of such escort services is that prostitution is inevitable and that conditions will be better for everyone all around if it's regulated (more condoms, fewer beatings). This parallels the argument against Prohibition or in favor of drug legalization: Illegality puts the bad guys and their guns in control. Women who fear prosecution can't go to the police for help. Better to give women more recourse to head off abuse and even inspect brothels for health-code violations.

Would legalizing prostitution increase trafficking? Not necessarily. "By this logic, the state of Nevada should be awash in foreign sex slaves, leading one to wonder what steps the Justice Department is taking to free them," writer David Feingold noted dryly in *Foreign Policy* in 2005. Countries in which prostitution is legal—Australia, Germany, the Netherlands—aren't cesspools. On the other hand, they haven't seen the demand for prostitution drop off, either, and sometimes it rises.

That's a disappointment for advocates of legalization, and lately there's another favorite model. In 1999, Sweden made it legal to sell sex but illegal to buy it—only the johns and the traffickers can be prosecuted. This is the only approach to prostitution that's based on "sex equality," argues University of Michigan law professor Catharine MacKinnon. It treats prostitution as a social evil but views the women who do it as the victims of sexual exploitation who "should not be victimized again by the state by being made into criminals," as MacKinnon put it to me in an e-mail. It's the men who use the women, she continued, who are "sexual predators" and should be punished as such.

[According to this Web site](#) for the Women's Justice Center, Sweden's way of doing things is a big success. "In the capital city of Stockholm the number of women in street prostitution has been reduced by two thirds, and the number of johns has been reduced by 80%." Trafficking is reportedly down to 200 to 400 girls and women a year, compared with 15,000 to 17,000 in nearby Finland. Max Waltman, a doctoral candidate in Stockholm who is studying the country's prostitution laws, says that those stats hold up. He also said the police are actually going after the johns as ordered: In 2006, more than 150 were convicted and fined. (That might not sound like many, but then Sweden has a population of only 9 million.)

For feminists like MacKinnon (with whom Waltman works), this sure looks like the solution: Go after the men! Take down Eliot Spitzer and leave the call girls alone! On the other hand, the group SANS, for Sex Workers and Allies Network in Sweden, [doesn't like the 1999 law](#). The network says it has brought more dangerous clients and more unsafe sex, rather than the other way around. Waltman says that there's a lot of debate in Sweden because some people inside and outside the industry still want

straight-out legalization but that no systematic studies have shown that the law has made sex work worse or riskier.

In the end, this seems like the most salient question: Forget Eliot Spitzer. Shouldn't prostitution laws come down to working conditions—and the laws that would lead to better ones for sex workers? [According to a recent working paper](#) (PDF) by economist Steven Levitt and sociologist Sudhir Venkatesh*, despite all the fighting and all the preaching, we apparently don't know that much about the specifics of the structure of the sex market—how much prostitutes make on average, how many tricks they turn a year, how frequently they and their pimps and johns actually get arrested.

To start filling in the gap, Levitt and Venkatesh looked at data from the Chicago Police Department. They found that women working the streets were making \$27 an hour but less than \$20,000 a year (they don't log a lot of hours). The risks of the trade were serious: "an annual average of a dozen incidents of violence and 300 instances of unprotected sex." There was also a "surprisingly high prevalence of police officers demanding sex from prostitutes in return for avoiding arrest." That looks like another argument against the bans on prostitution—presumably women wouldn't be caught in this particular trap if they weren't worried about going to jail in the first place. Levitt and Venkatesh also offer up this statistic: Prostitutes get arrested about once per 450 tricks, and johns even less frequently. Two lessons here: 1) A law that isn't being enforced much may not be worth having; and 2) Eliot Spitzer looks really, really unlucky.

***Correction, March 11:** The original sentence incorrectly identified Sudhir Venkatesh as an anthropologist. ([Return to the corrected sentence.](#))*

map the candidates Traveling Light

Obama and Clinton ease back on the stump speeches during the campaign's lull.

By E.J. Kalafarski and Chadwick Matlin

Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 1:38 PM ET

Devoted readers may have noticed updates to Map the Candidates have been a bit infrequent recently. That's because the candidates haven't given us much to work with.

Since Ohio's and Texas' primaries on March 4, both Democrats have pared down their public schedules considerably. Hillary Clinton has made nine stops over the last seven days, while Obama has made only six. Both candidates have taken rare days

off—at least publicly. Obama was off the trail for four days, while Clinton took two days off.

With six weeks to go until Pennsylvania's primary, neither candidate is in a rush to overload voters too quickly. Both have dabbled in Pennsylvania but haven't unleashed a full-court press like we saw in the run-up to Iowa. That's not likely to remain the case as we get closer to April 22.

[Map the Candidates](#) uses the candidates' public schedules to keep track of their comings and goings. A quick primer on your new election toolbox:

- Do you want to know who spent the most time in Iowa or New Hampshire last month? Play with the timeline sliders above the map to customize the amount of time displayed.
- Care most about who visited your home state? Then **zoom in on it** or type a location into the **"geosearch" box** below the map.
- Choose which candidates you want to follow with the **check boxes** on to the right of the map. If you only want to see the front-runners, then uncheck all of the fringe candidates. *Voilà!* You're left with the cream of the crop's travels.
- Follow the campaign trail virtually with MTC's **news feed**. Every day YouTube video and articles from local papers will give you a glimpse of what stump speeches really look and sound like. Just **click the arrow** next to the headline to get started.
- Take a closer look at candidates by **clicking on their names** to the right of the map. You'll get the lowdown on their travels, media coverage, and policy positions.

Click [here](#) to start using Map the Candidates.

medical examiner

Your Health This Week

Does Airborne work? And should 30 million more kids get a flu shot?

By Sydney Spiesel

Friday, March 14, 2008, at 7:21 AM ET

This week, Dr. Sydney Spiesel discusses [the herbal remedy Airborne](#) and the power of belief, how to [prevent kidney stones](#), and [whether 30 million more kids should get a flu shot each year](#).

[Airborne](#): Why it really does work.

Product: For more than 10 years, the herbal remedy Airborne was marketed as a cold-fighting treatment by CEO Elise Donahue, a former second-grade teacher who created and marketed the product herself, working her way up to an Oprah endorsement. Donahue's company claimed that it had been tested, with remarkable success, in a "double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical trial of 120 patients" in the early stages of a head cold. About half the patients treated with Airborne reportedly didn't develop a full-blown cold, compared with 77 percent of placebo-treated patients who did.

Law suit: But then two years ago [ABC News reported](#) that the testing laboratory, GNG Pharmaceutical Services, was a two-man operation with "no clinic, no scientists, and no doctors," started up to generate the Airborne study. A class-action suit for false advertising followed, and the company [just agreed to pay more than \\$23 million to settle it](#). Besides its lack of demonstrable efficacy (a little problem shared by virtually all cold medicines), there is the additional concern that Airborne might contain an unsafe amount of vitamin A.

Regulation: Why isn't some government entity, like the Food and Drug Administration, keeping track of products like this? The answer is simple: Basically, we don't want them to. In 1994, Congress passed the [Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act](#), which essentially set aside the FDA's oversight of products marketed as dietary supplements or the ingredients of dietary supplements. The FDA can pull such products from the market if they carry a significant risk of injury or if they are advertised to "prevent," "cure," or "treat" some illness, but, otherwise, they are to be left alone. The legislation was enacted to satisfy people who believe in these products and manufacturers who want to sell them. Neither constituency thinks these products should be subject to the pre-market safety and efficacy testing required of real medications—and, frankly, the true believers probably wouldn't heed the results, anyway.

Question: Are people deluded, or do products like this work? My answer, surprisingly, is that they do work—but only if you believe and thus deceive yourself. When you take the medicine you believe in, you won't notice when your nose runs anyway, and if you forget to take it before flying, you won't remember that your trip ended in perfect health. That's why it is so important that real studies of efficacy and safety include both the medication under evaluation and a placebo that looks, smells, and tastes just like it.

Findings: A very nice recent [piece of research](#) illustrates both the powerful effect of expectations and the subtle forces that influence them. The [research group](#) offered the experimental subjects a "new pain-relieving drug"—actually a placebo—and measured how well it relieved the pain of an electric shock. The subjects were divided into two groups. Both were given the same placebo pills and both were exposed to the same painful shocks, but one group was told that the pills cost \$2.50 each and the

other group was told that the pills were discounted to 10 cents. (I suppose because no one in their right mind would believe that a real pharmaceutical manufacturer would sell something so cheaply.) Both pills worked to reduce pain, but the \$2.50 pill worked a lot better than the cheaper one.

Conclusion: I'm betting that even though Airborne's settlement includes an offer of refunds to disappointed buyers, the company won't have to pay a lot of them. It's awfully hard to unbelieve.

[*Kidney stones and germ prevention?*](#)

Condition: Kidney stones are hard, usually minerallike objects made of a poorly soluble salt, calcium oxalate. Between 5 percent and 15 percent of the population has them at some point. Because they often cause severe pain, kidney stones frequently send sufferers to the hospital. The annual economic impact of those admissions in the United States has been estimated at about \$2 billion. Preventing them could lead to savings of \$2,500 per patient.

Question: Could we figure out how to prevent kidney stones if we understood why some people get kidney stones and others do not? [Recent research in Boston](#) suggests that the key may be the presence or absence of a slightly exotic bacterium in the intestines. This germ, called *Oxalobacter formigenes*, burns oxalic acid as its energy source, which, in theory, could make the compound less available for forming kidney stones.

Research: To test this theory, the researchers looked at about 250 adult patients with recurrent calcium-oxalate kidney stones and compared them with a roughly equal number of similar people without the stones. They cultured the stool of both groups, looking for colonization of *Oxalobacter formigenes* in the large bowel. They found that patients with this bacterium were at 70 percent less risk of developing recurrent kidney stones.

Conclusion: Whether this association is a coincidence or reflects actual causation remains to be established, but the finding is provocative. If this apparently safe and harmless germ eliminates oxalic acid and, in so doing, inhibits kidney stone formation, it could lead to new treatments. Perhaps we are looking for a new form of probiotic—a live-bacterium food additive that would prevent these painful stones from forming.

[*A flu shot for every kid*](#)

Recommendation: The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices is charged with making recommendations on immunization practice to the Centers for Disease Control, which almost always follows its advice. A few weeks ago, the advisory group came up with a bold [new recommendation about influenza](#)

[immunization](#): that all children between 6 months and 18 years of age should be given an annual flu vaccination.

Obstacles: The logistic difficulties inherent in this recommendation are pretty impressive. Thirty million additional children would get a flu shot every year (current recommendations call for flu immunizations for children only through age 5). Manufacturers, which in past years have had some difficulties in keeping up with the annual demand for this vaccine, would be pushed to scale up dramatically. That could lead to production problems, as in previous years, which in turn throw off distribution schedules, pushing the time of immunization dangerously close to the flu season itself. The timing of the recommendation is also tricky because of the [clear wide failure of this year's flu shot](#). Nasal-spray vaccine will probably be used more if the CDC accepts the recommendation to immunize more kids. It's easier to administer but may result in more side effects, since it should not be used for patients with asthma or certain other disorders. It is also somewhat more expensive than the injected version of the vaccine.

Rationale: Why did the ACIP choose to make such a controversial recommendation? First, even healthy children infected with flu are at risk for developing serious additional illnesses. (Last year, for instance, about 70 children in the United States died of influenza or its complications.) Children have also been identified as playing [a significant role in the transmission of this disease](#) to other children and to adults. Also, the economic cost is larger than one might imagine, since parents often need to take time away from work to attend to children who are ill.

Questions: Immunizing 30 million more children will probably be beyond the capabilities of pediatric and family-practice doctors and might be assigned instead to schools, pharmacies, and supermarket clinics. We don't know what this will mean. For instance, will it further weaken the relationship between patients and their usual health-care providers? Would that reduce the diagnosis of serious illness? Will the cost of more immunization take money away from other more important medical efforts?

Conclusion: In sum, the ACIP's recommendation is probably a good one, but only time will sort out whether the benefits exceed the disadvantages.

Watch Slate V's new series "House Calls With Dr. Syd"

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The research group was headed by Dan Ariely of MIT.

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Because of rapid genetic mutation, new strains of the influenza virus are constantly evolving and differ enough from each other that vaccines that protect against one strain don't offer much protection against others. It takes a while to produce and test a new vaccine, however, so upcoming formulas must be based on a prediction of which strains will be in wide circulation a year in advance. These predictions, made by studying epidemiological patterns (which are different for the Northern and Southern hemispheres), have been, historically, amazingly accurate. But this year, the predictions were off for two of the three strains incorporated into the current vaccine, resulting in a real decrease in protection.

medical examiner Training Daze

Why do doctors fixate on diagnosis, not treatment?

By Darshak Sanghavi

Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 1:06 PM ET

When doctors are freed from commercial pressure, how well do they perform? We've grown accustomed to scapegoating pharmaceutical companies for health-care ills—consider movies like *The Constant Gardener* and the recent *New York Times Magazine* [exposé](#) by a psychiatrist paid by drug makers. The implication is that if left alone by money-grubbing drug companies and health insurers, physicians make the right decisions on behalf of their patients.

Not so fast. It turns out that improving the quality of health care has only a little to do with drug companies. Their influence is a symptom of a deeper underlying pathology. The real trouble is that doctors—somewhat paradoxically—are simply not focused on actually *treating* disease.

A key indicator of this problem emerged last October, when a team of researchers led by Rita Mangione-Smith [reviewed children's medical records](#) from 12 major American cities and found that fewer than half of children got the correct medical care during doctor visits. The researchers asked basic questions

such as these: Did doctors properly inform mothers to continue feeding infants who had diarrhea? Was HIV testing offered to all adolescents diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease? Was a follow-up visit scheduled after a child's medication changed for chronic asthma? These were all simple things doctors should have been doing yet weren't. (A similar study of adult quality of care [was published](#) in 2003 with similar results.)

This seems absurd. Physicians are some of the most hypereducated professionals around, with eight years of higher education, followed by three to 10 years of residency and subspecialty training over thousands of hours. They also must pass some of the most exacting and complex licensing exams ever written, including at least four separate tests requiring weeks of dedicated study to achieve board certification. And yet, according to studies like Mangione-Smith's, most doctors in practice don't pass muster in administering optimal care for elementary conditions like infant diarrhea. What is going on?

There are at least two explanations. First, clinical training in primary care—including pediatrics, internal medicine, and family practice—excessively focuses on the diagnostic hunt rather than the more routine rounds of treatment that follow. It's tempting to think that most doctors are detectives nailing baffling diagnoses, like Hugh Laurie's character on *House*. In part, this view of medicine accounts for the success of Jerome Groopman's book *How Doctors Think*, which explores how wrong diagnoses occur. In almost every educational venue—from morning teaching sessions for residents to the weekly case conference featured in the *New England Journal of Medicine*—medical trainees spend hours learning about how to diagnose rare ailments. And then, abruptly, discussion ends, as though treatment were an afterthought.

The not-so-subtle subtext: Medicine is about the exciting search for a diagnosis, and any old doctor can write a prescription once the real work is done. This same bias pervades insurance rules. To be paid at the appropriate level, physicians must exhaustively document all sorts of irrelevant diagnostic data—such as a rectal exam in toddlers seen for a comprehensive asthma evaluation—rather than the rationale for the treatment they prescribe.

On a separate but related front, medical education today fixates on acquiring knowledge that is largely unrelated to patient care. Consider the college prerequisites to attend medical school (for example, physics and organic chemistry) and the morass of molecular biology, anatomy lessons, and pharmacology that follows and must be committed to memory. Of course, a general foundation is important. However, the sheer abundance crowds out an important—in fact, the *only*—skill that matters in treating a patient: how to critically appraise published clinical trials. Few doctors ever read them. In effect, medicine has become a priesthood of practitioners who never review or learn to interpret the Bible to minister to their flock; they instead rely on secondhand wisdom. Or, worse, on Google.

That is why, for example, the average internist can describe the branching patterns of the major coronary arteries but not the primary clinical trials assessing how much, if at all, various cholesterol-lowering agents cut heart-attack risks. Or, for that matter, whether the trials were soundly conducted. Yet in real practice, diagnostic puzzles are rare, and knowing the molecular basis of an illness does little good. Instead, children see pediatricians for ear infections, diarrhea, and attention-deficit disorders. Adults see internists for high blood pressure, diabetes, and chronic pulmonary disease. Filling the training vacuum, an unregulated, for-profit industry of information peddlers is emerging to interpret clinical trials and guide treatment.

These groups essentially write CliffsNotes for doctors, and their influence on medical care cannot be overstated, though it's largely invisible to consumers. The most widely used service is UpToDate.com, a private-equity-backed, subscription-only Web site that, according to some research, is accessed by half the clinicians at hospitals affiliated with Harvard Medical School at least five times a week. Eighty-seven percent of U.S. teaching hospitals subscribe to it. On the site are thousands of recipe-like entries on everything from toddler ear infections to drug therapy for heart failure. UpToDate.com has become *the* cookbook for medical treatment. No professional primary-care medical association, like the American Medical Association or American Academy of Pediatrics, has created anything like it.

To its credit, this site is subscriber-funded and refuses advertising, unlike rival sites like Medscape and eMedicine. But there's no guarantee it'll stay that way, especially if it is sold or goes public. And while the overall quality of information is quite good, the treatment guidelines tend to favor medications over modifying behavior and lifestyle, are not vetted by any government or other professional association, rely a lot on the personal views of the one or two authors of each recipe, and rarely include any cost-benefit analysis. Fundamentally, by neglecting treatment, doctors have outsourced it to private contractors who don't answer to any authority. (This is why drug companies can launch misleading marketing campaigns without a unified voice arguing on the side of the data.)

Even if perfect treatment guidelines were to appear magically, it takes a lot of work to teach doctors to follow them. Consider ear infections in children, which are vastly overtreated with powerful antibiotics. In 2000, a group of Boston researchers created an ambitious three-year program (using sociological methods used by missionaries to score religious converts) to educate local pediatricians about proper ear-infection treatment. They explained how to talk to patients, control symptoms without antibiotics, and create educational handouts for patients. They taught doctors what they should have learned in medical school and, as [reported in Pediatrics this year](#), substantially cut antibiotic use. The only sticking point is that it all took a big investment of time and money.

Treatment neglect has big consequences beyond ear infections. Medical errors may claim almost 100,000 lives each year, often from basic skills like poor handwriting on prescriptions. In her book, *Overtreated*, Shannon Brownlee explains how ignoring treatment has led to odd discrepancies in medical care; for example, some towns in Vermont had tenfold higher rates of pediatric tonsillectomy than others, despite having the same kinds of patients.

Refocusing doctors on actual treatment, instead of pointy-headed diagnostic puzzles, will take serious effort. In the meantime, patients should ask a simple question: "Can you describe the evidence for my treatment?" For better or worse, the answer will tell you a lot about the care you're getting.

moneybox Spitzenfreude

Wall Streeters are suggesting that Spitzer's fall exonerates them. No way.

By Daniel Gross

Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 6:25 PM ET

This week's outburst of *Spitzenfreude*—joy at the governor's suffering—has been deep and prolonged on Wall Street. Spitzer became governor in large part because he exposed the sins, indiscretions, and occasional criminality of the financial-services industry. As attorney general, he gained fame by becoming the [scourge of Wall Street](#), forcing banks, mutual fund companies, and insurers to admit to wrongdoing and change the way they do business.

So many Wall Streeters view Spitzer's downfall as a case of richly deserved bad karma for ruining the lives of countless innocents and imply that his sins vindicate those he investigated and prosecuted. "He destroyed reputations of people who had good reputations and deserved reputations," said Kenneth Langone, a former director of the New York Stock Exchange and ally of Richard Grasso, the former NYSE CEO whom Spitzer brought down over compensation issues. "We all have our own private hells," Langone [continued](#). "I hope his private hell is hotter than anybody else's." Charles Gasparino of CNBC has been all over the airwaves hyping his [book about the Grasso-Spitzer episode](#) (two guesses who his main source was) and [writing in the New York Post](#) of the "poetic justice" of Spitzer succumbing to his own shortcomings: "his zealotry, his wild temperament and his penchant for sleazy tactics." In the *Wall Street Journal*, columnist John Fund skewered Spitzer for, among other things, bludgeoning Wall Street firms into expensive settlements "all without any trials or judicial determination that they had done anything wrong."

Please.

Just as Spitzer didn't need an indictment and a trial by a jury of his peers to know that his conduct was unacceptable and incompatible with holding a position of public trust, the subjects of most of Spitzer's investigations didn't need a grand jury and lengthy court proceedings to know that they had been caught *in flagrante delicto*. As a prosecutor, Spitzer had an incredible tool in the Martin Act, a state law that gives officials extraordinary powers when pursuing financial fraud. Spitzer's willingness to wield this blunt instrument doubtlessly pushed many firms to settle cases even if they believed they had a good chance of beating Spitzer in court.

But that doesn't mean his targets were innocents. Spitzer's real tools were shame, embarrassment, and concern for reputation. Many of those who ran afoul of Spitzer failed what I call the Parents' Night Test. Even if certain practices are commonly accepted in your industry or circle of friends (like going to strip joints) and are plausibly legal—or clearly illegal but rarely prosecuted (like running an NCAA betting pool in the office)—would describing these practices to your kid's kindergarten teacher embarrass you and your spouse, cause other parents to place junior on the no-play-date list, and spur the headmaster to rue the day he accepted your child?

Spitzer himself has now failed the Parents' Night Test. But so did Wall Street in the 1990s—time and time again and in ways that led to significant and meaningful losses for millions of investors. Many of Spitzer's biggest cases simply revealed to the public possibly legal but undoubtedly sleazy ways of doing business. Take the [2002 investment-banking research case](#). Spitzer showed that the nation's biggest and most prestigious investment banks, the ones that spoke grandly of serving their clients with integrity, systematically pimped out investment recommendations for the sake of ginning up investment-banking business. The same firms, by the way, also parceled out shares of hot initial public offerings to favored executives in the hope they'd send investment-banking business their way. Nobody on the inside saw anything wrong. But imagine that at Parents' Night, a Citigroup telecom analyst had piped up: "I recommend that the public and our retail brokerage customers buy certain stocks even though I know they suck. I do it because those stocks are clients of my firm's investment-banking unit."

Or take the [mutual funds late-trading cases](#). Some of the largest asset managers, which had sworn on their sacred honor to treat all customers equally, allowed certain investors (mostly hedge funds) to engage in after-hours trading. Imagine if one of those managers had come on CNBC and said, "Yes, we let really rich guys make free money improperly—at the expense of you, the investing public—because they agreed to park money in some other funds we're starting." Another common industry practice that, when exposed to the light of day, became untenable,

inexcusable, sordid. The same held true for the case in which big insurers admitted to [rigging bids](#).

Spitzer didn't take these cases to trial because he didn't need to. The paper trail, the e-mails, and the trading records spoke for themselves. Once released to the public, they became a public-relations nightmare, fodder for the press and class-action lawyers. Rather than fight back in a court of law or the court of public opinion—how can you justify the selling of recommendations or late trading?—the accused firms essentially pleaded no contest and entered expensive settlements. That's pretty much what happened with Spitzer. Like the Wall Street executives he tangled with a few years ago, Spitzer has been drummed out of the industry in which he had spent his entire career and has had to surrender something of great value.

moneybox

Spitzer Gets Spitzered

How Spitzer was brought down by the same kind of investigation he pioneered.

By Daniel Gross

Monday, March 10, 2008, at 4:57 PM ET

The stock market may be battered, the dollar may be plunging, and the economy may be tanking, but there's a bull market in schadenfreude on Wall Street this afternoon. Even as the Dow was on its way to notching another triple-digit loss, whoops of joy erupted from the dispirited trading floors today on news of New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer's disgrace. Spitzer, who [rose to prominence as a scourge of Wall Street](#), uprooting corrupt practices, coming down hard on bad actors, and establishing a new moral order, was laid low by [reports that he had been involved in a prostitution ring](#).

Details are still emerging, and it's uncertain how this will all shake out, but one thing is immediately clear: Spitzer has been hoisted by his own petard, brought down by the same kind of investigation he pioneered as a prosecutor. The analogies between Wall Street and prostitution aren't perfect. (On Wall Street, for example, the transactions involving favors for money are generally conducted when both parties are fully clothed.) But he may have fallen victim to the same types of circumstances that led to his astonishing rise.

1. *The unnecessary digital trail.* Among Spitzer's biggest triumphs as New York attorney general was the investment banking research cases, in which he bludgeoned Wall Street's biggest banks into an [expensive settlement](#) of charges that they pimped out research recommendations in exchange for banking fees. The smoking gun: [incriminating e-mails from analysts](#). Of all people, Spitzer should know that whether you're prostituting

out investment analysis for the sake of banking fees, or whether you're a governor using the services of expensive prostitutes, discretion is a paramount value. The first and last rule is not to create a paper trail—or, in this age, a digital trail—that can come back to haunt you. But he was reportedly caught on wiretaps discussing bringing a prostitute to Washington to meet him at a hotel.

2. *Everybody does it, right?* Many of the Wall Street figures Spitzer nailed were engaging in activities that looked skeezy when exposed to the public but that were generally well-known and accepted by the powers that be. Until Spitzer, investment banks giving buy ratings to their investment banking clients, and spinning shares of hot IPOs to the personal accounts of executives who funneled investment banking fees their way, were common practices at Wall Street's top firms. The executives nailed by Spitzer thought they were engaging in routine activity and never thought they could be indicted for it. The same holds, to a different degree, with high-end prostitution. In New York, high-end prostitution is widely acknowledged and generally tolerated, though heavily cloaked in euphemism. [As](#) recently as December, a respectable publication like *New York* magazine ran ads for high-end escort services. (It has since stopped accepting such ads.)* Fancy gentlemen's clubs and strip joints (where all sorts of services are available upon negotiation or request) operate with full sanction of the law. Comparatively few of those involved in it are arrested, and the johns are almost never prosecuted. Spitzer likely thought that he, too, was engaging in a practice common among men of his social and economic class and that the likelihood of prosecution was exceedingly low.

3. *The law is an ass.* Wall Street executives who ran afoul of Eliot Spitzer earlier this decade found they were in deep trouble because of a peculiar wrinkle in the law. They found their options were limited because they happened to conduct their business in New York. Spitzer had at his disposal the Martin Act, a 1921 piece of legislation that gives extraordinary powers and discretion to an attorney general fighting financial fraud. As Nicholas Thompson noted in *Legal Affairs*, "people called in for questioning during Martin Act investigations do not have a right to counsel or a right against self-incrimination. Combined, the act's powers exceed those given any regulator in any other state." In Spitzer's case, he may have landed in water that was hotter than it might have otherwise been because he decided to do some of his business in Washington, D.C. (on the night before Valentine's Day, no less). By allegedly arranging for a prostitute to travel across state lines from New York to Washington, D.C., Spitzer may have bumped up his indiscretions from a violation of state to a violation of federal law—a much more serious matter.

4. *After-hours trading.* One of Spitzer's signature crusades as attorney general was unearthing the scandals of late-trading—in which mutual funds would allow favored clients (usually hedge

funds) to enter and exit rapidly on terms not available to retail investors. When that happened, Spitzer [demanded](#) that the executives responsible, among them Richard Strong, founder and chairman of Strong Capital Management, resign and face lifetime bans from the industry. Now that he's apparently been caught trading illicitly after hours, the top executive of the state of New York may be forced to resign and accept a lifetime ban from his industry.

[Correction](#), *March 11, 2008*: The piece originally said that high-end escort services advertise in *New York* magazine. *New York* stopped accepting such ads on January 1, 2008. ([Return](#) to the corrected sentence.)

movies

Michael Haneke's *Funny Games*

Feel like being tortured by a movie?

By Dana Stevens

Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 7:14 PM ET

It's been quite a season for movies that put the audience through a traumatizing wringer of violence and suspense. *No Country for Old Men*, *There Will Be Blood*, *Eastern Promises*, and *Sweeney Todd* were all grim and bloody spectacles that took their viewers to some pretty dark places. But I can't think of a movie last year that I walked out of literally shaking with dread (as in, when I tried to use an ATM machine by the theater, my hands could barely operate the touch screen). If there were an Oscar for most soul-grinding cinematic experience, *Funny Games* (Warner Independent Pictures) would have the 2008 award tied up already. But does that make it a good movie?

Funny Games is something far weirder than a remake of writer/director Michael Haneke's 1997 Austrian film of the same title. It's an identical shot-for-shot copy, with the same framing and blocking, most of the same dialogue, and even many of the same sets and props. According to Haneke (*The Piano Teacher*, *Caché*), he always intended the movie for an American audience, so when the Austrian version failed to catch on here (what, no one flocked to see a subtitled, horrifically violent Brechtian critique of mass entertainment?), he accepted an offer to remake it as long as Naomi Watts could play the lead role. The precision with which Haneke reproduces even nonessential details of the original (did the kitchen clock really have to sit at the exact same angle on the shelf?) suggests that he may be as much of a control freak as this movie's white-gloved villains. But it's true that the movie makes more sense on American screens, since the director's explicit project is to lure us Yankee suckers into a Hollywood thriller, then duct-tape our ankles together and trap us in hell.

Funny Games begins as a standard-issue (if curiously slow-paced) home-invasion movie, in which a bourgeois family is menaced by sadistic captors in the grand tradition stretching from *Cape Fear* to *Panic Room*. The well-off Farbers—George (Tim Roth), Ann (Watts), their son, Georgie (a brave young actor named Devon Gearhart, who I seriously hope had a counselor on-set), and their golden retriever, Lucky—are first seen driving to their summer house in what looks like the Hamptons. Towing their just-renovated boat behind them, they peaceably listen to a Handel aria. When the classical music is abruptly replaced by a shrieking death-metal song as the movie's title splashes onto the screen in bright red type, you start to get the point. Once the Farbers reach that tasteful, isolated mansion, their middle-class complacency will be burst asunder by evil forces, and Lucky's name will prove ironic (or maybe not; compared with what his masters go through, the pooch gets off easy).

What you don't foresee (unless you've already watched the 1997 version, in which case I can't imagine subjecting yourself to a rerun) is how the story that unfolds will deliberately frustrate, ignore, and mock your expectations. Before they've even unpacked, the Farbers are visited by two preppy young men in tennis whites, Paul and Peter (Michael Pitt and Brady Corbett.) These boys' exquisitely polite yet strangely malevolent request to borrow some eggs for a neighbor soon escalates into a full-blown hostage situation, with the [Leopold and Loeb](#)-like tormentors betting their captives that they won't live to see morning.

About the movie's content, I'll say no more than that (not so much to protect you from spoilers as to protect myself from remembering the thing). But its form is another matter (and this is an extremely formal movie, in both senses of the word). On at least three occasions, Pitt's character, the smarter and more ruthless of the two torturers, breaks the fourth wall by turning to address the camera. "You're on their side, aren't you?" he asks at one point, toying with our instinct to identify with the victim just as he's toying with the Farber family's will to survive. Soon after, he needles us for expecting a "real ending" with "plausible plot development." And just after the movie's one truly cathartic moment, Paul picks up the TV remote and rewinds ... *Funny Games*, the movie we're watching and he himself is in, just far enough back to deprive of us that catharsis and redo the ending the way he wants it.

Corbett's Peter, the lumpier beta male of the pair, never pulls one of these meta-narrative tricks, but he does his share of hammering home the same theme, repeatedly reminding Watts' Ann (who's bound, gagged, and forced to strip over the course of the film) that "you can't forget the importance of entertainment." So, fine, we're sick fucks for watching this thing to the end—but what about Michael Haneke, the guy who made it twice? The movie's attempt to combine cool Brechtian remove with the highly realistic depiction of physical and psychological torture

ultimately backfires on its auteur: The direct-address interludes come off as fatuous and hectoring, while our identification with the suffering family feels powerful and necessary. Haneke's been quoted as saying he wants his movies to make people think, but *Funny Games* is 110 minutes of pure reptile-brain jolts (fear, mostly), with a couple of meta-narrative finger wags thrown in.

It would be easy to dismiss *Funny Games* as a sadistic, self-important piece of garbage were it not for the superb artistry that went into its construction. Haneke is a master at re-creating the familiar rhythms of suspense cinema, while replacing Hitchcockian playfulness with a ponderous nihilism. Darius Khondji's light-flooded cinematography manages to make a broken egg look as frightening as a smashed head (which, in fact, the egg stands in for; most of the worst violence in the film happens offscreen). The actors all deserve medals just for showing up. Naomi Watts, who seems to prefer roles that push her to the limits of degradation, reaches new heights (or depths) as a sheltered housewife who's slowly reduced to little more than a creature with a numbed-out will to survive. Tim Roth does what he can with his passive punching bag of a role as her incapacitated husband (though he does get the film's one laugh when he glumly blow-dries a wet cell phone in an attempt to call the cops). And rarely have I hated a movie villain like I loathed the preening, entitled douchebag that Michael Pitt plays in this movie. I distracted myself from the pain of watching the Farbers suffer by imagining novel ways to reduce his cherubic face to mincemeat.

Remember the famous [horror-movie tag line](#) that encouraged viewers to keep telling themselves "It's only a movie"? *Funny Games* takes care of that for you, reminding the viewer at every juncture that what we're watching is an artificial construct and that really, we're kind of jerks for even caring how it ends. Many American viewers may take Haneke at his word and walk out midway through this grueling ethics exam of a movie. But much as I may resent the facile polemics of Haneke's shame-the-viewer project, I have to respect the way that he nailed me, trembling, to my seat.

music box

Words Words Words

Are excessive lyrics ruining pop music?

By William Weir

Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 3:54 PM ET

Fifty years ago, Link Wray's "[Rumble](#)," a snarling instrumental, was banned by radio stations because programmers worried that the song's grinding distortion would incite teenage audiences to *West Side Story*-esque delinquency. Perhaps an overreaction, but at least this censorship showed a respect for the power of

wordless music. Try getting your wordless tune on the radio today. From 1960 to 1974, 128 instrumentals reached the Top 20, while only 30 did from 1975 to 1990. And since? Five. These standouts are likely remembered only by smooth-jazz aficionados and soundtrack collectors: "Lily Was Here" by David A. Stewart and Candy Dulfer; Adam Clayton and Larry Mullen's remake of the *Mission: Impossible* theme; "Southampton" from *Titanic*; and Kenny G's "Forever in Love" and "Auld Lang Syne."

While wordless pop has disappeared from commercial radio, pop music has become ever more long-winded. The year-end top 10 songs from 1960 to 1969 have an average word count of 176. For the 1970s, the figure jumps to 244. In 2007, the average climbed to 436. The top 10 for the week of Feb. 2, 2008, features six songs over the 500-word mark. Chris Brown and T-Pain use 742 words in their "[Kiss Kiss](#)." While music can express what words cannot, music rarely gets a chance in contemporary pop, and certainly not in "Kiss Kiss." Except for the first two seconds, vocals fill the song's every moment. Entirely absent are instrumental phrasings that allow a song (and singers) to breathe. Guys, take a break.

In contrast, the Great American Songbook is a bible of pithiness. "Blue Moon," "Over the Rainbow," and "Embraceable You" all make their cases in fewer than 100 words. Will Smith, Kenny Chesney, Bon Jovi, and Beyoncé all have songs called "Summertime" yielding word counts three to five times as high as Gershwin's tune of the same name. They all have a similar message: "The livin' is easy." But with only 92 words, Gershwin says it best by letting the melody become part of the story. [Done well](#), the song sounds like a hazy, slow summer day. In Smith's "Summertime," he recalls hanging out in Philly parks, in Mercedes-Benzes, and at a place called "The Plateau," where everybody goes. All I picture are the Fresh Prince's summers. They sound fun, but I want my own. Gershwin's lyrical economy makes room for our own dog-day memories. Instrumentals are even easier to personalize. With no lyrics to dictate my emotional response, Funkadelic's "Maggot Brain" conforms to my mood. When it's playing on my stereo, just driving around assumes a cinematic brio.

In the contemporary radio landscape, instrumental blockbusters like Duane Eddy's "Peter Gunn" simply don't happen anymore. Considering the cultural impact they've had, that's a shame. The ubiquity of "[Green Onions](#)" by Booker T. & the M.G.'s (used in at least 15 movies and countless beer commercials) makes us forget just how good this swaggering and slightly dangerous-sounding piece is. Long before there were video games, the Tornados' "[Telstar](#)" sounded like one in 1962. The song, with noises supposedly from the first communication satellite (launched months prior), has the spirit of a world giddy about space exploration. Edgar Winter's jam "[Frankenstein](#)" (and his early version of a keytar) and the laid-back sounds of flugelhornist [Chuck Mangione](#) are gold mines for students of

the 1970s. "[Axel F](#)" from the *Beverly Hills Cop* soundtrack and "[Miami Vice Theme](#)" (our most recent No. 1 instrumental) tell us much of what we need to know about the 1980s. Herbie Hancock gave hip-hop its watershed instrumental in 1983 with "[Rockit](#)"—the first time many people heard record scratching.

Science offers some clues, if not a smoking gun, in the music vs. lyrics debate. Neuroscientists believe that the brain uses a different system to store and process music than it does words. Not much research has been done on which affects us more, but an American University study published in the *Psychology of Music* in 2006 gives a slight edge to melody. When listening to happy or calm songs, subjects found that lyrics dulled the tunes' emotional kick. Words, however, enhanced emotional responses to angry and sad songs. When researchers mismatched the melodies and lyrics—sad words with happy music, etc.—melodies held more sway with participants' moods than lyrics. Possible real-world application (my theory): Of all the phenomenal singers who have tackled the "Star-Spangled Banner," Jimi Hendrix's tortured, celebratory, and wordless version remains the most emotionally layered.

I understand the appeal of the human voice, and I certainly can't begrudge anyone's joy at singing along in the car (unless I'm in it). But why such shabby treatment for the instrumental? Marketability. A band is practically faceless with no crooning front man. People still credit the Surfaris' "Wipe Out" to the Ventures, the Beach Boys, or, bizarrely, [Morton Downey Jr.](#) And it's not as if good instrumental music isn't still getting produced. Singerless combos emerged in big numbers in the 1990s, and instrumental buffs have their pick of genres: [electronica](#), [sprawling post-rock](#), cello metal. But even the danceable and hooky pop of [Ratatat](#) runs into the same wall: No singer means no airplay. The experimental but profoundly catchy [Battles](#) didn't break out until the group added vocals on 2007's *Mirrored*.

Here's another problem for the instrumental: Fancy a new song, but don't know the name? You can Google the chorus. But with no words to work with, you're reduced to humming the guitar part to friends and record-store clerks, hoping they'll recognize it. They won't. Music journalists also share some responsibility. Words are writers' friends—they're easier to critique than a musical phrase the reader can't hear (although hyperlinks change this a bit). Take Black Sabbath's "Iron Man": I can go on for quite a while about the title character's tragic circumstances, but it's the riff that raises the song to pioneering doom classic. For all of the riff's majestic awesomeness, though, I'm at a loss to describe it.

Finally, there's Bob Dylan, the man perhaps most responsible for the word/music power imbalance. With the releases of "Wipe Out" and Lonnie Mack's "Memphis" in 1963, things looked bright for the rock instrumental. Then came *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* and his 564-word "A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall."

That year, the *New York Times* likened his songs to "speeches delivered to guitar chording" and called him "an inspired poet." Two years later, the *Times* reported that everyone was copying him.

obit

Martin Pawley

A critic who pushed architects into the modern, technological world.

By Witold Rybczynski

Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 4:59 PM ET

The British architectural writer, critic, broadcaster, and teacher Martin Pawley, 69, died on March 9. He is best-known to Americans for a series of provocative, iconoclastic books, beginning in 1970 with *Architecture Versus Housing* and including *The Private Future*, *Theory and Design in the Second Machine Age*, and *Terminal Architecture*. His last work, a collection of writings titled [*The Strange Death of Architectural Criticism*](#), was published last year.

Pawley was an accomplished and prolific journalist. After studying architecture at the Oxford School of Architecture, the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and the Architectural Association in London, he burst on the scene in the 1970s as a contributing editor to *Architectural Design* when it was the liveliest and most influential architectural periodical in the English-speaking world. Over the years he served as editor of *Building Design* and *World Architecture*, as news editor and columnist of *Architects' Journal*, and, for seven years, as architecture critic of the *Guardian*. Pawley's was a sharp, take-no-prisoners style of journalism, and his writing, when he was in top form, recalled Evelyn Waugh, though he shared none of Waugh's reactionary views, on architecture or anything else. Pawley once called Modernism a "magnificent mutiny against historicism" whose "presence has been central to the fortunes of architecture, whether as an avant-garde tendency, a rising star, a revolutionary challenge, a global orthodoxy, an unmitigated evil, a fallen giant or (perhaps) as a resurgent force that is even now gathering strength." The *perhaps* is pure Pawley.

I knew Martin well in the 1970s when he was a visiting professor at a number of American universities. He had developed an idea that he called "garbage housing" using industrial and consumer wastes and by-products as inexpensive building materials. Together with enthusiastic architecture students at Cornell University, the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and Florida A&M University, he experimented with structures built out of soft-drink cans, rubber tires, and cardboard cartons. At Rensselaer, we collaborated on a full-size house with walls made out of bottles and cans, roof trusses made from

cardboard tubes (discarded newsprint cores), and roofing shingles made out of neoprene rubber waste.

We both moved on from garbage housing, but that heady decade of idealistic tinkering was emblematic of my friend's hopes for architecture. He was suspicious of architectural Postmodernists, starchitects, and conservationists, and he disdained architectural traditionalists such as the Prince of Wales and his "country house crowd." Martin revered Buckminster Fuller and championed the work of Norman Foster. I think that of all architects, he admired Ludwig Mies van der Rohe the most, not only for aesthetic reasons but for his phlegmatic consistency and refusal to be swayed by the tides of change. Martin, too, was happiest standing alone against the crowd.

In 1974, Pawley founded a weekly newspaper at the Architectural Association. He called the tabloid *The Ghost Dance Times*, referring to an ill-fated religious movement that grew up in the late 19th century among American Plains Indians, promising a restoration of the past glories and the creation of a paradise on earth. The title was his sardonic comment on the insularity that affected—and still affects—schools of architecture and, in his opinion, architecture itself. Pushing his fellow architects into the modern, technological world was Martin Pawley's mission—although, with a characteristic chuckle, he would have pooh-poohed such a lofty word.

other magazines

The Iron Ladies

The New Yorker on Hillary Clinton, *Newsweek* on Margaret Thatcher, and the *New Republic* on Michelle Obama.

By Morgan Smith

Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 2:36 PM ET

The New Yorker, March 17

After Hillary Clinton's marginal victories in Ohio and Texas, Ryan Lizza [visits](#) her campaign as it struggles under the light of the media's death watch. Despite calls to drop out and a low delegate count, Clinton continues to battle, even if she must argue a case against Obama that "is not so very different" from that of the Republicans. A protracted contest with Clinton could help prepare Obama for the general election, and "no one is entitled to a Presidential nomination." ... An article examines a recently uncovered photo album of operations at Auschwitz that reveals the existence of a retreat called Solahutte next to the forced labor and death camp. Photos in the album show SS officers there relaxing with young women and singing in a group with an accordion player. A source says: "That S.S. officers went on vacation didn't take us by surprise. What surprised us was that Auschwitz wasn't only a place to imprison men and women and kill European Jews; it was also a place to have fun."

Newsweek, March 17

Tina Brown's dramatic [cover story](#) describes Hillary Clinton's appeal to baby boomer women, "who possess all the management skills that come from raising families while holding down demanding jobs, women who have experience, enterprise and, among the empty nesters, a little financial independence, yet still find themselves steadfastly dissed and ignored." According to the piece, the candidate doesn't attract their twentysomething daughters, who are embarrassed by "[t]he very scar tissue that older women see as proof of her determination, "but for the sake of these "invisible women" Clinton "should not give up the fight." ... A [piece](#) looks back to the first "Iron Lady," former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and compares her to Hillary Clinton: "[A]cross the globe, women entering positions of political leadership have learned that playing to stereotypes can endear them to voters at critical junctures in campaigns, especially when it is their likability, and not their competency, that is in question."

New Republic, March 26

A fresh Michelle Obama [profile](#) concentrates on the "edgy" first lady hopeful's traditional core. Though her tendency to knock her husband and tell tales of domestic difficulties on the campaign trail "may be a departure for political wives," the piece notes, "for wives in general, it is anything but new." The familiarity of the role, though struck by a black, "overeducated lawyer," resonates with voters—in a way that a previous Democratic first lady, also accomplished in her own right and who "seemed to scorn such warm-and-fuzzy nonsense," didn't. ... A [piece](#) reviews a contentious episode between Barack Obama and John McCain over ethics reform legislation in the Senate, providing a glimpse of what an Obama-McCain showdown might look like in the general election. Both tout their efforts at bipartisanship and "reform bonafides," but "each sees the other as a posturing phony."

Vanity Fair, March 2008

The [cover story](#), accompanied by an Annie Leibovitz photo spread, refutes *Slate* contributor Christopher Hitchens' [January 2007 Vanity Fair article](#), in which he argued that women have no sense of humor. Cable television has ushered in a new generation of comediennes who write their own material, aren't afraid to be good-looking, and don't fit between the "two poles of acceptable female humor: feline self-derision or macho-feminist ferocity." ... A [piece](#) investigates the Bush administration's involvement in Palestine after Hamas won control there in 2006. It alleges the United States sponsored a covert Fatah militia that tortured and assassinated opponents in the hopes of squashing Hamas' power in a civil war. Instead, it sparked the group's bloody June 2007 takeover of Gaza. ... An entertaining [feature](#) explores Texas moneyman Jack R.

Worthington Jr.'s claims that he is the illegitimate son of JFK and delves into the journalistic "addiction to the scoop."

Weekly Standard, March 17

In a cover package on McCain, a [piece](#) by Fred Barnes looks at the Republican nominee's potential running mates and recommends Mitt Romney, who has "the best ratio of virtues to drawbacks." The former Massachusetts governor could court the social conservatives unswayed by McCain and "shore up [the candidate's] admitted weakness on economic issues" with his business know-how. The hitch? McCain's not a fan of him. ... An [article](#) on Hillary Clinton's campaign (headlined, of course, "The Fat Lady Hasn't Sung") explains how the New York senator could still win the Democratic nomination. Puerto Rico, a region dominated by Hispanics and Catholics who favor Clinton, has 55 unclaimed delegates. Florida and Michigan, where Clinton won in unofficial elections, could be re-vested with their delegates if the race is still close. And John Edwards' delegates in Iowa have to be reassigned.

poem

"For D."

By Rosanna Warren

Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 7:33 AM ET

to Rosanna Warren read this poem.

The plane whumps down through rainclouds, streaks
of creamy light through cumulus, and, below,
a ruffled scattering, a mattress' innards ripped—

friendship is always travel. How to measure
the distance eye to eye, or hand to hand—as our hands age—
or shoulder to shoulder as we stand at the sink

washing grit from beet greens, our palms magenta,
our voices low, steady, exchanging
gossip and palaver while

water rollicks to a boil
in the large, old, dented pot and aromas sharpen
(thyme, onion, oregano), children's voices rise and fall,

at the fireplace the fathers argue about the fire,
and two families will eddy in rising hunger around the oval table
with its blue-checked cloth—

the plane tears through the lowest cloud bank
and again I am making my way toward you
from the far country of my provisional health,

toward you in your new estate of illness, your suddenly
acquired,
costly, irradiated expertise.
You have outdistanced me.

politics

Slate's Delegate Calculator

Florida and Michigan join the abacus party.

By Chadwick Matlin and Chris Wilson

Friday, March 14, 2008, at 7:18 AM ET

After a torrent of demands from readers, we're pleased to announce that the [Slate delegate calculator](#) now offers the option to include Florida and Michigan in your electoral math. Both states had all of their delegates stripped by the DNC after they leapfrogged ahead of most other primaries in the schedule, contrary to party rules. Thanks to the never-ending, hyperclose Democratic race, there's a movement to find a way to seat the two states' delegations. It seems that will most likely force a revote in both states.

That's where we can help. The calculator now includes options to enable Florida and Michigan. When you check the boxes next to either or both states, you'll notice that the overall number of delegates needed for the nomination changes. With Florida and/or Michigan involved, there are more total delegates to go around, so the number needed for a majority rises. Our calculator assumes that the DNC will allow both states to retain their entire pledged delegation, and not punish the states by halving their delegate totals like the RNC did.

If Florida and Michigan are included in the calculus, Hillary Clinton stands to benefit most. When they're not factored in, Clinton needs an average margin of victory of 28 points in all of the remaining states to catch Obama's pledged-delegate lead. With Florida's and Michigan's delegates up for grabs, that average margin of victory drops to 18 points. Essentially, Florida and Michigan buy Clinton more time to not only persuade superdelegates to nuzzle up to her and Bill, but also to chip away at Obama's lead.

Other changes since our last version:

- Wyoming and Mississippi numbers have been locked in, still using NBC News' delegate tally and

extrapolating the unallocated delegates when necessary. Nine delegates are still waiting to be assigned in Texas, but it looks like Obama will come out slightly ahead. (We have a conservative one-delegate-lead estimate for him.)

- When California's vote was certified, [Obama picked up four delegates](#) that had been assigned to Clinton, giving him a net gain of eight. That is reflected in a tally of 1,196 delegates for Obama prior to March 4 and 1,032 for Clinton, a slight adjustment from earlier versions.
- In our original methodology, we had said that the overall percentage of a candidate's popular vote was a good predictor of the percentage of delegates they picked up. We re-crunched the data, and through Mississippi there's an average deviation of 2.9 percent between the popular vote and delegates assigned. Although that number is very low, we'd like to remind you that the calculator offers estimated delegate totals, not the real thing.
- Puerto Rico moved its caucus from June 7 to June 1 and transformed it into a primary, expecting high demand.

Click the launch module above to use [Slate's delegate calculator](#).

Methodology

- The current number of pledged delegates comes from [NBC News' tally](#).
- We estimate the number of delegates based on the overall state vote, even though delegates are awarded by congressional district as well. We felt comfortable making this approximation because in the primaries through Mississippi, there was only a 2.9 percent deviation between the percentage of the overall vote and the percentage of delegates awarded in primaries. The proportion of delegates awarded by congressional district, therefore, does not differ greatly from the statewide breakdown.
- The calculator does not incorporate superdelegates into its calculations. Superdelegates are unpledged and uncommitted and therefore can change their endorsements and convention votes at any time. As a result, we've simply noted at the bottom of the calculator how many superdelegates the leading candidate needs to win the nomination in a given scenario.
- All of the calculator's formulas and data come from Jason Furman, the director of the Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institution.

[Click here](#) to start using *Slate's* delegate calculator.

politics

Campaign Junkie

The election trail starts here.

Friday, March 14, 2008, at 7:17 AM ET

politics

Tainted Gov

Slate's complete coverage of the Eliot Spitzer prostitution scandal.

Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 6:45 PM ET

"[XX Factor](#)": *Slate's* women blog on the Eliot Spitzer scandal, an ongoing discussion.

"[Spitzenfreude](#)": Wall Streeters are suggesting that Spitzer's fall exonerates them. No way," by Daniel Gross. Posted March 13, 2008.

"[Legally Blind?](#)": How bad is David Paterson's vision?" by Alex Joseph. Posted March 13, 2008.

"[Did the Press Service Spitzer?](#)": That's what *Wall Street Journal* columnist Kimberly A. Strassel would have you believe," by Jack Shafer. Posted March 13, 2008.

"[How Big Is Your Hypocrite?](#)": Who's worse—Larry Craig or Eliot Spitzer?" by Bruce Reed. Posted March 13, 2008.

"[Sex Sells](#)": Emily Bazelon and Josh Levin take readers' questions about prostitution." Posted March 13, 2008.

"[Skinflint](#)": Did Eliot Spitzer get caught because he didn't spend *enough* on prostitutes?" by Sudhir Venkatesh. Posted March 12, 2008.

"[The Emperors' Club's Front Company](#)": Gotten your 'strategy planned' lately, har har?" by Bonnie Goldstein. Posted March 12, 2008.

"[The Silda Spitzer Lesson](#)": Don't quit your day job," by Linda Hirshman. Posted March 12, 2008.

"[The Cultural Gabfest on the Eliot Mess](#)": Listen to *Slate's* critics debate the week's news, by Stephen Metcalf, Dana Stevens, and John Swansburg. Posted March 12, 2008.

"[The Art of Fessing Up](#)," a *Slate V* video. Posted March 12, 2008.

"[The Map of Shame](#)": A guided tour of Washington's sex-scandal locales," by Chadwick Matlin. Posted March 11, 2008.

"[How To Prosecute Eliot Spitzer](#)": Which federal laws might the governor have broken?" by Harlan J. Protass. Posted March 11, 2008.

"[So You Want To Open a Brothel](#)": The keys to success, as gleaned from the Web site of Eliot Spitzer's favorite escort service," by Josh Levin. Posted March 11, 2008.

"[A Shonda for the Quakers?](#)": What does Eliot Spitzer have against George Fox?" by Timothy Noah. Posted March 10, 2008.

"[Spitzer Gets Spitzered](#)": How Spitzer was brought down by the same type of investigation he pioneered," by Daniel Gross. Posted March 10, 2008.

"[Why Is Prostitution Illegal?](#)": The oldest question about the oldest profession," by Emily Bazelon. Posted March 10, 2008.

"[Will the Scandal Hurt Hillary?](#)" by Christopher Beam. Posted March 10, 2008.

"[Eliot Spitzer's Escort Service](#)": Serving (until a few days ago) persons of 'immense financial and influential affluence'," by Timothy Noah. Posted March 10, 2008.

"[Eliot's Erotic Games](#)": When is a massage more than a massage?" by Michelle Tsai. Posted Monday, March 10, 2008.

"[Would Spitzer Lose His Superdelegate Vote?](#)" by Christopher Beam. Posted March 10, 2008.

politics

The Bush Tragedy

Bush's evangelical politics: An excerpt from *The Bush Tragedy*.

By Jacob Weisberg

Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 7:18 AM ET

From: Jacob Weisberg

Subject: The Doubtful Faith of George W. Bush

Posted Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 3:18 PM ET

*This is the first of three excerpts from *Slate* Editor Jacob Weisberg's new book, [The Bush Tragedy](#).*

In his 1999 campaign autobiography *A Charge to Keep*, George W. Bush describes a soul-searching conversation with the Rev. Billy Graham that prompted him to re-evaluate his life, accept Jesus, and give up drinking. In the summer of 1985, as Bush tells it, his father, the vice president, invited the famous evangelist to Kennebunkport for a weekend visit. Graham spent an evening taking questions from members of the family about faith. The next day, Graham took a walk along the beach with Bush's eldest son and asked if he was "right with God." Bush said he wasn't, but that he'd like to be.

"Something was missing in my life, and Billy Graham stimulated my heart—I would like to say planted the mustard seed which grew, and started me on a journey, a walk, to recommit myself to Jesus Christ," was how George W. put it in [one interview](#) during the 2000 campaign. The terms "heart," "walk," and "mustard seed" occur in every telling. The mustard seed is a parable from the Gospel of Luke. Jesus tells his disciples that the kingdom of heaven is like the tiny mustard seed that grows into a huge plant. According to Bush's story, the conversation with Graham took a year or more to germinate. But it was this conversation that prompted his change of heart, which in an evangelical Christian context means accepting Jesus as his personal savior. This born-again experience led him to begin "walking," or leading a righteous life. Finding God enabled him to quit drinking, gave his life meaning and direction, and made possible the successful political career that followed.

Graham and Bush surely did have conversations in Maine that subsequently took on meaning for George W. But on closer examination, this story too turns out to be a parable, crafted to convey an idea about the subject rather than to relate the literal truth of what happened. Like almost every other detail about his spiritual life that Bush has chosen to reveal, it shows evidence of being shaped and packaged.

A version of the Billy Graham story first appeared in 1988, in a book called *Man of Integrity*, which was distributed by his father's presidential campaign of that year. It was compiled by Doug Wead, an Assemblies of God minister whom Vice President George H.W. Bush began using as an emissary to evangelical leaders in 1985 and who grew close to the younger George Bush around the time of his religious conversion. In that book, which George W. helped write, the story goes somewhat differently:

I remember one night when Dad asked Billy if he would sit around with the family and answer questions and just talk about his life and his view of things, his spirituality. It was one of the most exciting nights I have ever spent in my life. The man is powerful and yet humble. That combination of wisdom and humility was so inspiring to me individually

that I took up the Bible in a more serious and meaningful way.

As you know, one's walk in life is full of all kinds of little blind alleys. Sometimes life isn't easy, and so Billy redirected my way of thinking in a very positive way. He answered questions of all types.

The next year when he came, he made it a point to call me aside and ask how things were going. He took a real interest in me individually, and for that I am forever grateful.

In this version, there is no walk on the beach, no pointed question about the son's relationship with God, no admission by Bush that he felt "lost." The private conversation with George W. happens a full year later, which would have been in the summer of 1986—after Bush had spent nearly a year attending a weekly men's Community Bible study group in the basement of the First Presbyterian Church in Midland every Monday night.

Other evidence suggests that Bush's religious turn really began 15 months earlier. If someone planted a mustard seed, it was likely not Billy Graham in 1985-6 but Arthur Blessitt in April 1984. Blessitt—yes, that is his real name—is an evangelical preacher who has walked throughout the world lugging a 12-foot tall, 70-pound cross. His [website](#) boasts that he holds the Guinness World Record for the world's longest walk, most recently tallied at 37,352 miles.

Blessitt keeps a careful diary. On April 3, 1984, he noted: "A good and powerful day. Led Vice President Bush's son to Jesus today. George Bush Jr.! This is great! Glory to God." Over the previous week, thousands of people had been coming to hear Blessitt tell stories of dragging his cross through the Amazon at a sports stadium in Midland. Bush heard Blessitt's sermons, which were carried live on local radio, while driving. Though he didn't feel comfortable coming to the Chaparral Center, Bush arranged through an oilman friend named Jim Sale for the two of them to meet with Blessitt and talk about Jesus. In an empty restaurant at the Midland Holiday Inn, Bush looked Blessitt in the eye and said: "I want to talk to you about how to know Jesus Christ and how to follow Him." According to [Blessitt's account](#):

I slowly leaned forward and lifted the Bible that was in my hand and began to speak.

"What is your relationship with Jesus"? I said.

He replied, "I'm not sure."

"Let me ask you this question. If you died this moment, do you have the assurance you would go to heaven?"

"No" he replied.

"Then let me explain to you how you can have that assurance and know for sure that you are saved."

He replied, "I'd like that."

After telling him how to know Jesus, Blessitt asked:

"Would you rather live with Jesus in your life or without Him?"

"With Him," Bush replied.

"Would you rather spend eternity with Jesus or without Him."

"With Jesus."

The three men held hands and prayed together. Blessitt proclaimed, "You are saved!" Jim Sale attests that he remembers this event precisely the way Blessitt does.

There are other discrepancies in the "official" version of the 1999 tale. When Bush related the story in public, a religious reporter contacted Graham, who had no memory of a meaningful encounter with George W. Graham later did his best to get onboard with the story that laid the cornerstone of his relationship with yet another American president but even so seemed unable to confirm it. "I don't remember what we talked about," he told *Time* journalists Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy in 2006. "There's not much of a beach there. Mostly rocks. Some people have written—or maybe he has said, I don't know—that it had an effect, our walk on the beach. I don't remember. I do remember a walk on the beach."

Something is going on here beyond the tricks memory plays. Years later, in 1999, when the political purpose was the son's own, rather than the father's, George W. reshaped the anecdote to give it greater resonance and political value. Multiple encounters are telescoped into a single one, a process that took place over at least two years is collapsed into a single "defining moment," the setting is made more dramatic (the beach in Maine rather than a living room) and more personal (a one-on-one conversation, rather than a family question-and-answer session). And the dialogue that two eyewitnesses remember taking place with Blessitt—"What is your relationship with Jesus"—"I'm not

sure"—is transmuted into a dialogue with Graham—"Are you right with God"—"No, but I'd like to be."

One can understand why a mainstream politician might wish to do this. Blessitt, a kind of madman-Messiah, comes out of hippiedom's Christian branch, the Jesus people or "Jesus freaks." In the 1960s, the "psychedelic evangelist" began preaching in a strip club in L.A. and ran "[His Place](#)," a ministry-coffeehouse-nightclub, with appearances by bands like the Eternal Rush. Blessitt's book [Life's Greatest Trip](#) includes some of his poetry: "Get loaded on Jesus,/ 24 hours a day,/ you can be naturally stoned/ on Jesus!" In 1969, Jesus told Blessitt to start walking. He has kept on truckin' ever since. In 1976, he declared that he was running for president, though it wasn't clear which party he belonged to.

Finally, the "mustard seed" reference in the later version is calibrated to resonate with evangelical Christians without sending the wrong signals to the Biblically ignorant, who might pause to wonder why it's not a more common herb or vegetable or just an unspecific "seed." Often, the precision of Bush's religious language cuts in the other direction, making references more generic. He avoids such evangelical terms of art as "born again" and "saved" in his journey-to-faith narrative—and even "Jesus" as opposed to "God." He similarly avoids using the specific terminology "evangelical" or "alcoholic" in reference to himself. The vagueness frees Bush from the assumptions people make when they hear the more conventional terms. According to Doug Wead, Bush's break with the bottle came after he and Laura read an Alcoholics Anonymous pamphlet that emphasized the need for help from a higher power. "The tract brought a lot of things together," Wead said. Bush has never spoken of reading A.A. literature; following 12-step guidance would make him sound like an alcoholic.

What his faith stories have in common is the way they put George W. Bush's religious experiences to political use. The beliefs themselves may be entirely genuine. But Bush does not appear to surrender himself to the will of God in the way a conventionally religious person does. If we look closely at his relationship to religion over a period of two decades, we see him repeatedly commandeering God for his exigent needs. His is an instrumentalist, utilitarian faith that puts religion to work for his own purposes. Faith made it possible for Bush to order his life and emerge as a plausible leader. Once he became president, it helped him cope more effectively than his father had with the monumental pressures of the job.

From: Jacob Weisberg
Subject: What Bush Believes

Posted Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 6:57 AM ET

This is the second of three excerpts from *Slate* Editor Jacob Weisberg's new book, [The Bush Tragedy](#).

What are George W. Bush's religious beliefs? The question, which would seem central to understanding his presidency, comes up again and again and never receives a satisfactory answer. When religiously inclined writers try to describe Bush's faith, they invariably end up talking about how Bush uses religion, how he relates to other religious people, and what faith means to him. But they seldom say anything about its content. They described all the things his faith is not—fiery, judgmental, dogmatic, exclusive—but don't discover positions on even the most basic theological issues that divide and define denominations, such as whether the Bible is literally true, whether Christians should evangelize, or whether salvation comes through faith alone. They overlook the curious detail that he seldom goes to church. Often, they end up projecting their own beliefs and assumptions onto his blank screen.

After reading a certain amount of what might be called Godly-President Literature—*The Faith of George W. Bush* by Stephen Mansfield, *God and George W. Bush* by Paul Kengor, *A Man of Faith* by David Aikman—the recognition begins to dawn that Bush's faith has no specific theological content. When a Houston reporter asked Bush about the difference between the Episcopal Church he was raised in and the Methodist one he began attending after he was married, he replied, "I'm sure there is some kind of heavy doctrinal difference, which I'm not sophisticated enough to explain to you." His religion has often been best described as evangelical, but in various respects it appears not to conform to the definition. Unlike most other evangelicals, Bush blithely uses profanity and as governor would play poker. He doesn't tithe. He didn't try to convert others—one of the central obligations in most evangelical denominations—even before he resumed a political career. He didn't raise his daughters in his faith. On issues that divide evangelical Christians from nonevangelical Christians—and varieties of evangelicals from each other—Bush does not need to feign ecumenical neutrality. He isn't hiding his beliefs; he simply doesn't have many of them.

A better term for Bush's faith is Self-Help Methodism. What Bush clearly does believe in is the personal, transforming, and sustaining power of belief in God. "Faith gives us purpose—to right wrongs, preserve our families, and teach our children values," he told congregants at Second Baptist, a mega-church in Houston, on the Sunday he announced his presidential exploratory committee in 1999. "Faith gives us conscience—to keep us honest even when no one is watching. Faith changes lives. I know, because it changed mine." Having a personal relationship with God, praying, and reading the Bible daily were the tools Bush used to get control of his life; they supported a transformation that made it possible for him to control his drinking, keep his family together after Laura had threatened to leave him, manage his aggressive behavior, cope with the burden

of his successful father, and attain success in business and politics. Finding God made his life "easier to understand and clearer," as he put it.

If Bush proselytizes, it is not for his denomination or even for Christianity, per se, but for the power of "faith" itself. Bush believes that everyone who prays to God prays to the same one, and that there is "truth" in all religions. He told the prime minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, "You believe in the almighty, and I believe in the almighty. That's why we'll be great partners." He had a similar reaction to the Orthodox cross he saw hanging around the neck of Vladimir Putin on their first meeting. According to former staff members, Bush had a problem figuring out how to relate to secular European leaders like Jacques Chirac and Gerhard Schroeder. As Bush's chief of staff, Andrew Card, told Jeffrey Goldberg of *The New Yorker*: "I can see him struggle with other world leaders who don't appear to be grounded in some faith." He added, "The President doesn't care what faith it is, as long as it's faith."

This instrumental view of religion is inseparable from the way Bush came to it, through a midlife crisis on the verge of 40. [Community Bible Study](#) was an ecumenical movement just catching on in 1984, when a group of men from Midland traveled to California to learn the method. When I visited in the fall of 2007, the Bible study had grown to more than 200 regular participants, but still worked the same way: After all meeting together for a few songs, the men broke into groups of 12 or 15 to consider the passage they had read for the week. Wealthy oilmen sat side-by-side with jumpers who worked on their million-dollar rigs for \$20 an hour. Each participant had filled out a questionnaire that asked him to relate the week's verses from the Gospel of Mark to his own life and feelings. In some places, Bible study is more like a religious book group. In Midland, it is more like a support group with some business networking thrown in. When I attended, oil had just crossed the \$80 level, and Midland was booming as it hadn't since the early 1980s. But when Bush began reading the Gospel of Luke with the group in September 1985, the price of oil had just fallen to \$9 a barrel. Many of the participants in his Bible study had gone bankrupt or were on the verge of doing so. Some were suffering from substance-abuse problems, and many had been through or were on the verge of family breakups.

This was Bush's story. Laura was losing patience with her husband's drinking and he was deeply worried about losing her and his daughters. According to various accounts, she gave him an ultimatum: me or Jim Beam. He was resistant to the change at first. Several attendees recall his sarcasm at sessions. One version of the history has Bush following his drinking buddy Don Jones, the president of a Midland bank, into the group. According to another legend, Bush's parents asked Graham to lead an "intervention" after an episode of boorish behavior in Maine. In any case, the [Midland Bible study](#) supported the behavioral changes Bush adopted in the summer of 1986. In this

sense, it functioned as therapy for someone who doesn't believe in therapy, more A.A. meeting than religious exploration. Prayer—which, as a friend of Bush's who is still in the Bible study told me, just means talking to God—gave him a sense of serenity and control that enabled him to redirect his stalled career.

The relevant context for Bush's embrace of sobriety was not just Laura's ultimatum and his 40th birthday, but his father's run for president. At one level, finding God was an act of rebellion against the arid, high-church Episcopalism of his parents. His father said that when he was marooned in a lifeboat after being shot down over the Pacific, he thought of his family, God, and "the separation of church and state." That principle is perhaps the last one his son would think of in extremity. Fervent, popular faith helped him establish his independent identity. But this was loyal defiance: His new religious identity also enabled Bush to become closer to his father, who needed someone to help him navigate the evangelical shoals of a Republican primary. In 1980, when religious leaders asked if he was a born-again Christian, Bush senior had made the mistake of simply saying, "No" (before learning to say that though he hadn't had a single born-again moment, he accepted Jesus as his personal savior). With his behavior under control, the younger Bush now began to win his father's confidence as someone who could help with the problem of the evangelicals. By outdoing his father in religiosity, he could effectively represent the family's political interests, as opposed to being a liability for the family to manage.

Faith produced in Bush a series of positive second-order effects as well. Religion also supplied George W. with a richer emotional vocabulary, allowing him to express feelings in a way he hadn't previously been able to do. Over time, his religious outlook tempered his aggression and made him nicer, at least some of the time. It added humility to his repertoire. A religious framework made him more accepting of others, less cutting and judgmental—something he frequently refers to with reference to the parable of the mote and the beam: "Don't try to take a speck out of your neighbor's eye when you've got a log in your own." Bush ultimately answered his parents' doubts about his capabilities with an exertion of sheer will. With religious help, he showed he could accomplish feats they thought him incapable of. And so willpower became his instinctive way of dealing with doubt, criticism, and opposition of all kinds. Rather than prompt him to consider or reflect, skepticism about what he could do provoked him prove his doubters wrong.

*This is the third of three excerpts from **Slate** Editor Jacob Weisberg's new book, [The Bush Tragedy](#).*

If Bush's theology is free of content, his application of it to politics is sophisticated and artful. Evangelical politics is a subject on which he has exercised his intellect, and perhaps the only one on which he qualifies as an expert. Bush began his study in 1985 on behalf of his father's effort to become president. George H.W. Bush regarded televangelists like Pat Robertson as snake handlers and swindlers. Reflecting his parents' attitude, Neil Bush referred to evangelical Christians in a speech for his father in Iowa as "cockroaches" issuing "from the baseboards of the Bible-belt." For their part, the evangelicals felt no affinity for Bush Sr. They found his patrician background off-putting and suspected the sincerity of his conversion to the pro-life cause.

To help him with this problem, Bush Sr. brought in Doug Wead as his evangelical adviser and liaison. Wead had been involved in a group called Mercy Corps International, doing missionary relief work in Ethiopia and Cambodia, and gave inspirational speeches at Amway meetings. He was also a prolific memo writer. The most important of his memos is a 161-page document he wrote in the summer of 1985 and a long follow-up to it known as "The Red Memo." Wead argued for "an effective, discreet evangelical strategy" to counter Jack Kemp, who had been courting the evangelicals for a decade, and Pat Robertson, whom he accurately predicted would run in the 1988 primaries. Wead compiled a long dossier on the evangelical "targets" he saw as most important for Bush. ("If Falwell is privately reassured from time to time of the Vice President's personal friendship, he will be less likely to demand the limelight," he wrote.) Wead made a chart rating nearly 200 leaders for various factors, including their influence within the movement, their influence outside of it, and their potential impact within early caucus and primary states. Billy Graham received the highest total score, 315, followed by Robert Schuller, 237; Jerry Falwell, 236; and Jim Bakker, 232.

Unbeknownst to Wead, Vice President Bush gave the Red memo to his oldest son. After George Jr. pronounced it sound, George Sr. closely followed much of its advice. For instance, Wead recommended that the vice president read the first chapter of *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis, a book that had become a popular evangelical device for winning converts. "Evangelicals believe that this book is so effective that they will automatically assume that if the Vice President has read it, he will agree with it," Wead wrote. Vice President Bush made sure that religious figures saw a well-worn copy on top of a stack of books in his office when they visited the White House and cited Lewis' condemnation of the sin of pride as one of the reasons "we haven't been inclined to go around proclaiming that we are Christians." He also took Wead's advice on how to answer the born-again question; in courting the National Religious Broadcasters with three speeches in three years; in inviting

From: Jacob Weisberg
Subject: Bush's Evangelical Politics
Posted Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 7:18 AM ET

Falwell, James Dobson, and others to the White House; in cooperating with a cover story in the *Christian Herald*, the largest-circulation evangelical magazine at the time; and in producing a volume for the Christian book market.

George W. Bush became the campaign's semiofficial liaison to the evangelical community in March 1987. "Wead, I'm taking you over," he said at their first meeting, over Mexican food in Corpus Christi, telling him to ignore Lee Atwater, whom Wead had been reporting to. Wead recalls how anxious George W. was in political conversations with his dad. "He was a nervous wreck," Wead told me. "He wanted his father to be proud of him." Wead also recalled the son's expressions of his own political interest. The campaign had prepared state-by-state analysis of the primary electorate in advance of Super Tuesday in 1988. "When he got the one on Texas, his eyes just bugged out," Wead remembered. "This is just great! I can become governor of Texas just with the evangelical vote."

The crucible of the campaign forged a close relationship between the two men. Wead, whom George W. called "Weadie," says the candidate's son spent an inordinate amount of time talking about sex. But he was so anxious to avoid any whiff or rumor of infidelity that he asked Wead to stay in his hotel room one night when he thought a young woman working on the campaign might knock on his door. "I tried to read to him from the Bible, because by that time he was sending me these signals," Wead told me. "But he wasn't interested. He just rolled over and went to sleep."

Having Wead put him to bed was a way to advertise his marital fidelity, and to reinforce a distinction with his father, who was facing rumors about the Big A. Wead said Bush also liked having him around as an alternative to the company of drinking buddies from his pre-conversion period. But Bush resisted religious overtures as firmly as sexual ones. "He has absolutely zero interest in anything theological—nothing," Wead said. "We spent hours talking about sex ... who on the campaign was doing what to whom—but nothing about God. And I tried many, many times."

The Wead-George W. effort yielded spectacular political results: Poppy beat back the primary challenge from Pat Robertson and won 81 percent of the evangelical vote in 1988, exceeding the 78 percent share Ronald Reagan won in 1984. After the election, George W. turned to his evangelical friend for advice about how to handle having a father in the White House. Wead returned with a 44-page memo entitled *All the Presidents' Children*, which he later developed into a book of the same title. The precedents were not encouraging. Burdened by impossibly high expectations, many sons of presidents struggled unsuccessfully to "complete" the work of their fathers. As a group, they disproportionately fell prey to various forms of failure, alcoholism, divorce, and early death. Bush, who was planning to move back to Texas and run for office, groaned when Wead told

him that no presidential child had ever been elected governor of a state.

With the various roles he played in Bush's life—life counselor, political adviser, spiritual companion—Wead became in the late 1980s the first in a series of what might be described as surrogate family members to George W. Like Karl Rove and Dick Cheney, the two others who subsequently played this kind of role, Wead originally worked for the old man before transferring loyalties to his son. Like them, he aided Bush with a crucial transition in relation to his father. What Rove would do in helping Bush launch his political career in Texas, and Cheney in helping him define his presidency, Wead did in Bush helping him assert and establish his independent identity as a person of faith. But the experience left Wead troubled about the sincerity of Bush's beliefs. "I'm almost certain that a lot of it was calculated," he says. "If you really believed that there's some accountability to life, wouldn't you have Billy Graham come down and have a magic moment with your daughters? Are you just going to let them go to hell? You have all these religious leaders coming through. If it changed your life, wouldn't you invite them to sit down in the living room and have a talk with your daughters? Or is it all political?"

Envy over Rove's closer relationship with Bush may have pushed Wead toward an act of betrayal he tried to portray as a service to history, his secretly tape-recording nine hours of his private phone conversations with Bush in 1999 and 2000. Wead played portions of these tapes for the *New York Times* and a few other journalists at the time his book *All the Presidents' Children* was published in 2003. He later apologized and signed a legal agreement to turn the tapes over to Bush's lawyers and not discuss their content. These tapes, of which I've obtained a partial copy (not from Wead), provide a glimpse of the man behind the public mask. They capture Bush thinking aloud and rehearsing answers to questions he expected to get on the campaign trail. On one, he acknowledges illegal drug use decades back: "Doug," Bush says, "it doesn't just matter [about] cocaine—it'd be the same with marijuana. I wouldn't answer the marijuana question. You know why? Because I don't want some little kid doing what I tried. ... I don't want any kid doing what I tried to do [pause] 30 years ago."

But the more interesting revelation is how politically Bush thinks about religion. Speaking of an upcoming meeting with evangelical leaders, he notes: "As you said, there are some code words. There are some proper ways to say things and some improper ways. I am going to say that I've accepted Christ into my life. And that's a true statement." On another tape, he rehearses his dodges. He goes over with Wead what he plans to tell [James Robison](#), an evangelical minister in Texas who wanted him to promise not to appoint homosexuals in his administration: "Look, James, I got to tell you two things right off the bat. One, I'm not going to kick gays, because I'm a sinner. How can I differentiate sin?" For those interested in the details

about what kind of sinner he was, Bush has another line: "That's part of my shtick, which is, look, we have all made mistakes."

The tapes reveal how calculated George W. Bush's projection of faith is. Wead said that during the countless hours the two spent talking about religion over a dozen years, they discussed endlessly the implications of attending services at different congregations, how Bush could position himself in relation to various tricky questions, and how he should handle various ministers and evangelical leaders. But the substance of Bush's own faith never came up. Wead told me he now struggles with the question of how sincere Bush's expressions of devotion ever were. He often goes over their conversations from 1987 and 1988 in his mind, having grown more skeptical about what Bush was doing. "As these memos started flowing to him, he started feeding back to me what his faith was," Wead said. "Now what is interesting for me, and I'm trying to understand, is, was I giving him his story?"

To say that Bush's religious persona is a calculated projection does not mean that it is fraudulent. For practiced politicians, the question of whether any behavior is genuine can seldom be answered. For them, calculation and sincerity are not opposites. The skillful leader harmonizes them, coming to truly believe in what he needs to do to succeed. Piety, like any other political mask, tends to become the genuine face over time.

The secular misunderstanding of Bush is that his relationship with God has turned him into a harsh man, driven by absolute moral certainty and attempting to foist his evangelical views onto others. Many of those who know Bush best see the religious influence in his life cutting in precisely the opposite direction. As one of the evangelical staff members in the White House told me over lunch near the White House in the summer of 2007, Bush's religion has made him more genuinely humble and less absolutist in the way he defends his views. Believing that he too is a lowly sinner, Bush learned to be more tolerant of the faults of others.

But if his eternal perspective improves Bush's personality, it diminishes any ability he might otherwise have to take in ambiguity or complexity. Early in his presidency, Bush told Sen. Joe Biden, "I don't do nuance." That line was probably spoken with irony, but it captures a truth about the intellectually constricting lens of his faith. Bush rejects nuance not because he's mentally incapable of engaging with it but because he has chosen to disavow it. Applying a crude religious lens that clarifies all decisions as moral choices rather than complicated trade-offs helps him fend off the deliberation and uncertainty he identifies with his father.

But closing one's mind to complexity isn't mere intellectual laziness; it's a fundamental evasion of freedom, God-given or otherwise. A simple faith frees George W. from the kind of agonizing and struggles his father went through in handling the

largest questions of his presidency and helps him cope with the heavy burden of the job. But it comes at a tragic cost. A too-crude religious understanding has limited Bush's ability to comprehend the world. The habit of pious simplification has undermined The Decider's decision-making.

politics

Obama Won Texas

Winning doesn't mean exactly what it used to.

By John Dickerson

Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 7:27 PM ET

You may think Hillary Clinton won Texas, but she didn't, [at least not by the rules of the game](#). The eventual Democratic nominee will be the one with more delegates, and Obama won more of Texas' than Hillary did.

To reiterate: Clinton won the state's popular vote and the primary, but that doesn't matter, because after a majority of the caucus votes were counted—the second step in Texas' two-stage process—it looks as if Obama won the delegates.

Declaring Obama the winner makes sense. In this primary season, we've got to stick fast to the rules. As both the Obama and Clinton campaigns spin themselves into the topsoil, that's all we have to keep us from madness. Except that Obama supporters have been making a case that doesn't stick to the rules in arguing how Democrats should pick the party's nominee.

Over the last several weeks, as Obama has taken an insurmountable lead among pledged delegates, I have heard various Obama allies and aides argue that if Clinton wins the nomination by convincing superdelegates to overthrow Obama's lead among pledged delegates, it will represent a subversion of the popular will. Whatever backroom thinking went into forming the superdelegate system, it is not in keeping with the view that the people—and not party insiders—should determine the nominee. Obama supporters argue that a superdelegate-driven Clinton victory would be unfair and would destroy the party. Obama's passionate constituents would bolt, furious that the prize had been snatched from them. To avoid this train wreck, superdelegates should sign up with Obama.

Fair or not, if Clinton wins by superdelegates, that win would be perfectly legal. The Democratic Party, in all its wisdom, designed the system to allow for this possibility. It may subvert the popular will, but the rules are the rules. In claiming victory in Texas, Obama is making this very same case, because the Texas delegate win happened through a subversion of the popular will. In just one of the contest's [several wrinkles](#), Texas

delegates were apportioned in the primary and caucus among [state Senate districts](#), based on a system that gave more delegates to the candidate who won districts where turnout had been high in previous elections than to the candidate who won districts where turnout had been lower.

Obama played by the rules and won fair and square, but if, as an Obama supporter, you insist that he won Texas through a system that thwarts the popular will, you lose standing to complain about a system that thwarts the popular will in picking the nominee. One system may thwart the will more than the other, sure. But either the principle is that the rules are the rules or it isn't.

Obama's campaign manager, David Plouffe, says he is not suggesting that a Clinton nomination victory by a superdelegate majority would be underhanded—though some of his colleagues and allies certainly are making this case. Plouffe's own pitch is that superdelegates should look at Obama's lead in pledged delegates and decide to back him. This is a good argument, but it's not rule-based. Once you start climbing into the heads of the superdelegates, you've gone somewhere else. "There are few principled arguments in either camp," says Democratic pollster and strategist Mark Mellman, "only arguments of interest." There's nothing in the Democratic rule book that instructs superdelegates on how they're supposed to vote or what they're supposed to base their thinking on. Maybe they should support a nominee by following the pledged delegates, or maybe they should take a look at the popular vote. Or maybe they should roll a 12-sided die or ask their pet myna bird.

The Clinton campaign would prefer that superdelegates use the popular vote as a criterion for their decision, since Clinton's slim chances of winning the popular vote are better than her next-to-impossible chances of winning the pledged delegate vote. Obama aides say that the Clinton team's new emphasis on the popular vote is a desperate stratagem they've been forced into by Obama's pledged delegate numbers. This is true, but if the debate is over what criteria the superdelegates should use, any argument goes. *But, wait*, Obama supporters will insist, *the rules say nothing about superdelegates following the popular vote*. Correct. They also say nothing about superdelegates following the pledged delegate lead.

Which brings us back to this: If Obama supporters are going to insist that their guy won Texas because the rules are the rules, then they should not squawk if Clinton wins the nomination despite her pledged delegate deficit. The rules are the rules.

politics

The Map of Shame

A guided tour of Washington's sex-scandal locales.

By Chadwick Matlin

Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 8:15 PM ET

Eliot Spitzer's [adventure as "Client-9"](#) at Washington's Mayflower Hotel was only the latest in a long line of sexual indiscretions committed in Washington by the political elite. Double-click on the map's landscape below to zoom in, and double-right-click to zoom out. Click on the headshots to read about other politicians ensnared by the city's favorite temptation.

[View Larger Map](#)

President Bill Clinton, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW

In 1995, Clinton and White House intern Monica Lewinsky began to have sexual relations in the Oval Office, infamously recorded on [that blue dress](#). The affair eventually led to Clinton's impeachment and censure.

Rep. Gary Condit, 2600 block of Adams Mill Road NW

Condit still denies that he had an affair with intern Chandra Levy, who went missing in 2001 and [was found dead in 2002](#). Levy's mother says Levy told her she was having an affair with Condit. Condit avoided direct questions about the affair, but [passed a lie-detector test](#) in which he denied knowing any details about her disappearance.

Rep. Mark Foley, 137 D St. SE

Foley admitted to sending sexually explicit instant messages to congressional pages and resigned from the House in 2006. Foley was said to have told one page that he was "well hung." [Multiple pages claim](#) that Foley had sex with them in his home but that he waited until they turned 18.

Rep. Barney Frank, 8th Street SE*

Frank's personal assistant, Stephen Gobie, was charged with a felony for running a prostitution business out of Frank's apartment. After the charges were made public, Frank disclosed [that he had paid Gobie for sex in the past](#).* In 1990, [he was reprimanded by the House](#) for abetting the dismissal of Gobie's parking tickets but was cleared of more serious sex-related allegations.

Rep. Newt Gingrich, Rayburn House Office Building

While House Speaker Gingrich was denouncing Bill Clinton for his affair with Lewinsky, he was himself [conducting an affair](#) with [Callista Bisek](#), a congressional aide. Eventually Gingrich divorced his wife and married Bisek.

Sen. Gary Hart, 517 Sixth St. SE

Immediately after announcing his 1988 bid for the presidency, Hart was besieged by rumors that he was having extramarital affairs. Eventually, [Miami Herald reporters staked out](#) Hart's residence and caught Donna Rice going in and emerging the

next morning. The revelation killed Hart's chances of winning the Democratic nomination and ended his political career.

Rep. Wayne Hays, Longworth House Office Building

In 1976, the [Washington Post broke the story](#) that Hays' office clerk, Elisabeth Ray, was actually his mistress in disguise. Hays denied the story for two days, then finally admitted to the affair, but he continued to deny that Ray was hired purely for her sexual prowess. Meanwhile, Ray told the *Post*, "I can't type, I can't file, I can't even answer the phone."

Rep. John Jenrette, steps of the U.S. Capitol

Jenrette and his wife, Rita, [had sex on the Capitol steps](#), giving new meaning to the word *filibuster*.

Sen. Ted Kennedy (featuring Chris Dodd), La Brasserie, 239 Massachusetts Ave. NE

[In 1985](#), Kennedy straddled a waitress who was sitting on Dodd's lap, rubbing his crotch against hers. Two years later, he came back for seconds: A different waitress walked in on Kennedy and a lobbyist having sex in a private room upstairs.

Rep. Wilbur Mills, Tidal Basin near the Jefferson Memorial

In 1974, Mills' political career cratered when a [stripper jumped out of his car](#) and dove into Washington's murky Tidal Basin after police pulled Mills over. The married Mills had been cavorting with the "Argentine Firecracker" for more than a year. He would later leave Congress [after being spotted](#) in a Boston strip club.

Strategist Dick Morris, Jefferson Hotel, 1200 16th St. NW

Morris discussed White House affairs [while sucking on a prostitute's toes](#) at the Jefferson. Morris resigned the same day Clinton was renominated at the Democratic Convention.

Sen. Robert Packwood, Senate side of the Capitol

In 1992, nearly a dozen of Packwood's staffers [claimed he made unwanted sexual advances](#) while they worked for him in the Senate. After first denying the allegations, he blamed it on a tendency to drown his sorrows in booze. Packwood stepped down in 1995.

Rep. Don Sherwood, 110 D St. SE

Sherwood enjoyed a fling with Cynthia Ore, a Peruvian immigrant, and arranged an internship for her on the Hill. The affair was exposed when Ore [called the police on Sherwood](#), alleging domestic abuse. The two settled out of court, and Sherwood lost his re-election.

Gov. Eliot Spitzer, Mayflower Hotel, 1127 Connecticut Ave. NW

Our newest entry, Spitzer [paid \\$4,300](#) to bed a prostitute going by the name "Kristen." Spitzer was reputed to be a difficult customer who sometimes asked the women to do things that (in

the secondhand account of one FBI witness) "you might not think were safe."

Sen. David Vitter, location unknown

By scrutinizing phone records of Deborah Jeane Palfrey, "the D.C. Madam," [Hustler magazine was able to force](#) Vitter to [admit in 2007 that he was a past customer](#). Vitter phoned Palfrey five times and was also alleged to [be a frequent customer](#) of a brothel in New Orleans.

Know of sex scandal in D.C. that we didn't include? Send submissions [our way](#).

Scandal inevitably leads to confession. Slate V looks at the peculiar art of the political confession.

[Correction, March 12, 2008](#): This sentence originally misstated that Frank announced he was gay after it was revealed Gobie was running a prostitution business from Frank's home. Frank had come out publicly before then. Also, Frank lived at 8th Street SE at the time, not Corcoran Street NW, as the article originally asserted. ([Return to the corrected sentence](#).)

politics

The Umbrage War, Continued

Clinton and Obama jockey to take advantage of Geraldine Ferraro's provocative comments.

By John Dickerson

Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 6:10 PM ET

A reporter will never go wrong at a Clinton or Obama press conference by asking: "Senator, what about the latest outrage?" The question is always apt, because [taking umbrage](#) and responding to it has become the chief daily business of the Democratic campaign. Tuesday, Clinton supporter Geraldine Ferraro initiated the latest round. "If Obama was a white man, he would not be in this position," said Walter Mondale's former running mate. Immediately, Barack Obama's foreign policy adviser, Susan Rice, who is African-American, said, "I think if Sen. Clinton is serious about putting an end to statements that have racial implications ... then she ought to repudiate this comment." If that sounded familiar, it's because Rice was mirroring the outrage Clinton campaign officials expressed days earlier when Rice's colleague Samantha Power called Clinton a "monster." Power severed her affiliation with the Obama campaign. Clinton's communications director merely said of Ferraro, "We disagree," but by the end of the day Clinton had distanced herself from Ferraro, saying she disagreed with her.

The Clinton campaign moved through the recognizable scale of umbrage reactions: The first is to have a spokesman tut-tut. The

next level would be for Ferraro to apologize immediately to Obama. The step beyond that would be for Clinton to disagree, which she did but which is far short of denouncing Ferraro publicly. The final level would be for Clinton to fire Ferraro (or, in the case of an unpaid ally, to ostracize her thoroughly). I suppose that if the umbrage wars escalate, there could be a further level in which the candidate actually flogs the misbehaving adviser in Philadelphia's Independence Hall.

In some cases, knowing what to do with a bum ally is easy. When Larry Craig was caught propositioning a male police officer in a Minnesota airport bathroom, Mitt Romney jettisoned the man who had once been his campaign's senate liaison, saying his behavior was "disgusting." Obama couldn't keep Power, because her remarks directly challenged the central idea that his campaign was founded on elevating the political dialogue. She was out about an hour after the Clinton campaign arranged a conference call demanding her ouster. When a Clinton staffer in Iowa was trafficking in smears about Obama's supposed Muslim heritage, she was bounced immediately.

The benefit to casting aside a supporter is that a candidate can claim the high ground the next time an opponent's supporter misbehaves. *Had someone in our campaign even thought such a thing, they'd have been fired.* It also means you don't have to fire the next offender on your own staff so quickly. When reporters asked Clinton's aides why the campaign had not censured Bob Johnson for making a joke about Barack Obama's past drug use, they ducked the question by pointing out that Bill Shaheen, Clinton's New Hampshire co-chairman, resigned after raising the issue of Obama's admitted past drug use. Any smart campaign of the future should salt their organization with expendable allies who can be denounced immediately and publicly ostracized, developing cover for the inevitable moment when someone important screws up and needs to be protected.

So why didn't Clinton immediately denounce Ferraro? She was initially insulated from having to do it quickly because she has distance from the former veep candidate. Power was a top Obama adviser. Ferraro is only on her finance committee and acts as a surrogate, one of a far larger group of loosely affiliated supporters who defend the candidate on afternoon cable news programs. The closer the offender is to the candidate, the higher the price for keeping him or her on. That may be why John McCain is not under as much pressure to denounce Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, for saying that Barack Obama's middle name, Hussein, sends a signal to terrorists. King is merely a Republican—he isn't affiliated with McCain's campaign.

Since candidates are naturally inclined to cling jealously to support, the formula for dealing with a radioactive ally is to move not one micrometer farther from them than necessary. And no candidate wants to give in to what the *Washington Post's* Anne Kornblut calls fauxmbrage—an opponent's overplayed act of outrage. By appearing to stand by Ferraro, Clinton risked

offending African-American voters, but Obama already has that constituency pretty well locked up, so her risk is diminished (at least until she needs those same African-American voters in the general election).

When a candidate refuses to make anyone walk the plank, it's up to the other campaign to make sweeping generalizations about their opponent's underhanded tone and low character. After the Clinton team reacted tepidly to Ferraro's remarks, the Obama campaign immediately escalated, scheduling a conference call on which strategist David Axelrod condemned Ferraro and the Clinton campaign for "unleashing the ugliest kinds of forces in our society." Barack Obama added his own censure: "I don't think that Geraldine Ferraro's comments have any place in our politics or the Democratic Party," [he said](#). "I think they were divisive."

When Clinton finally spoke out about Ferraro, that only put the umbrage/counter-umbrage cycle into a new rotation. Obama's spokesman said Clinton didn't go [far enough](#), and Clinton's [campaign manager accused](#) Obama's aides of milking the moment for political advantage.

Clinton opponents charge that by not sufficiently denouncing Ferraro, she benefits from racist sentiment kicked up by Ferraro's comments. By publicly disagreeing with Ferraro, Clinton limited the chances for that charge to stick, though her best defense may come to her in a day or so. Given how many opportunities there are to cry foul, Clinton may be able to return to the high ground as someone supporting Barack Obama gives her a chance to take umbrage again.

politics

Primary Lessons

What do the results so far tell us about Clinton and Obama as general election candidates?

By Jeff Greenfield

Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 10:10 AM ET

It's the political equivalent of ["tastes great!" vs. "less filling!"](#) among light-beer lovers: the Clinton-Obama battle over who will be a better general-election candidate based on the primary results. The Clinton campaign says she'd be the better fall candidate because she's stronger with her party's core of white working- and middle-class voters in Democratic states. The Obama campaign argues that he'd be better in the fall because he can attract independents, bring new younger voters to the polls, and compete in traditionally red states.

Who's right? Neither side. Why? Because they are both arguing from the false assumption that primary contests can provide a guide to the fall campaign. Look back across recent political history and you'll be hard-pressed to find such a link.

Some of the counterexamples are blatantly obvious: In 1988, the Rev. Jesse Jackson won Democratic primaries in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Virginia. Did that reveal Jackson's potential strength in the South as a general-election candidate? Of course not; it demonstrated that legions of white Southerners had fled the party in those states, leaving blacks a powerful voting bloc in the primary but insufficient in numbers to carry the general election.

Or look at what happened in 1980 in the Michigan Republican primary. On May 20—well after Ronald Reagan had effectively clinched the GOP nomination—Michigan Republicans voted for George H.W. Bush in a landslide, 57.5 percent to 31.8 percent. Proof that Reagan would be weak in that state? That fall, he beat President Jimmy Carter there by six and a half points, a bigger margin than homeboy Gerald Ford had racked up against Carter four years earlier. [Today, when](#) journalists and campaigns set out to find "Reagan Democrats," they head straight for Macomb County, Mich.* There was no sign of enthusiasm for Reagan in the Republican primary of 1980 because Reagan Democrats weren't voting in the primary.

I offer this blindingly obvious point to suggest why it is mostly a fool's errand to find autumn portents in winter and spring primaries. To be even more blindingly obvious, the great majority of voters do not participate in the primaries. As of today, some 27 million people have votes in Democratic primaries and caucuses (counting Florida, where all the candidates were on the ballot, but not Michigan, where only Clinton and Chris Dodd were). In the 2004 general election, more than 122 million votes were cast. Any extrapolation about voting blocs based on primary results has to confront that elemental difference.

Moreover, exit poll results from primaries don't always tell us what we think they tell us. Consider the much-sought-after independent voter. Independents are permitted to participate in primaries and caucuses in such competitive states as Ohio, Wisconsin, Iowa, and New Hampshire. But exit polls simply ask respondents to identify themselves, so a registered Democrat or Republican who considers herself an independent thinker might tell an exit pollster she's "independent." In addition, even those voters who don't formally register with a party often have strong leanings one way or the other; the number of genuine "swing" voters is comparatively small.

In the case of the current battle, we're divining, for example, whether Obama can draw white voters based on those who have decided to vote in Democratic primaries. We don't really know how this historic contest between a woman and an African-

American is playing with white voters who are not part of the primary process. Maybe race and gender matter a lot less than they would have a few decades ago; maybe such voters are sitting this round out and will flock to the white guy in the fall. We are unlikely to get a persuasive answer to this question until the fall. Nor do we have any real clue about whether Clinton's showing among white working-class voters would mean much of anything should she be the Democrat to confront John McCain ... or whether a campaign focused on the economy as opposed to national security would pull such voters to either Democrat. Can we guess? Sure. Can the primaries offer us actionable intelligence? Highly unlikely.

This is not to say that there are no clues at all to be gleaned from the primaries. [Michael Barone](#)—who is to political numbers what [Bill James](#) is to baseball statistics—offers this take on last week's Ohio primary: "In southeast Ohio, settled originally by Virginians and still Southern-accented today, Clinton carried all-white counties with 70 percent to 80 percent of the vote—more than she was carrying nearly all-white counties in central Texas. That raises doubts that Obama could run well in these counties, which provided critical votes in Bill Clinton's wins in Ohio in the 1990s and Jimmy Carter's narrow win there in 1976." Those findings have to give Obama backers pause.

If you're looking for better news for Obama, the measurable surge of younger voters in the primaries and caucuses suggests that the decadeslong wait for "the youth vote"—a wait that makes Godot look like the most punctual of men—may be over. After splitting their votes almost evenly between Gore and Bush in 2000, the 18- to 29-year-old cohort—some 20.5 million of them, by my exit poll arithmetic—produced a nine-point edge for John Kerry, or a boost of 2 million-plus votes. Greater numbers and a bigger margin for Obama in the fall could be decisive.

There's also one historical example that is heartbreakingly intriguing. When he won the 1968 Indiana primary, Robert Kennedy had the vote of a large number of conservative white working-class voters. (In 1970, two ex-Kennedy aides wrote a book debunking that claim; in his new book on the '68 race, [The Last Campaign](#), historian Thurston Clarke debunks the debunkers.) There is anecdotal and statistical evidence suggesting that a chunk of the RFK primary voters wound up supporting George Wallace's third-party bid that November, when Democrat Hubert Humphrey ran against Nixon. We will never know whether Robert Kennedy could have kept those voters from defecting to Wallace—or whether the huge turnout of Hispanic and black voters for RFK in California that June would have occurred again in November and turned the tide in his favor in what was back then a Republican-tilting state.

Finally, there is one clear and consistent scenario in which primary contests provide telling clues about the fall: when an incumbent president faces a meaningful challenge for re-

nomination within his own party. No president in modern times has ever survived such a challenge to win in the fall. Lyndon Johnson abdicated in 1968; Gerald Ford fended off Ronald Reagan in 1976 but lost that fall; Jimmy Carter beat Ted Kennedy but was swept away by Ronald Reagan four years later; and even George H.W. Bush, embarrassed in New Hampshire by Pat Buchanan, though never seriously threatened by him, had to invest so much time shoring up his base that the episode helped lead to his defeat in 1992.

But the main lesson is that in searching the primary terrain for general-election hints, tread very carefully. As a rule, what happens in the primaries stays in the primaries.

***Correction, March 11, 2008:** The original sentence misspelled Macomb. ([Return](#) to the corrected sentence.)*

politics

Me Fatigue

But enough about us, let's talk about the candidates.

By Dahlia Lithwick

Saturday, March 8, 2008, at 7:02 AM ET

"I'm a Rorschach test," Hillary Clinton famously said of herself, describing the ways Americans projected their own hopes, anxieties, and fears about women onto her lightly padded shoulders. And having spent the last two months—dear God, has it been only two months?—bonking each other over the heads with our gender differences, race differences, and income and education disparities, Clinton and Obama supporters may not have learned all that much about their candidates. But we sure do know a lot about ourselves.

Democratic women, for instance, now recognize all of the invisible fault lines between first-wave, second-wave, and third-wave feminists, the post-feminists, the "shoulder pad" feminists, the Obama Girl feminists, the angry feminists, and the medicated ones. Having turned the entire primary season into a protracted exercise in group therapy, we have explored, deconstructed, and shared our collective way into a fog of gender enlightenment. Gloria Steinem has scolded us, Robin Morgan has disowned us, and *Saturday Night Live* has called us the B-word. It took the women in Ohio and Texas and Vermont and Rhode Island last week to remind us that endless group therapy isn't a luxury everyone can afford.

As has been the case throughout the primary season, women broke big for Clinton again last Tuesday. In Ohio particularly, Clinton took two out of every three white women, and that split may have had less to do with internecine debates between soccer

moms and tae kwon do moms than with working-class moms fretting about health insurance for the twins.

In Ohio, where one-third of voters are working class, 58 percent of Democrats said the economy was the most important issue to them, and they broke for Clinton. In both Texas and Ohio, Clinton took voters with no more than high-school diplomas by margins of six in 10. In Ohio she took workers earning less than \$50,000 a year. None of which means Clinton is necessarily better for those who worry about the economy. It does suggest that those folks care more about their wallets than her pantsuits.

For months we've been witness to a primary campaign in which voters—like adolescents on a first date—cannot seem to stop talking and thinking about themselves. The novelty of all these firsts led us to line up behind the candidates that look most like us: Blacks and young people continue to vote for Obama. Women and folks older than 50 continue to support Clinton. But just as relationships tend to transition from the early fizz when all you can see is yourself reflected in your partner's eyes, so, too, is this contest changing into a more sober scrutiny of the guy across the table. And for every woman who experiences sexist attacks against Clinton as echoes of the obnoxious boss who asked her to make coffee in 1986, there must be tens of women who still bring him that coffee every day, then head out for the night shift.

Perhaps the 2008 primary season will settle, once and for all, this question of whether identity politics is a luxury item or a necessity. And if it's truly a luxury item, maybe like the mink stole, it's on its way out. Perhaps at the end of all these months of peering in the mirror, we can stop looking for the candidate who embodies every slight and insult we've ever encountered and contemplate which of these people is better suited to govern. To be sure, the policy differences between Obama and Clinton may be meager. But there are differences of temperament and character that have nothing whatsoever to do with race or gender.

At the risk of offering up yet another gender-based generalization, I'll wager that most women are ultimately pragmatic. And that for as many of us who define ourselves by the cut of our pocketbook, a lot more will vote what's in it. Sure, we get a little tipsy at the symbolic value of seating the first woman president. But most of us will not cast a vote for that reason alone. As some of this newest wave of feminists keep reminding us, issues of class and race are as important to most women as gender is to the feminists who came before. The women who voted last Tuesday may have been saying less about themselves as women, as they were telling us about themselves as voters.

I've loved every minute of the great big gender intervention we women have staged these past weeks—the frank discussions about public tears, brutish husbands, and whether it's sexist or

respectful to be asked to speak first. It's all been a long time coming, and it's focused the mind, and the women's movement, in all sorts of important ways.

But health reform and the Supreme Court and the war in Iraq and the economy are pragmatic problems and not merely symbolic ones. All this talk about women and America has been most illuminating, and I am now ready for it to be over. Hey, candidates? Enough about us; let's talk about you. And what you can do for us.

A version of this article appeared in this week's Newsweek.

press box

Did the Press Service Spitzer?

That's what *Wall Street Journal* columnist Kimberly A. Strassel would have you believe.

By Jack Shafer

Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 2:40 PM ET

Desperate newspaper columnists can always grind out a quick piece by purchasing a large burlap bag and stuffing "The Press" and several pounds of broken glass inside it. Drag to a steep, long staircase, give it a shove, and the column almost writes itself.

The *Wall Street Journal's* Kimberly A. Strassel adopts this technique in her March 12 op-ed "[Spitzer's Media Enablers](#)," in which she accuses the "adoring" and "compliant" press of acting "as an adjunct of Spitzer power, rather than a skeptic of it."

Like most press critics who hunt with a blunderbuss, Strassel is low on specifics. The pro-Spitzer coverage she deigns to name hardly gives him a free ride. Strassel knocks *Time* magazine's [Dec. 30, 2002](#), feature for calling Eliot Spitzer "Crusader of the Year." But the piece, written by Adi Ignatius, doesn't fawn over him. He's portrayed as impetuous and overreaching, and too pushy for his own good in various sections. Ignatius writes that Spitzer's pursuit of Merrill Lynch was viewed by some as "too harsh, meddling in an area in which he had no expertise or clear jurisdiction."

Strassel smacks the *Atlantic* for calling Spitzer the "Democratic Party's future," but the [October 2004](#) profile isn't a puffer, and Strassel's quotation misleads. Here's what reporter Sridhar Pappu actually wrote in the magazine:

Make no mistake: Spitzer is the Democratic Party's future. Or, at the very least, a significant part of it. ... But, along with

Michigan's governor, Jennifer Granholm, and the soon-to-be Illinois senator Barack Obama, Spitzer represents the cutting-edge model of the post-Clinton Democrat, drawn from a generation of politicians whose formative experience wasn't the civil-rights movement, who are tough on crime, and whose foreign policy isn't shaped by Vietnam.

Strassel also makes a big deal about Pappu calling Spitzer a "rock star," but taken in context the reference is anything but slobbering. Spitzer has just given a speech—practically a "sermon," in Pappu's view—to an auditorium of 3,000 people. So when he writes, "Spitzer gets a standing ovation. He is a rock star now, and as such he is met after the speech by a group of people wanting a piece of him," he's describing something real, not necessarily stroking a politician.

Fortune—that well-known left-wing journal of opinion—gets Strasselled for calling Spitzer "The Enforcer." But click and read the actual [Sept. 16, 2002](#), article by Mark Gimein for yourself, and get back to me if you think the magazine licks Eliot's feet.

Strassel also finds skullduggery in Spitzer biographer Brooke A. Masters' comparison of "the attorney general to no less than Teddy Roosevelt." For crying out loud! Lots of pieces about Spitzer compare him to Teddy if for no other reason than Spitzer encourages the comparison—he worships the old pol, keeping a conspicuous picture of him in his office for reporters to see! Other non-nefarious reasons a reporter might compare Eliot to Teddy: Both battled Wall Street. Both became governor of New York. Both bullied their opponents.

The remainder of Strassel's press critique neglects to name the favorite reporters to whom he "doled out scoops" and "who repaid him with allegiance." The publications that "buried inside" the news that would embarrass the prosecutor also go unnamed. She claims that news organizations (unnamed, in the interest of consistency, I suppose) "that dared to criticize him" found themselves "cut off." But this allegation cuts against Strassel's thesis, of course, by noting that some reporters refused to give Spitzer the tongue bathings he seems to have demanded. Excellent avenue for exploration in a piece of press criticism, don't you think? Similarly, I don't recall the press lining up to protect Spitzer in the wake of his state trooper scandal.

None of this is to say that Spitzer was my kind of attorney general or that the press distinguished itself in its coverage of him. He wasn't and it didn't. Bias for Spitzer, where it existed, probably grew out of reporters' preference for action over inaction. Many reporters become blocked when assigned to write about something that isn't happening. That's why they love writing stories and columns about the horrors of "gridlock" and "do-nothing" politicians.

To make the case that the press serviced Spitzer, Strassel needs to do more than shake her bloody burlap bag as evidence.

Sometimes Spitzer followed the press. The *Time* piece Strassel complains about reports that a 2001 Spitzer investigation of Merrill Lynch began with an article in the *Wall Street Journal*. Send egregious examples of Spitzer bias to slate.pressbox@gmail.com. (E-mail may be quoted by name in "The Fray," *Slate's* readers' forum, in a future article, or elsewhere unless the writer stipulates otherwise. Permanent disclosure: *Slate* is owned by the Washington Post Co.)

Track my errors: Here's a [hand-built RSS feed](#) that will ring every time *Slate* runs a "Press Box" correction. For e-mail notification of errors in this specific column, type the word *Strassel* in the subject head of an e-mail message and send it to slate.pressbox@gmail.com.

press box Plagiarism and Apology

The *New York Times* lifts from *City Hall*.

By Jack Shafer

Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 6:03 PM ET

New York Times Standards Editor Craig Whitney apologized to Manhattan Media this afternoon after today's (March 11) *Times* lifted from a Manhattan Media story published on the Web and e-mailed to a media list yesterday.

The lift, taken from Manhattan Media's *City Hall* [piece](#) about New York Lt. Gov. David Paterson, appeared at the end of a *Times* [story](#) about the succession process should Gov. Eliot Spitzer resign.

City Hall reported:

Speaking at an On/Off the Record breakfast held by *City Hall* and *The Capitol* in late October, Paterson took a pause from explaining the nebulous role of the lieutenant governor in office to remark on bringing the national lieutenant governor's association to Buffalo this spring.

The *Times* reported:

Speaking at a breakfast in late October, Mr. Paterson took a pause from explaining the nebulous, mainly ceremonial role of the lieutenant governor to muse on his initial reluctance to attend a meeting of the National Lieutenant Governors Association.

(*Emphasis added to both excerpts.*)

The *Times* article also reproduced a Paterson quotation from *City Hall*, which it did not attribute to *City Hall*.

In his e-mail to Manhattan Media President Tom Allon, the *Times'* Whitney writes:

Dear Mr. Tallon [*sic*]:

[*Times* Executive Editor] Bill Keller asked me to look into the question you raised about the similarities between the last two paragraphs of Nick Confessore's story today and two paragraphs from an article by your editor, Edward-Isaac Doveve, that was e-mailed last night.

You are right; the similarities are not coincidental, though the way they came about was bad luck.

Confessore, working on deadline, was getting feeds of on-the-record quotations from Lieutenant Governor Paterson from other reporters, and one of the reporters e-mailed to him (also by that time under severe deadline pressure) the two paragraphs from the article in *The Capitol*, thinking that the phrase about the breakfast being "held by *City Hall* and *The Capitol*" was a clear enough indication of the source of the two paragraphs; he gave no other indication of their source. Confessore thought the introductory paragraph had been written by the reporter who sent it, and beyond superficial paraphrasing, did not see a need to attribute it.

Both reporters involved are chagrined. Neither intended to plagiarize.

Both have been reminded of the dangers of cutting-and-pasting. And we apologize to you and to Mr. Doveve.

Sincerely,
Craig Whitney
Standards Editor

(I believe Whitney's first reference to the *Capitol*, another Manhattan Media publication, is mistaken. I think he means *City Hall*.)

David Blum, editorial director of Manhattan Media and editor-in-chief of its *New York Press*, expresses his dissatisfaction with Whitney's explanation via e-mail. He writes:

whitney's explanation doesn't make sense. the story in question had a single byline and no contributors' tags, so whitney's defense that confessore was writing from another reporter's files doesn't jibe with new york times policy about credit. [See addendum to this story [below](#).] also, whitney says only that reporters were sending confessore quotes, so why would confessore think that the contextual material was written by an (uncredited) new york times reporter? the email refers to the "reporters involved" but doesn't identify the second reporter being blamed. given that this email acknowledges that dovere's article was plagiarized, and blames it in part on a second, uncredited reporter, shouldn't this second reporter be identified?

it's easy for the new york times to always excuse plagiarism on "cut and paste" issues and label it "inadvertent" -- but it seems both a convenient and flimsy defense in this case, if true at all. newspapers are always on deadlines -- and the new york times should know how to handle copy on deadline without plagiarism, inadvertent or otherwise.

Nobody appointed me as Solomon in this dispute, but here goes.

The *Times* admits that it plagiarized *City Hall*, but did so inadvertently. As all plagiarism cops know, intent is no defense. But Whitney isn't erecting a defense. He's explaining how the plagiarism happened, an account I find plausible. He apologizes, which is the right thing to do, and he reports that all the mentally tardy individuals at the paper responsible for the transgression have been reminded of proper *Times* procedure.

No, Whitney doesn't identify the second blamed reporter, and he probably should. And Blum is right to insist that the *Times* should know how to move deadline copy without plagiarism, inadvertent or otherwise. I don't think he'll find opposition to that view inside the *Times*.

The key for me is that the *Times* accepted institutional responsibility for the transgression in near real time and

apologized. If only every case of plagiarism came this close to being settled this quickly.

Addendum, March 12: Blum read the *Times* story in question on the Web, which is also where I read it. No contributors box ran with that version. However, the *Times* did run a contributors box—listing 22 names—in the New York print edition of the paper on Page B4. The box and the story in question did not run in the national edition of the *Times*, which is what I read here in Washington.

Via e-mail, Blum writes: "That certainly answers the question I raised yesterday. I appreciated the Editors' Note that appeared in the *New York Times* today, and agreed completely with what you wrote regarding the *Times*' prompt explanation and apology."

Disclosure: I know *Times* reporter Nicholas Confessore professionally. Send your plagiarism war stories to slate.pressbox@gmail.com. (E-mail may be quoted by name in "The Fray," *Slate*'s readers' forum, in a future article, or elsewhere unless the writer stipulates otherwise. Permanent disclosure: *Slate* is owned by the Washington Post Co.)

Track my errors: Here's a [hand-built RSS feed](#) that will ring every time *Slate* runs a "Press Box" correction. For e-mail notification of errors in this specific column, type the words *Manhattan Media* in the subject head of an e-mail message and send it to slate.pressbox@gmail.com.

recycled Eliot's Erotic Games

When is a massage more than a massage?

By Michelle Tsai

Monday, March 10, 2008, at 3:36 PM ET

New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer was implicated today in a [prostitution](#) scandal and apologized in a brief statement. During the [D.C. madam scandal](#) in May, Michelle Tsai explained which "erotic services" are against the law and which aren't.

Deputy Secretary of State and abstinence-proponent Randall Tobias [resigned Friday](#) after admitting he called a Washington, D.C.-area escort agency "to have gals come over to the condo to give [him] a massage." The agency's madam, Deborah Palfrey, has been charged with running a prostitution ring, but she claims that her girls offered "high end erotic fantasy" services, not sex. What kinds of erotic fantasy services are illegal?

The touchy-feely ones. In most states, it's against the law to agree to exchange money for any erotic service that involves the touching of sexual parts with the intent to arouse or gratify. (Brothels are legal in parts of Nevada.) A man can pay for a massage as long as there's no salacious contact with his anus or genitals. And talking dirty—as with phone sex—is OK, too. Specific laws vary from state to state, but in general, the distinction between paid-for physical contact and "prostitution" comes down to the purpose of the touching.

Some state laws are more explicit than others about what exactly counts as sex or sexual contact. For instance, [Texas penal code](#) describes sexual contact as any touching of the anus, breast, or genitals with intent to arouse. New York state doesn't give a specific definition in its prostitution laws, but the courts have adopted guidelines taken from a law about [disseminating indecent material](#) to minors. It's illegal to pay for anything included in the following list: "[a]cts of masturbation, homosexuality, sexual intercourse, or physical contact with a person's clothed or unclothed genitals, pubic area, buttocks or, if such person be a female, breast." A series of legal cases since the 1970s has shed some more light on the issue. Performing an erotic dance while being touched on the exposed breasts or buttocks counts as sexual conduct. In the view of one court, BDSM activities like spanking and foot-licking don't. As for masturbation, New York judges have decided that you can perform the solo act, but you can't give somebody else a hand.

Legal fantasy sex might include fetish and bondage acts. In these areas, workers commonly have a no-touching rule—both to protect themselves from clients and to stay legal. Simulated intercourse and lap dances, again with no actual contact, could also qualify. What about at-home massages? They're legal if clients, as Palfrey's lawyer delicately put it, [stay on their stomachs](#).

Escort agencies know they need to steer clear of frank talk about sex if they want to keep on the right side of the law. It's legal to pay hundreds of dollars to bring a companion to a benefit, but if you discuss what sex acts the girl will perform, then you're hiring a prostitute. Some madams avoid certain loaded phrases altogether, like "full service" or "date," while others have their girls sign contracts that say the agency isn't liable for their actions. Palfrey says she [gave each of her escorts a guide](#) that spelled out what sexual conduct was kosher and what was verboten, and made them pledge not to do anything illegal. Given that clients paid Palfrey just \$200 to \$300, it's possible her agency offered no-sex dates; in New York, at least, a full-service rate could be double that amount.

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

Explainer thanks Carol Leigh of Bayswan, Juliana Piccillo of Sex Workers Outreach Project, Tracy Quan, author of [Diary of a](#)

[Married Call Girl](#), John Teakell of Milner & Finn, and Juhu Thukral of the Urban Justice Center.

slate v

Dr. Syd's House Call: Nail Biting

A daily video from *Slate V*.

Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 11:27 AM ET

slate v

The Art of Fessing Up

A daily video from *Slate V*.

Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 11:04 AM ET

slate v

The Most Meta Internet Video Ever

A daily video from *Slate V*.

Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 2:42 PM ET

slate v

Dear Prudence: Lusty Boss

A daily video from *Slate V*.

Monday, March 10, 2008, at 10:18 AM ET

sports nut

This Is One of the Greatest Teams in NBA History?

The mystery of the Houston Rockets' 20-game winning streak.

By Robert Weintraub

Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 4:15 PM ET

Like most NBA fans in Atlanta, I go to games to watch the visiting team. On Wednesday night, I went to the "Highlight Factory" (as the Hawks' marketing department insists on calling Philips Arena) to check out the scalding-hot Houston Rockets, who were going for 20 straight wins. Houston [won ugly](#), 83-75, and history was made. The Rockets are now tied with the 1970-71 Milwaukee Bucks for the second-longest winning streak in NBA history. (The 1971-72 Lakers, a dream team that featured Wilt Chamberlain, Jerry West, and Gail Goodrich, won an absurd 33 straight.)

Before the Rockets went on this historic streak, nobody thought they would even make the playoffs. When franchise player Yao Ming was [lost for the season late last month with a broken foot](#), one Houston writer called it "[a crushing blow](#) to a franchise." But in the two weeks since the supposedly catastrophic injury, the Rockets have won another eight straight. According to ESPN, aged center Dikembe Mutombo [made an announcement](#) to "nobody in particular" after last night's game: "The Rockets have won 20 games straight. ... All the critics can kiss my black ass."

How have the Rockets gone from mediocre to dominant? I noticed one key to the team's success shortly after the league's only pregame [drumline](#) left the floor Wednesday night. Houston's reserves actually stand for large chunks of the game, watching the action intently. This is in stark contrast to most NBA benches, which largely consist of sullen guys scanning the stands for pretty women. Perhaps this is because most of the Rockets get in the game. Coaches typically spend the season hoping their top seven players can find a rhythm and stay healthy. Rockets boss Rick Adelman keeps the scorer's table busy, regularly using 10 or 11 guys, with only perennial all-star Tracy McGrady as a constant. When Yao went down, the Rockets were more prepared than most teams to play without him.

I was mildly surprised to see that the Hawks gave the Rockets a lot of trouble with their athleticism. Joe Johnson slashed his way to 28 points, and Josh Smith powered in 16 points and 22 rebounds. But while the Hawks may have the horses to stay with anyone in the league, they're not savvy or clutch. At the start of the fourth quarter, Atlanta's backup center, Zaza Pachulia, compounded a blatant elbow to Luis Scola's face with a technical foul for arguing. Then, with Houston ahead 71-70 and four minutes to play, the Rockets had six offensive rebounds in a single possession before finally scoring. Next time down, Scola scored on yet another offensive board. Shane Battier blocked a shot, Scola forced a turnover, and McGrady scored six straight points. Ballgame. Twenty straight, despite shooting only 33 percent.

Yao's departure has helped Houston in a couple of important ways. For one, McGrady is now the unquestioned first (and second, and third) option. He can look to score at any time without worrying about getting Yao his shots. The Rockets can now also spread the floor and crash the boards more aggressively from all spots on the floor, something they couldn't do with Yao clogging the pivot (and drawing multiple defenders down low).

Houston is also now a tougher team. For all his size, Yao is somewhat soft, not the type of guy who'd elbow another team's big man in the kidneys to get an advantage. By contrast, guys like Chuck Hayes, Bobby Jackson, Battier, Scola, and rookie Carl Landry are both tenacious and flexible, allowing the team to

play at any pace as well as adapt to both bigger and smaller opponents. Most important, they all have a role-player mentality, content to set screens, crash the boards, and play defense. More than any other team in the NBA, the Rockets play team basketball, and (last night excepted) it's beautiful to watch.

The Rockets' toughness and team mentality are the keys to reeling off a streak during the dog days of the regular season. They aren't necessarily traits that win playoff series, however. That's especially the case in the ridiculously loaded West, where Denver might miss the playoffs despite having a better record than all but three Eastern Conference teams. Heck, Houston's streak has only gotten them into [second place in the West](#), a mere three and a half games ahead of eighth-place Golden State. If they go on a bad streak the rest of the way, they could *still* miss the playoffs.

Right now, the Lakers look like a team built for the post-season. Los Angeles was the hands-down winner at last month's trade deadline, [acquiring gifted seven-footer Pau Gasol](#) from Memphis in the hoops equivalent of the sale of Manhattan for a bunch of beads. The deal instantly turned the Lakers from a dysfunctional, if dangerous, mess in thrall to Kobe Bryant's ego into championship contenders.

The rest of the West responded to the Gasol trade like the United States after Sputnik beeped its way over the horizon: first, panic, then the inevitable Space Race. Phoenix traded Shawn Marion for the redoubtable Shaquille O'Neal. Dallas sent rising star [Devin Harris to New Jersey for Jason Kidd](#). Even the defending-champion Spurs felt threatened enough to get the band back together, reacquiring ring bearer Kurt Thomas.

Meanwhile, Houston made a deal that attracted almost no attention, offloading [crazed](#) forward Bonzi Wells for backup guard Bobby Jackson. The exile of the me-first Wells predated the Yao injury but so perfectly suited the team's new direction that it seems like a response. Houston is now tougher and friskier (and, thanks to the inclusion of expiring contracts in the Wells deal, well-positioned under the cap for next season).

Can the Rockets emerge victorious after what promises to be an epic two months of playoff combat? The key will be their ability to overwhelm the aging teams (San Antonio, Dallas, Phoenix) with waves of bodies and energy, while being smarter and better able to exploit mismatches than the conference's younger, faster squads (New Orleans, Utah, Golden State). If McGrady can overcome his historic allergic reaction to playoff hoops (he has yet to win a series in his otherwise sterling career), I think they can defeat any of those teams.

That leaves the Lakers, who have both extreme firepower (Kobe Bryant, Gasol) and superb role players (Jordan Farmar, Sasha Vujacic, Luke Walton). They'll prove a tough stop for the Rockets or anyone else. In fact, Los Angeles is an enhanced

version of Houston. Kobe is better than T-Mac, Gasol is better than the Battier/Scola combo, and the Lakers' glue guys do the little things just a bit better than the Rockets' complementary players. And, like Houston, Los Angeles has responded well to a key injury to a big guy: The team has lifted its play in the absence of Andrew Bynum, who has been [out with a knee injury](#) for two months. For the Rockets to make the NBA Finals, they might need a team with a dominant big man—think San Antonio and Tim Duncan—to take out the Bynum-less Lakers. The matchups will be crucial, so pay attention to the stretch run. That shouldn't be a problem—for the first time since the Lakers were winning 33 in a row, there's a reason to watch the NBA regular season.

sports nut

Minute Details

Watching the Hawks and Heat do over the last 51.9 seconds of a game they started in December.

By John Swansburg

Monday, March 10, 2008, at 11:08 AM ET

It seems I underestimated the wrath of the basketball gods. Saturday morning, this reporter rose earlier than is his weekend habit to make good on his [promise](#) to travel to Atlanta to watch the Hawks and the Heat replay the final 51.9 seconds of their Dec. 19 contest, the NBA's first do-over in 25 years. I wanted to see what, if any, justice would be served by this exercise. It was also an unprecedented chance to test the theory, popular among professional basketball's detractors, that the only part of an NBA game worth watching is the last minute.

Arriving at LaGuardia, however, I learned that my flight had been delayed three hours. It was [snowing in Atlanta](#). Divine punishment, surely, for the NBA's hubristic attempt to turn back time. That, or it was just a really bad weather day. As the afternoon wore on, a heavy fog fell over the tarmac in New York, closing the airport. My flight was eventually canceled, and the one I was bumped to was delayed enough to render it impossible for me to make the replay. Even the most enthusiastic of the NBA's apologists will tell you that the opening moments of a professional basketball game are no big deal. When the game you're trying to catch is less than a minute long, tardiness is rather more of an issue.

Plan B: After a few phone calls, I found a sports bar on the Upper East Side that had the NBA package. I arrived at [Bounce](#) at around 6 p.m., still toting my luggage and looking a bit worse for the wear, having spent six hours shoulder-to-shoulder with some very irritated [AirTran](#) customers. I can only imagine what the cocktail waitress thought was going through my head when I tried to impress upon her the importance of having one of the

bar's flat screens tuned to the Hawks-Heat game *promptly* at 7. But she took pity on me and made it so.

So, the replay. The Heat in-bounded the ball with 51.9 seconds to go. Though Miami was down 114-111, there seems to have been some concern among the Hawks players about the Heat's opening gambit. For one thing, Pat Riley was one of the head coaches [the last time the NBA forced a do-over](#). What's more, as the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* [noted](#), *he'd had 80 days to design this play*. Asked before the game what he was expecting, Atlanta's Josh Childress said: "They seem to think that, because it's Riley, he'll go for the 3 immediately. But you don't know. They might have a trick play like [Boise State](#), some 4-point play we've never seen."

Now that would have been something. Instead Dwayne Wade brought the ball up, [fiddled and diddled](#) a bit before passing to the immortal Mark Blount, who promptly lofted a brick. The Hawks rebounded and got the ball to Joe Johnson, who took a shot and missed. The Heat got it back with 8.5 seconds to go. This time Wade opted for the 3 to tie, but he [didn't get a good look](#), and the ball clanged off the rim. Game over, again. Al Horford, who did not play in the do-over, pumped his fist after time expired, celebrating "a bit disproportionately," as even the hometown *Journal-Constitution* put it. There is perhaps something *déclassé* about rejoicing too strenuously after a win in which neither team scores a point.

Then again, the Hawks are still in the hunt for a playoff spot, and the team was understandably happy to recover a win that had been temporarily confiscated by the NBA. And Horford may have merely been playing out a role the team had scripted for him, as pitchman for this replay. Recall that the do-over came about because the Hawks statistics crew had incorrectly ejected Shaquille O'Neal from the original game. Rather than hang their heads in shame, however, the Hawks—in a display of not insignificant chutzpah—used the replay to try to move tickets and concessions. The 52-second-long "first game" between the Hawks and Heat was to be followed by a regulation-length game between the same two teams. The Hawks commissioned a [video](#) from young Horford, in which he urged fans to show up early and support the Hawks on this "historic day for the NBA"—a hoops doubleheader. As a further inducement, Horford promised dollar sodas, hot dogs, and popcorn to anyone who showed up before 6:30. The first 3,000 fans through the turnstiles would also get a free 2008 [A-Town Dancers](#) swimsuit calendar, thoughts of which were not far from my mind as I waited in vain for the fog over LaGuardia to lift.

I was disappointed at not being able to see the event in person, to witness the weirdness of watching fans filing *into* a game as time expired, to see if the scalpers were jacking up prices on the pretense that fans were getting two games for the price of one, etc. But there was something to be said for watching it on TV; Miami's [Sun Sports](#) network had dug up archival footage of [the](#)

[last NBA replay](#), in 1983, which provided further evidence of the silliness of do-overs and of just how well Pat Riley has aged. Plus, as a patron at Bounce, I was able to ascertain that both women's college basketball and a [Devils-Maple Leafs game](#) were of more interest to a New York bar crowd. This was an important data point as I try to determine the place that this historic replay will hold in the collective memory of America's sports fans.

I stuck around the bar for the nightcap, on the off chance something of note would occur—another glaring error from the scorer's table, a shot of Stephen Hawking on the sidelines. Around the second quarter, I noticed that the crowd had thinned out. A waitress produced a bouquet of helium-filled balloons, one of which floated, annoyingly, right in front of my flat screen. A bouncer, meanwhile, had appeared at the door and was turning people away, informing them the bar was closed for a private party. I kept waiting to be asked to leave, but either out of pity or fear of journalistic reprisal (I was taking notes in a reporter's notebook), I was grandfathered into the private function, a pretty classy birthday party. By the fourth quarter, I was rather inebriated—I felt obliged to repay the bar's kindness at not ejecting me by ordering beer after beer—so when the birthday boy started bragging to friends that I was covering the party for [TMZ.com](#), I played along. Seemed like the least I could do.

Final score: [Hawks 97, Heat 94](#). A doubleheader sweep for Atlanta. Don't really remember the details, but I'm pretty sure no one fouled out.

technology

Have People Stopped Clicking on Google Ads?

Or did a Web-traffic firm get the numbers wrong?

By Chris Wilson

Monday, March 10, 2008, at 12:03 PM ET

On the morning of Feb. 26, the investment firm Bear Stearns sent out [an alert](#) (PDF) about some unwelcome news for Google. According to [comScore](#), a leading Web-analytics company, the company's domestic paid clicks—that is, the number of times people in the United States clicked on a Google ad—were down 0.3 percent compared to last year and down 12 percent since October. By 7:16 a.m., former tech-securities analyst (and [Slate contributor](#)) Henry Blodget reported the news on Silicon Alley Insider under the headline "[Google Disaster](#)." As news of the comScore report circulated, Google got killed on Wall Street: The stock opened the day down \$25 a share and continued to

fall, sinking to [an 11-month low](#) of \$464.19 before staging a modest comeback.

Wall Street's anti-Google stampede came despite some good news. The company's advertising numbers from the previous quarter were strong, particularly outside the U.S., and Bear Sterns also reported that Google has "healthy growth prospects that should lead to market share gains [and] a strong balance sheet." Nevertheless, investors were spooked by the idea that Web surfers had stopped clicking on text ads—perhaps a sign that even mighty Google wasn't immune from an economic slowdown. Wall Street, however, shouldn't have made such a leap. ComScore's click numbers, like so many stats about user behavior on the Web, are unreliable and opaque. Instead of using comScore reports to predict a tech company's future performance, an investor would be better off ignoring them.

ComScore is one of several firms in the United States that peddles statistics on Web traffic. It seems like it should be easy to get an exact count of how many people visit a Web site, click on an ad, and so forth. But as [Slate's Paul Boutin has pointed out](#), these stats are a moving target. Analytics firms like Nielsen and comScore don't count every time a Web page gets accessed; rather, they extrapolate the numbers based on data from panelists who install the companies' tracking software. ComScore claims its panel includes [more than 2 million people](#) who are recruited either directly or through third-party software packages that offer services like virus protection and performance optimization. (The company terms this "researchware." Less charitable types call it "[spyware](#).") The company takes the data it gets from these users and weights it according to demographics to draw a statistical portrait of traffic to individual sites. ComScore is, essentially, making an educated guess. Nobody except Google is keeping a tally of each individual click on the company's text ads.

Even though comScore's numbers are an estimate, they've been repeated as gospel with little discussion of margins of error—this despite the large psychological difference between a 0.3 percent decline and a small gain (or a bigger loss). Why did Wall Street respond so emphatically to comScore's numbers, ignoring the big-picture reassurances in Bear Sterns' report? One can certainly blame a jittery market on the watch for bad news as economic indicators everywhere are looking ugly. It's also probably fair to guess that crafty investors—guessing that less savvy investors will panic—would sell early in an attempt to make money off this skittishness. But it's impossible to avoid the conclusion that Wall Street types put way too much stock in the reliability of Web traffic stats, numbers that should not be used for day-to-day management of a portfolio.

After the public hubbub over its Google numbers, comScore released [an analysis of the data](#) on the site's blog. The post lists many caveats, including the possibility that the recent decline in clicks might have been the result of Google getting better at

reducing "bad clicks"—accidental clicks by people who have no interest in the product being advertised. Many in the tech-blog community saw this response as comScore [getting spooked by the fallout from its report](#) or bending to pressure from Google. (A comScore spokesman told me there was no contact between Google and comScore executives between the time of the initial report and comScore's elaborations.) More likely, comScore was simply being realistic about the reliability—or maybe the unreliability—of its own data.

ComScore's numbers are particularly prone to error when making long-term comparisons, like the year-over-year comparison of Google's paid clicks. For one thing, the group of panelists that provided comScore's data in January 2007 isn't the same as the group from January 2008. We don't know how different the groups were because comScore doesn't release that data.

Like most companies that deal in Web statistics, comScore gives few specifics about its methodology. In order for investors and tech buffs to get a better sense of the accuracy of this data, firms like Nielsen and comScore have to become more transparent—something the Interactive Advertising Bureau, an umbrella organization for 300 companies involved in online advertising, has [called on them to do](#). (For a great side-by-side comparison of how different Web analytics companies work—so far as we know—see [this primer](#) from the Web marketing firm Antezeta.)

Until Nielsen, comScore, and other analytics companies become committed to sharing their data and methodologies, personal fortunes and the fates of tech companies will depend on data that might not be anywhere close to accurate. Wall Street, at least, shouldn't be so willing to act on this kind of report.

Before public demand for better methodology is likely to mount, however, those whose personal fortunes rest on this data will have to understand that it is a methodology in the first place, not some universal registry of Web use data with a margin of error of zero. Next time you see a press release that says clicks are going up or down, take it for what it is: a guess—as far as we know.

television

Cooking in a Gangsta's Paradise

A new Web show with Coolio and a new season of *Top Chef*.

By Troy Patterson

Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 6:31 PM ET

Promos for *Top Chef* (Bravo, Wednesdays at 10 p.m. ET) bray that it's "the No. 1 food show on cable." The cable part is clear

enough, and one doesn't even mind that they call it a show, as it features all the signature elements of one: image, sound, conflict, commercial breaks. It is the *food* part that sticks in the craw, for no matter how ardently the kitchen-bound players on this reality competition mince, grate, knead, roast, deep-fry, and julienne, there is no shaking the suspicion that the show is not actually about cooking or eating. This is a lifestyle experience, and the food is just an ingredient.

Exhibit A reaches bookstores this month in the form of *Top Chef: The Cookbook* (Chronicle), a smartly designed, nicely photographed, all-around-nifty souvenir item that gives few indications of actually wanting to be in your kitchen. For one thing, there are no more than a dozen recipes here that one might prepare on a normal night—and that's counting the truffle-and-cognac-cream macaroni and cheese (Dave, season 1, episode 9). For another, the index is lousy, existing only as a handy sample of the *Top Chef* subculture; "Bracco, Lorraine" abuts "Braised pork shoulder with tomato marmalade." Most galling, the publishers have covered the volume in an ivory sheath of cloth, as if they expect you to wipe the counter with it.

And now, a fourth season. It's set in Chicago, and the competitors' first challenge is to make deep-dish pizzas, the ugliest of which looks like a boule disgorging day-old creamed spinach. Whom to root for among these 16 aspirants? Whose pretensions to despise? You'll want to keep an eye on Richard, who, with his liquid-nitrogen gizmo and his portable smoker, is a Wylie Dufresne wannabe. "A lot of people label it as 'molecular gastronomy,'" Richard intones, his fingers air-quoting in blasé fashion. I will forgive him his self-seriousness if he finds a way to turn bacon into foam. Richard shares his coiffure—a sandy faux-hawk—with Jennifer. Jennifer, meanwhile, shares her life with another contestant, her longtime girlfriend, Zoi. Are there too many cooks in their bedroom?

This season's most able camera hog would seem to be Andrew—a bearded young New Yorker whose attitude and affect recall the Beastie Boys circa *Paul's Boutique*. How does he describe his passion for cooking? "It's like molten fucking lava pouring out of me." *Mmmm*. In a snippet from Andrew's application video, we see him putting the finishing touches on "tattooed tuna carpaccio." He has used something (seaweed, perhaps) to render an image of a human hand (extending its middle finger, I think) on the fish. I appreciate an edgy appetizer as much as the next guy, but if I pay 15 bucks for a dish, I don't want it flipping me off. But that finger nonetheless points in the direction of the show's central question: Which of these people will do the sharpest job of styling themselves as outlaw poets in aprons, cowboys of the range?

Indeed, in recent years, thanks to the work of such hard-living and adventurous restaurant people as *Top Chef* judge Anthony Bourdain—seen this week breaking a tie between two extremely

compelling instantiations of eggs Benedict by siding with the one that would be the superior hangover cure—chefs have acquired a hard-edged kind of cultural chic. And who better to carry this tradition forward than an actual gangsta rapper? The Web series [Cooking With Coolio](#) reveals that the Compton-born singer of "Gangsta's Paradise" has, for his second act, earnestly become "a ghetto-witch-doctor-superstar chef." Where Emeril would say, "Bam!" Coolio booms, "Shaka Zulu," tutoring his audience in the preparation of dishes that include caprese salad, sautéed spinach, and "game-day turkey." Nothing is fancy. Everything is sound. Coolio does go rather heavy on the balsamic, but that's bachelor cooking.

Some of you will find the program offensive, pointing to the air of inner-city minstrelsy that attends to the proceedings and the objectified women lingering around them. The production gives you a feel for what it might be like were Flavor Flav to host *This Old House*. For instance, Coolio taps out his spices from small plastic baggies as if he had bought them not at Whole Foods but in his dealer's Escalade. Next, a pair of women from Coolio's stable of "sauce girls" are always at his side, and the sauce girls—possibly taken in from a home for the mute—are not to be confused with actual sauciers. What the sauce girls do, mostly, is stand around in heels, sometimes wearing aprons, sometimes wearing a bit less than aprons. They were permitted to fondle some baguettes in an episode featuring "ghettalian garlic bread." That's the one where the star and his sous-chef pretended to abduct a college boy off the street. "We're gonna find a hungry, broke-ass, malnourished, Top Ramen-eatin' muthafucka, and we're gonna teach him how to cook a healthy, inexpensive meal," promised Coolio, intent, as always, on putting the M.F. back into MFK Fisher.

the audio book club

The Audio Book Club on *All the King's Men*

Our critics discuss Robert Penn Warren's great political novel.
By Stephen Metcalf, Julia Turner, and Jacob Weisberg
Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 7:12 AM ET

To listen to the Slate Audio Book Club discussion of Robert Penn Warren's All the King's Men, click the arrow on the player below.

You can also download the audio file [here](#), or click [here](#) to subscribe to the Slate Audio Book Club feed in iTunes.

This month, the Audio Book Club chews over Robert Penn Warren's classic political novel *All the King's Men*.

Slate critic-at-large Stephen Metcalf, culture editor Julia Turner, and Editor Jacob Weisberg discuss the changes made to the "restored" edition, contemplate Penn Warren's vision of American fascism, and debate the racial views expressed in the novel. They also agree that it's the last great American novel before Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March*. The conversation runs about 50 minutes.

If you'd like to get an early start on the next book-club selection, we've chosen [Beautiful Children](#), by Charles Bock, which John Burdett, writing in the *Washington Post*, [described](#) as a novel that "deserves to be read more than once because of the extraordinary importance of its subject matter and the sensitivity with which [Bock] treats it." We'll post the discussion in early April.

You can also listen to any of our previous club meetings by clicking on the links below*:

[Eat, Pray, Love, by Elizabeth Gilbert](#)
[Tree of Smoke, by Denis Johnson](#)
[The Audacity of Hope, by Barack Obama](#)
[The Road, by Cormac McCarthy](#)
[The House of Mirth, by Edith Wharton](#)
[Independence Day, by Richard Ford](#)
[The Emperor's Children, by Claire Messud](#)
[The Omnivore's Dilemma, by Michael Pollan](#)
[Beloved, by Toni Morrison](#)
[Everyman, by Philip Roth](#)
[Saturday, by Ian McEwan](#)
[The Year of Magical Thinking, by Joan Didion](#)

Questions? Comments? Write to us at podcasts@slate.com. (E-mailers may be quoted by name unless they request otherwise.)

* 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.

the book club

Common Wealth

Ideas will rescue us from our global energy predicament.
By Jeffrey Sachs and Martin Wolf
Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 4:15 PM ET

From: Martin Wolf
To: Jeffrey Sachs
Subject: Is It Moral Concern or Self-Interest We Should Count on To Help Save the Planet?

Posted Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 6:54 AM ET

Dear Jeff:

For more than three decades now, you've been tackling big policy challenges as an adviser to many—the United Nations and countless governments around the world, among others—and in your writings. But never before have you taken on a topic of the scope of *Common Wealth*. I'm delighted to be able to discuss the book with you over the next couple of days.

Yet, first of all, I want to congratulate you on its scope. It concerns nothing less than the future of the world. It is also a call to arms. In this epoch, for the first time in the history of our planet, one species, ours, is in charge of the planet. We have already learned the need for cooperation within national borders. Now, you argue, "the recognition that we share responsibilities and fates across the social divide will need to be extended internationally so that the world as a whole takes care to ensure sustainable development in all regions."

In particular, you stress the need to secure four high-priority global goals: first, "sustainable systems of energy, land and resources use that avert the most dangerous trends of climate change, species extinction, and destruction of ecosystems"; second, "stabilization of the world's population at eight billion or below by 2050 through a voluntary reduction of fertility rates"; third, "the end of extreme poverty by 2025 and improved economic security within the rich countries as well"; and, finally, "a new approach to global problem solving based on co-operation among nations and the dynamism and creativity of the nongovernmental sector."

Throughout, you concentrate much of your fire on the Bush administration in particular and U.S. politics in general. You condemn: its mistaken view that the United States is the world's "sole superpower"; its blind trust in the efficacy of military force; its misplaced reliance on unilateral action; its contempt for multilateral institutions; its excessive belief in the unaided magic of the market; and its opposition to progress on climate change and birth control. You emerge as a European or, more precisely, a Scandinavian social democrat. In the European context, these views would be mainstream. In the United States, they are anything but that. In making the argument for urgent action, you point to the six trends that are shaping this century: economic convergence, or the rapid growth of developing countries; rapid population growth, despite broadly shared declines in fertility, with the poorest countries set to experience the most rapid increases; the rise of Asia; urbanization; a looming environmental disaster, as humanity appropriates for its use an ever-rising share of global resources; and the tumbling of at least 1 billion people into a "self-reinforcing poverty trap."

Yet what is perhaps most important about the book is its optimism. You argue that "the difference between the dangerous and unsustainable global trajectory we are on now and a sustainable trajectory that addresses the challenges of environment, population, and poverty is a modest 2 to 3 per cent of [global] annual income." Like the prophet Jeremiah, you warn of terrible things to come, should your call for repentance be ignored. But you insist that we can fix these problems by forgoing less than one year's global economic growth. "These estimates are necessarily uncertain," you acknowledge, "... but, as in so many cases in the past, the ultimate costs of action are likely to prove far smaller than we fear today, since we are more clever than we know once we've mobilized our efforts." The attraction of a book that offers cheap solutions for costly perils is evident.

The book is clearly and passionately argued, focused on challenges of the highest importance, infused with moral purpose, intelligent and well-informed. I agree with much of it. But agreement is boring. So I'd like to focus on five big questions it raised in my mind. I'll start with two, both about your intended audience, and then tomorrow, I'll be eager to turn to three more—about your optimism, about the prospects of collective action, and about global economic growth.

First, to whom is the book addressed? You talk of "we." But the "we" seem to be citizens of high-income countries and Americans, above all. The reason for this focus seems evident: These are the people with the resources—economic and technological—needed to tackle the challenges you address. And Americans signally fail to understand either the challenges or their role in meeting them.

Second, and far more important, why should this "we" care about the challenges you address? Demonstrably, the citizens of rich countries care little for the plight of the world's poorest. Yet two of your three big challenges—population and mass poverty—concern precisely the latter group of people. Developed countries devote less than 1 percent of their public spending to this cause. It is possible to argue that mass poverty is the breeding ground of terrorism. But the connection is far from compelling. Even in the case of climate change, the argument that this is a vast danger to the world's richest countries, including the United States, while far stronger than for poverty, is not overwhelming. So are you making a moral argument for action or an argument from self-interest?

Best wishes,
Martin

From: Jeffrey Sachs

To: Martin Wolf
Subject: Forget Grand Principles. Let's Stay Practical.
Posted Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 11:59 AM ET

Dear Martin,

I'm delighted to be discussing the book with you. Thanks so much for your initial thoughts. Here are some of my reflections on your queries. Seven years ago, in early 2001, I went to the White House to make the case that the United States should invest around \$3 billion per year to fight AIDS. I was given two respectful hearings by Condoleezza Rice, then National Security Council adviser. Still, I was met with some incredulity. Three billion dollars per year! Was I kidding? The president's economic adviser, Lawrence Lindsay, put his arm around my shoulder as he led me out of the West Wing. "Jeff, it's very nice what you are doing ... but don't hold your breath." Two years later, Bush launched his \$3 billion per year President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief program. Now it seems likely to be expanded to at least \$6 billion per year.

Is the U.S. AIDS program "self-interest" or "morality"? It's obviously both. Many of the president's core supporters, notably in the evangelical community, regard the AIDS program as the Lord's work. Many in the Pentagon regard it as a contribution to U.S. national security. Many in the State Department regard it as good diplomacy. And many in the rest of the country and in the world regard it as common sense. Leaving a killer pandemic to run wild in Africa is surely unsafe for the whole world, they reason—a threat to regional and global stability, national security, and the moral integrity of those who would look on.

And it's not just "we" in the rich world who have joined the effort. China is building hospitals and staffing clinics throughout Africa. Countless other countries in the "South" (really those nearer the equator rather than the misnamed "South") are training doctors and nurses, sending engineers, stepping up aid projects, and generally acting on the realization that morality, self-interest, and global stability are deeply intertwined on our intensely crowded and interconnected planet.

The real issue of the book, I believe, Martin, is not the "we" and the "why" but the "how." If it's really right, as I claim, that by investing some 2 percent to 3 percent of the world's income, it is possible to save around 10 million children per year from death while stabilizing the world's population growth, ending extreme poverty, curbing climate change, and developing alternative energy sources (rather than the \$100-per-barrel oil of a militarized Middle East), the "we" and the "why" would not be much of a question. Each of us, in rich and poor countries alike (remembering that many of the poor will soon be rich), would find many reasons, both selfish and selfless, to sign on, just as many signed up when they realized that treating AIDS wasn't a \$10,000 per person per year proposition (as had been supposed)

but was closer to a \$200 per year opportunity to fight death and disease.

The real issue is what you and I would call "positive" analysis rather than "normative" analysis. Can it really be right that poverty can be ended for less than 1 percent of rich-world income? Is it really true that the world's population can be stabilized voluntarily at 8 billion, or are we destined to burden the planet—and burdened it will be—with 9 billion or more? Can a global sustainable-energy system cost as little as 1 percent per annum of the gross world product? If these things are true, and if basic institutions can be devised to implement them in a reasonably effective manner, the motivations will follow, and amply so. The bargains will be too good to pass up.

Too many economists spend far too much time debating grand principles rather than facts and evidence. For years I've been trying to stay practical and focused with regard to global poverty. My position—more aid directly targeted at specific needs—was widely dismissed at the start and has been an object of mirth among some mainstream economists. Three billion dollars per year for AIDS? A global fund to fight pandemic diseases? A 100 percent cancellation of many Third World debts? A mass distribution of anti-malaria bed nets? A fund for an African Green Revolution? All of these are now in development. And sooner rather than later we will begin to invest massively in demonstrating carbon capture and sequestration and other renewable-energy technologies (Japan just posted \$10 billion for that purpose for developing countries). Sooner rather than later we will have a fund to avoid deforestation (Norway just put up \$600 million for that objective). Let's turn to the "numbers" to discuss whether these things will work, at what cost, and in which institutional manner.

I am not, to be sure, Dr. Pangloss. For every favorable trend, we also face hugely adverse and growing threats as well. The world population continues to grow. Today's impoverished drylands continue to combust in a tinderbox of violence, which we wrongly call Islamic fundamentalism. We send armies when we should send engineers and doctors. Violence is spreading. In seven brief years, we will have squandered more in the so-called "war on terror" than all the world has ever given in all of its aid to all of Africa for all time.

Is that self-interest? Is that morality? No, it's just foolishness and carelessness. The book is aimed to help us get off that dangerous course. We have low-cost ways to avoid the cliff, but heading for the cliff we are. Let us discuss in the next round how we—all of us—might steer the planet to a safer course.

From: Martin Wolf

To: Jeffrey Sachs
Subject: So, How Do We Save the Planet for 3 Percent of Global Income?
Posted Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 7:15 AM ET

Dear Jeff:

I agree with you that economists' tendency to ask whether what works in practice also works in theory is incredibly irritating. So, let us focus on the practicalities. My big question is whether the contrast between the scale of the challenges you address and the low cost of the suggested solutions is credible.

In the case of mass poverty and population control, I am, as you know, inclined to agree with you: Either the problems can be fixed with the sums you suggest or they cannot be fixed, at least by external assistance. I am not sure the approach you favor will succeed in all cases, but there is nothing else plausible on the table.

So, we have to try. I would have liked, though, to have seen more on the security dimension of poverty elimination, which is a theme of Paul Collier's recent book *The Bottom Billion*. Collier favors military intervention, as in the apparently successful example of British intervention in Sierra Leone, to prevent or halt hugely damaging civil conflicts. This makes sense to me, in extreme circumstances. What do you think?

On climate change, estimates by informed analysts of the possible extreme outcomes are so frightening that we must try to reduce the risks, even if it turns out to cost much more than you suggest. But I do suspect you are understating both the costs and the political difficulties ahead.

On the cost of mitigating climate change, [the Stern Review](#), published by the British government last year, comes out with the same central estimate as you do, but with a large range (negative 1 percent to plus 3.5 percent of annual gross global income). Some observers think costs will be far higher. A ready supply of commercial energy is, after all, the foundation of the modern world economy.

If we are to decarbonize that economy almost completely, while sustaining economic growth, we will need, at the least, to make "carbon-capture-and-storage" work on a vast scale, with much retrofitting of existing generating capacity. Moreover, as you remark, "the bulk of the large-scale non-fossil fuel alternatives are likely to come from nuclear power and solar energy."

Yet, as of today, carbon capture and storage is essentially an unproven technology, certainly on the needed scale, as is such vast use of solar energy, while large-scale reliance on nuclear power confronts huge political and security challenges. Mass

reforestation looks simpler, but there must also be a limit to that, given the growing world demand for food.

The world economy would increase at least fivefold between now and 2050, on your forecasts. Is it possible, under any plausible view of future technology, to achieve such an expansion while massively reducing, if not eliminating, anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions altogether?

In addition, how is the world to achieve an effective global agreement on climate change and biodiversity? This is a gigantic collective-action problem.

It is not just the United States that is an obstacle here. The Europeans have mostly failed to meet their commitments under the Kyoto treaty. Despite having an economy that is less than half that of the United States in size, even at purchasing power parity, China already emits as much greenhouse gas as the United States. Moreover, it is increasing its power-generating capacity every year by the amount of the United Kingdom's current power generation, while relying overwhelmingly on dirty coal. China is also just beginning to create what will surely end up as a fleet of hundreds of millions of vehicles. India is following behind. Yet you say little about how an effective global agreement to decarbonize production is to be reached.

Finally, are there not important conflicts among the goals you set out? Should you not at least consider the possibility that maintaining biodiversity will be much more difficult, if not impossible, in a world in which everybody enjoys the standard of living of the contemporary rich countries? Is it not an implication of your increasingly Malthusian point of view that global economic growth may need to stop altogether, starting in the rich countries, and perhaps rather soon?

Let me be clear. I agree these are the biggest challenges that loom before us. I agree we should try to tackle them. But I am not convinced that we can do so as easily and cheaply as you suggest. Would it not be honest to confront your readers, most of whom will be among the richest people in the world, with the possibility that they may be unable to solve some of the problems you want them to solve while also enjoying rising living standards for the indefinite future?

Important books raise important questions. You have achieved that fully. I congratulate you.

Martin

From: Jeffrey Sachs
To: Martin Wolf

Subject: Ideas Will Rescue Us From Our Global Energy Predicament
Posted Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 4:15 PM ET

Dear Martin,

Thanks, as always, for zeroing in on the key challenges. I'm grateful that you've stipulated two main areas of provisional agreement: a globally coordinated attack on extreme poverty and a revived effort to promote voluntary fertility reduction, aiming to stabilize the world's population. My previous book *The End of Poverty* laid out the case that market forces, combined with a mere 0.7 percent of rich-world GNP (now around \$280 billion per year), can get the job done on extreme poverty by 2025. I'm more than satisfied with your judgment that while such an approach might not work in all cases, "there is nothing else plausible on the table."

In the end, the key is to try. We'll learn, I believe, that much more is achievable much more rapidly than is widely suspected. We have deep reserves of powerful technologies—for food production, water management in dry lands, disease control, and infrastructure—that can be deployed rapidly and at modest cost to break poverty traps. If we do this, I think we will also find that the need to rely on the military is decisively reduced. There are no doubt occasions, very few in number, when a military intervention can end or prevent a bloodbath. But the military alone can never solve the deeper and chronic problems of instability in Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Our mistake is to be vastly overinvesting in military approaches while tragically neglecting our opportunities to address the challenges of poverty and demography, which are at the crux of the matter.

I also agree with you that the bigger uncertainties lie in the challenge of combining environmental sustainability and continued global growth. The challenge is probably greatest on the question of energy. The modern world has been created by fossil fuels, but they will no longer suffice, at least not with today's technologies. And we can't even be sure whether our most urgent problem will be the dangerous climate change that fossil fuels induce or the limited supply of these fuels at reasonable costs. The new \$105-per-barrel price of oil is an appropriate backdrop to our discussion.

I argue in the book that, as with extreme poverty, we have sustainable technologies waiting in the wings that can make the continued use of fossil fuels environmentally safe and progressively replace them altogether as their low-cost supply is depleted. Carbon capture and storage, or CCS, is the most promising way for us to continue the large-scale use of fossil fuels, especially coal-fired power plants. Each component of the technology—capture, pipeline transport, and underground sequestration—is proven on a small scale but certainly not on a large scale. New sources of energy—including wind,

geothermal, and even a little bit more hydro—can play their role, with the big and long-term players likely to be nuclear and solar.

But such sweeping statements are easy. The essence of the problem lies in the cost of bringing about such a transition and the agility it will require. On cost, I am indeed relying on relatively optimistic engineering. I am impressed not only by the engineering reports on CCS, concentrated solar thermal, concentrated PV solar, plug-in hybrids, green buildings, and other low-emission technologies, but also by the ironic fact that most of these and other promising technologies have not yet been tried on a large scale. It's not as if we have knocked our heads against the wall for two centuries on this problem and must therefore pray for an as-yet-unimagined breakthrough. Carbon emission reduction is a relatively new problem, which the world's engineering talent has yet to aggressively tackle; there are a great number of exciting potential angles of technological attack with some huge successes likely to be found, relatively close at hand and at a surprisingly low cost. The same has been the case, at a vastly lower scale, with cuts in sulfur emissions, deleading of gasoline, and the phasing out of ozone-depleting chlorofluorocarbons.

The hardest point of all, we'd probably agree, is global agility. The book emphasizes at great length that markets alone will not solve this problem. Even putting a price on carbon emissions—through emissions taxation or tradable permits—is only a piece of a much larger institutional problem. We must engineer large-scale technological change. We need to conceive of sustainable development as a matter of global-scale directed technology policy, using an interplay of public and private institutions to spur RDD&D, meaning the research, development, demonstration, and diffusion of new core technologies. And we will have to do this globally and cooperatively. China alone now accounts for more than half of the world's coal consumption, for example, so that the United States, Europe, and Japan have a strong interest in helping China to develop local capacity in CCS technology and to begin CCS demonstration projects. The world's climate may well depend on it.

Currently our global energy system is tied up in knots. Should we build coal-fired power plants at all if they are not capturing their carbon? What about nuclear? What about large-scale liquefaction of coal in the face of tightening oil markets? What about bio-fuels and their environmental and social costs? There is little global leadership and even less global consensus, just an intensifying scramble for the resources at hand and the prospect of growing conflict zones if we don't raise our sights. The financing of energy infrastructure is gripped by uncertainty, though the readiness of vast sums to flow into new energy technologies is also evident.

We are at a time when ideas will count—technical ideas to be sure, but also ideas about cooperation and conflict. The frames of reference of our political leaders will matter greatly. If they

view the world as us versus them, we will indeed live in a world of growing conflict. If they view the world as facing a science-and-technology-based transition at a global scale, we can achieve spreading prosperity and sustainability. And in the end, interestingly, the politicians will be listening and responding to the world public. Perhaps as in all ages, our fate is truly in our hands.

Thanks again,

Jeff

the chat room

Sex Sells

Emily Bazelon and Josh Levin take readers' questions about prostitution. Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 4:57 PM ET

Slate editors Emily Bazelon and Josh Levin were online at [Washingtonpost.com](#) on Thursday, March 13, to chat with readers about prostitution—the [laws against it](#), the [workings behind it](#), and the marketing of it—in the wake of the Eliot Spitzer scandal. An unedited transcript of the chat follows.

Josh Levin: Josh Levin here. Ready to answer some questions.

Washington: When one books a hooker for two hours, what goes on other than sex? Seriously—is there foreplay, conversation? I am trying to rid my mind of the image of Spitzer naked, in bed.

Josh Levin: There's a great piece on *Slate* now by the sociology professor Sudhir Venkatesh, who has done a lot of research on the sex trade in New York City. (No, not that kind of research.) He reports that 40 percent of the sex transactions in NYC don't go beyond kissing. A lot of guys just want someone to talk to, it seems. As Venkatesh writes, if you're paying \$4,300, "That's one helluva conversation."

washingtonpost.com: [Skinflint: Did Eliot Spitzer get caught because he didn't spend enough on prostitutes?](#) (*Slate*, March 13)

Savage, Md.: If we could get past the hypocrisy about sex, would it not be a good idea to establish government- or state-

regulated brothels so as to better protect the health and well-being of both buyers and sellers?

Emily Bazelon: Maybe yes, but maybe no. In Amsterdam, where brothers are legal, the red-light district is reportedly seedy and full of pickpockets. (Disclaimer: There's going to be lots of second-hand reporting in this chat.) The Dutch aren't shutting it down, but they've added restrictions. One question I have is about how widespread legalization and regulation would have to be to change the working conditions for prostitutes. If you legalize in one place (like Nevada) then doesn't everyone go there and turn it into a mess. Whereas if prostitution is legal throughout an entire country, or part of the world, wouldn't the ramifications be different, potentially?

Greencastle, Ind.: Wasn't it noted behavioral expert Charlie Sheen who once said he didn't pay women for sex, he paid women to leave?

Josh Levin: A classic quote from one of American's leading thinkers. I bet Eliot Spitzer is hoping his public image will one day rise to the level of Mr. Sheen, or better yet Hugh Grant.

Garland, Texas: According to Ms. MacKinnon, women always are victims because men are predators. Men always force or lure women to having sex. I am sure she thinks that it is always men who are charged with indecent exposure. I wonder what she thinks of women who wear skinny clothes, which should be considered undergarments. How about see-through cloth without any undergarment? In my opinion, women lure men as well. Needless to say, prostitutes lure clients (men/women) all the time. This is their business. So, how is it fair for her to say that women always are victims and men always are predators.

Emily Bazelon: I don't think that's a fair rendering of MacKinnon's views. Yes, she emphasizes the role that men play in buying porn and buying sex. And she uses strong words, like that women are being sold, to make you think about acts we often gloss over. But calling men to account, even harshly, isn't the same as condemning women for wearing revealing clothing. Yes, MacKinnon stresses that men are often predators, and she exhorts women to watch out, but it's not quite as black and white as you portray.

Claverack, N.Y.: The New York State GOP is trumpeting a new line: All Democrats must give back money donated to them by Spitzer, because it's ... er ... "tainted." Really? It's not like he's giving people money the prostitutes have touched themselves

personally. If Spitzer had done something fundamentally corrupt rather than work-a-day lechery—yeah, okay, I could see that. But can anyone make a case that this taints every dollar of the Spitzer fortune, retroactively?

Emily Bazelon: I agree, that seems like the classic overplaying of a political hand. It's a testament to how tainted Spitzer's brand is, but that's got nothing to do with his money.

Washington: Are there any "organizations" that employ older women? Probably not. Do these places exist to fulfill fantasies for men who never got the girl in high school, and now are making up for lost time?

Josh Levin: I'm not familiar with any agencies that specialize in older women, but when it comes to the sex trade there's generally something for everyone on the World Wide Web. Your take seems spot-on based on the Emperors' Club website, though. All of the women are described as being in their early 20s, fresh-faced, full of youthful brio, etc.

Arlington, Va.: I don't buy the argument that every woman (and man) who sells sex for money is being exploited. Is it any different from selling any other kind of labor? Sure, an abusive pimp changes the calculation, but legalized prostitution can get rid of the pimps and better ensure the health and safety of prostitutes. Other than Nevada, have any other states ever come close to legalizing prostitution?

washingtonpost.com: [Bill to close prostitution loophole](#) (*Providence Journal*, March 13)

Emily Bazelon: I think that Rhode Island has legalized some acts of prostitution that take place indoors. (If I'm wrong about that, someone write in to correct me.) Here's my question: Assume you're right that selling sex for money isn't necessarily exploitation. After all, plenty of women come forward to say just that, and it seems a bit much to accuse them all of false consciousness. But would legalization really improve things for them? That's not the report from Amsterdam, where trafficking has increased. The most intriguing alternative I've heard about is Sweden's, where it's legal to sell sex but not to buy it, johns are actually arrested, and the level of prostitution in Stockholm has significantly fallen.

Did I miss this part?: When were Mark Bruener, aka "Michael," and Cecil Suwal aka "Katie," aka "Kate," actually

arrested? Cecil seems to be a strange name for someone known as Kate. Is that a man or a woman?

Josh Levin: There does seem to be a fundamental gender disagreement here. But keep in mind that guys have pretended to be women (and vice-versa) since about four seconds after the Internet was invented. Like that famous *New Yorker* cartoon says, "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a Cecil."

Anonymous: I don't want to be insulting, but how do people end up in this line of work? That's the part that scares me as a parent. I mean, the story of the woman working corners is pretty much generalized and understood, but this lady's story does not seem much different than that typical scenario, and she ends up as a \$1,000-an-hour call girl. How do they recruit and find these ladies? This one seemed to know consciously what she was doing and referenced the need for money. Are model searches and escort searches code words of which I am not aware?

washingtonpost.com: [Wiretaps, Rookie Hookers and Client No. 9](#) (*Post*, March 13)

Emily Bazelon: I imagine that as with every line of work, there are multiple paths in. Because of the stigma involved (and I do think the stigma remains strong), some women fall into prostitution out of desperation. They're addicted to drugs or broke or depressed (a majority of prostitutes have been sexually abused, studies show), and they need money. I imagine, though, that other women might dip a toe into the sex trade more out of titillation or curiosity.

Burke, Va.: Any theories on how Spitzer got hooked up with QAT Enterprises (or whatever they're called) to begin with? Seems like there'd need to be an intermediary (unless he just stumbled across their Web site).

Emily Bazelon: I don't think we know the answer to that yet, but if I had to guess, I'd say he didn't have an intermediary. If he'd had help, he might not have chosen what seems like the riskiest way to buy sex in terms of getting caught—through an escort service rather than a top-price independent operator, to which he had to wire payments. Sudhir Venkatesh has a great piece in *Slate* today about the NY prostitution market that makes Spitzer's methodology seem sort of bumbling.

Josh Levin: Agree with Emily. My best guess is that he Googled the term "escort." Or perhaps he searched for "private club for those accustomed to excellence." (One of many instant-classic quotes from the Emperors' Club website.)

washingtonpost.com: [The Silda Spitzer Lesson: Don't quit your day job](#) (*Slate*, March 12)

Start-Up Costs: How do these people start a prostitution ring? Creating a Web site would be cheap, but how are the girls recruited? Are there security costs? (If my computer is being bugged, I do not have the resources or inclination to be involved. I'm just curious.)

Emily Bazelon: It's a black market enterprise that runs according to the rules of the underground economy—lots of word of mouth, proving that you're worthy of trust, getting to know the people who can set you up with the supply you're looking for. This service didn't seem to have had any high-tech security that got in the way of the federal wiretap.

Credit Cards: Do Visa, Master Card or American Express do any background checks when a new business requests to use their service? I would think they would want to avoid being involved, except in Nevada where prostitution is legal. How about the bank where the money was deposited?

Emily Bazelon: It was the banks that caught Spitzer, or that alerted the feds to him. They noticed that he was making a bunch of deposits right up to the legal limit, and they flagged it for the IRS. The original investigation was for public corruption and bribery, not prostitution.

Doylestown, Pa.: Will "Emperor's Club VIP" T-shirts be this year's big Father's Day fad?

Josh Levin: Hot Topic has no doubt purchased hundreds of additional presses to accommodate this print run.

What should it say on the back of the shirt? "I paid \$4,300 and all I got was this lousy T-shirt and extreme public humiliation."

The Fam: Eek! I feel so awful for Spitzer's wife and children—but I have to say, I do not understand this pervasive "stand by your man" schtick in politics. I am struggling to understand the motivation behind agreeing to stand up with your husband under such circumstances. It would be one thing if it were months later and the couple had time to talk, get therapy, decide if they were going to stick together, etc. Am I naive? Am I missing some obvious reason that this is the standard behavior of a politico's wife?

Emily Bazelon: Anne Applebaum, a *Washington Post* columnist who is married to the defense minister of Poland, wrote a v. instructive post on *Slate* about this. She pointed out that if you stand up there once (or in Silda Spitzer's case, twice) then no that's it, and you don't have to explain yourself later. You say what you say to your husband in private. Personally, I don't think it's for me, and I couldn't have felt worse for Silda Spitzer, too. But I'm not sure she had any good choices.

Washington: Having been to Amsterdam last summer, in response to earlier comments: Not many of the women appeared to be Dutch (broad generalization, but it raised questions in my mind about human trafficking and women from poor countries with little to no economic opportunities), and not all of the women were in their early 20s. In Amsterdam, as on the Internet, there was someone for everyone.

Emily Bazelon: Yes, trafficking is a considerable problem there. Whereas in Sweden, where johns are prosecuted, trafficking has dropped off to v. small numbers. I wrote about this in *Slate* earlier in the week—[here's the link](#).

TheCloudBoy: Given the caliber of clients they wished to attract, I can't believe the very poor copywriting on the Web site and how the whole thing read like something my friends and I would have cooked up in ninth grade as a joke. The whole "Marisha speaks nine languages and grew up in Russia before becoming an Esteemed Dancer" bit (paraphrased, but you know it was about that bad) had me laughing and rolling on the floor.

I mean, really people ... it's like a combination of horrible copywriting and grade school kids writing a James Bond movie script. How could a governor—and one must presume other leading businessmen—fall for this? I love the uppercase on some things they wished the place emphasis on too ... I hope each and every one of their clients is found out and hauled before a court of law to explain his actions, if not his very poor taste.

Josh Levin: Not sure I buy the logic that Spitzer's punishment should be worse because he went for a site that made a mockery of conventional sentence structure. But I certainly agree that it was strange how poorly written the Emperors' Club's promotional material was. I've always wondered the same thing about spam e-mail—wouldn't those penis enlargement pitches have a higher success rate if they read like they'd been written by a human being? Apparently the underground economy does not properly value the work of copyeditors.

move around a lot, they use threats to make women fear testifying against them, etc. Law enforcement is not an easy job.

Roseland, N.J.: Doesn't it disturb anyone else that this story is being used as a pivot to discuss how one goes about hiring a prostitute, how much one should expect to pay, what they'll do for the money? Is this doing the married women of America such a huge favor here? It's not like it's an integral part of reporting the story—it's just prurient interest (not that that isn't the very best kind of interest!)—and somehow everyone's been given license to stop being a political reporter and start pretending they're a hybrid Howard Stern/Dr. Drew.

Emily Bazelon: You're right, some of the coverage is inevitably prurient. (A low: The [NY Observer story](#) asking a bunch of women what THEY would do for Eliot Spitzer for \$5,500.) But some of the explanations about how the sex trade works, and what the working conditions are like for women, have been entirely worth reading, I think. This is a part of the lives of some poor women, and I'm glad to be learning about it. I for one am not quite sure what I think about prostitution, and learning more facts about it is helping me make up my mind.

Washington: I cannot believe as a woman (not you, Josh) and as a descendant of one of the most beloved chief judges of the D.C. circuit, you are defending the right of women to open up their bodies for cash—but then again, you have a political reporter on the campaign trail who trashed his own mother in a book. Maybe at *Slate*, anything goes. Kind of sad.

Emily Bazelon: Well that's nice about my grandfather. Not fair about John Dickerson's book, though! He wrote about his mother with a great deal of love and compassion. Did you read it? As for me, I'm not sure I'm defending anything. I'm asking questions about which legal regime keeps women who sell sex safest. I'm still not sure of the answer.

Bonn, Germany: Most civilized countries tolerate prostitution; where it is forbidden, prostitution will go underground and come under the control of criminal elements. It was the same with prohibition in the 1920s, which made the Mafia into the power it is to this day. It is not true that all prostitutes are forced into the profession—the call girl who got Spitzer into trouble certainly did so under her own free will. Would it not make sense to legalize prostitution in the U.S., but punish those who force women into prostitution?

Emily Bazelon: I'm not sure Prohibition is the right analogy, but it's certainly ONE analogy. Punishing pimps, if that's why you mean by force women into prostitution, seems like an unalloyed good. The problem is making charges against them stick. They

Richmond, Va.: I'm probably the opposite of a lot of people who wonder why it's still illegal—I wonder why it's still around. That world that thought of women as vessels and chattel is what should be gone, not the illegality. With swinging parties, Craigslist and friends with benefits, no one has to pay for cheap sex anymore.

Josh Levin: It's possible that Spitzer paid for sex because he thought it would buy discretion—that he wouldn't have to worry about some friend with benefits blabbing to the tabloids. More likely is the theory that Ellen Tarlin put forward on *Slate*'s XX Factor blog: "He didn't hire whores because he can't get laid for free. He hired whores because he gets off on hiring whores." (Please read the rest of Ellen's [brilliant post](#) for enlightening commentary on how all this relates to gerbils and twinkies.)

Detroit: Has prostitution as an occupation ever been generally accepted, or has it always been stigmatized?

Emily Bazelon: I think some particular forms of high-end prostitution, like the Japanese comfort women, have been accepted, to a degree. Have you ever seen the TV show *Firefly*? There's a character on it who is a "registered companion," and she pretty much personifies the beautiful, well-adjusted prostitute. The question is whether she's a fantasy, or such a tiny fraction of the whole as to be virtually irrelevant, for policy-making purposes.

Washington: Josh, could you share your experiences of when you were a male prostitute? Thanks!

Josh Levin: Come on, that's offensive. I was never a male prostitute. I only go by Josh in online chats. My real name is Katie.

I think that Rhode Island has legalized some acts of prostitution that take place indoors. (If I'm wrong bout that, someone write in to correct me.): You are wrong—I researched this a few months ago. They were using a sort of "no idling" vehicular law to stop prostitution, and the courts ruled they couldn't charge prostitutes and johns with *that violation*. Prostitution is still illegal, with no plans to change it. It is sorta

like using tax laws to catch mobsters, it's just that one vehicular law that can't be used to cite prostitution.

Emily Bazelon: very helpful, thank you!

Detroit: Actually, Sweden is legally on the right track. In a study made in nine countries, interviewing more than 800 prostituted women and children, 89 percent directly reported (even when pimps were standing next to them) that most of all, they wanted to leave the industry, but couldn't. This answer was given regardless of whether their country (or jurisdiction) had legalized prostitution or not.

Prostitution and pornography increasingly are being recognized as violence and as sexually discriminatory practices, e.g. in international law. The majority of all prostituted persons—most of whom are women—whether on the street or in media, have been sexually abused or battered as children. Research in the U.S. shows that an average age of entry into the industry is around 14, when children hardly "freely" decide to carry out sexual services for—on average—2,000 adult men a year. Often the children are desperate and destitute without anywhere to go.

Studies in Canada show prostituted women have a life expectancy far below others. No wonder—among 55 prostituted persons in Portland, 84 percent had been exposed to aggravated assault, on average 103 times a year; 53 percent were sexually tortured on average more than once a week. Often pornography was made of the assaults.

Against the background of some Swedish procuring cases, these facts do not appear exaggerated. The Swedish law against purchase of sexual services moves in the right direction, but it does not recognize or compensate the victims for the harms of prostitution. A civil remedy for prostituted persons to claim damages from sex buyers or procurers would empower those who need empowerment.

Emily Bazelon: Yes, I've read these facts elsewhere. And a Swedish grad student told me on Monday about the civil remedy idea. It's intriguing; on the other hand, the incentives it sets up seem weird. You let a man solicit you for sex, and then you say hey, I'm suing you? That seems like an incentive for women luring men and then turning on them, no?

Josh Levin: Tenuously related to Emily's answer about Japanese comfort women, a couple of smart readers pointed out to me that the language on the Emperors' Club website is similar to that of *Memoirs of a Geisha*—the focus on the education of the women,

the concept of paying a "buyout" to the manager if you enter into a personal relationship with a prostitute, etc.

Boston: For me at least, the discussion of the sex trade that this case has generated has been extremely helpful. Any discussion I previously have seen seemed to go one of two ways—either the hookers-on-the-street "all women are victimized and it definitely should be illegal" viewpoint, or the post-feminist empowered sex worker saying "I'm here because I choose to be, there's nothing inherently dirty or bad about women's sexuality—and I'm making a good living, too."

Now we're having to look at the middle ground, and take a look at how other countries in the world actually make prostitution laws work (and while the first argument is too extreme for me, the second one didn't seem to be grounded in reality). Thanks, Emily, as well for your (and the rest of the ladies') commentaries on *Slate's* XX Factor; it's become my favorite source of news commentary!

Emily Bazelon: I agree, and hey that's great that you're enjoying XX Factor! We have a lot of fun doing it. Especially in weeks like these.

Denver: In this case these seem to be women, but from what I understand, the average age one enters prostitution nationwide is 14; this, combined with relatively low life-expectancy and the chances of getting caught and put in prison, leads me to believe that most prostitutes are actually teenage girls, and even many who are women may have been trapped in this life when they were girls.

That aspect of it bothers me greatly. I wonder if making it legal at least could ensure that it is women, not girls, doing this. On the other hand, I also wonder why in the current legal state, more men are not harshly prosecuted in their role in this as johns, when not only are they soliciting, they also often are committing statutory rape.

Emily Bazelon: There will always be a black market for teenage girls, but you may be right that legalization and regulation could reduce their numbers. On the other hand, legalization could create other problems. I agree that arresting johns seems like a smart way to dry up demand, as the Swedish example demonstrates.

Rockville, Md.: For \$1,000 or more an hour, couldn't "the Emperor's Club VIP" come up with a better name and some

classier copy? The bad grammar and inept flattery (I mean, what kind of cheeseball wants to join "The Emperor's Club"?) would put me right off. Granted, I'm female, but still, won't someone think of the poor consumer who has to read this eyeball-burning schlock?

Josh Levin: I think this is one business where the name probably isn't that important when it comes to making a sale. Anyway, perhaps we're not giving the proprietors enough credit for the subtle reference to the Emperor's New Clothes.

College Park, Md.: Has anyone ever done a study of women long after their prostitute careers are over? I wonder how they feel about the work in retrospect—the better paid prostitutes, in particular, not the street prostitutes who one would assume were doing whatever they could to get by. Part of me figures, fine, prostitution should be legalized—surely women can decide for themselves if they're cut out for the job. But my friends and I tend to be of the opinion that the work sounds just too icky, and none of us could do it, ever.

Emily Bazelon: That is such a great question and I wish I knew the answer. There have been studies of prostitutes' mortality rates, the rate of sexual abuse, and a couple of recent ones by economists looking at average pay and instances of physical abuse. But I think you're asking a broader question—how do these women feel about the work they did after it's over, and they look back. If the studies suggesting that the vast majority of women wish they could leave the trade are any indication, a lot of women probably look back with regret and sadness. But as always in life, not all of them, and it would be really interesting to read well-conducted studies that try to take that measure.

Atlanta: Just an observation, really: I must hang around some shady characters, because the questions here strike me as puritanical, naive and humorous. How does a woman "choose" this line of work? She tries other jobs and realizes she could make as much money if not more doing "this" in less than the typical 40-hour work week. The women I've known who've done this have no qualms about why they made that choice. It's not for everyone—and no, I'm not talking about victims of abuse. It takes a certain mindset and personality.

Emily Bazelon: Yes, prostitutes don't work a 40 hour work week, and yes, for some women the sex trade could be a rational line of work. It's risky—there's a high rate of violence, you depend on your clients for cash-based payments if you collect your own money. But other work could look worse, in some circumstances.

Washington: I don't know what your research and discussions have developed, but I believe that it's not entirely uncommon for younger women to work as call girls. I went to college and lived in an undergraduate dormitory in New York until I moved back to Washington three years ago, and it was almost an open fact that several of my dormmates worked (a few with some frequency) for a service which seemed not dissimilar to the agency implicated in the Spitzer scandal.

My dormmates (I discussed this extensively with one of them) seemed truly unconcerned by the potential medical, violence and ultimately blackmail risks to which they might be exposed. Honestly, I was stunned by this more than anything else. I since have learned that there may have been at least a half-dozen people in my 200-plus student dorm who may have worked for the same two agencies. Have you found that this somehow is gaining social acceptance? What really astounds me more than anything else is voluntarily undertaking the blackmail exposure. I really would value your comments.

Josh Levin: Not sure it speaks to the rising social acceptance of prostitution, but that's a pretty alarming percentage of prostitution in your college dorm. In his *Slate* piece I referenced earlier, Sudhir Vinkatesh makes some interesting points about the difference between the growing class of "indoor" sex workers and the stereotypical streetwalker. "In the past, sex workers tended to view their role as part-time 'survivors'—selling sex to keep up a drug habit, to pay rent, or to eke out a living until something better came along," he writes. "Pushed indoors, some became 'careerist.' They were professionals offering a legitimate service, like nursing or counseling; they looked at their work as partly therapeutic."

Washington: How has legalization worked out in Nevada? I have to wonder if that situation may better represent the potential reality of legalization in the U.S. than does Sweden...

Emily Bazelon: Except that Nevada is one island of legalization in a sea of bans. So of course demand is high there—it's where people go to buy sex without fear of arrest.

Re: "He hired whores because...": That is an excellent point, and one reason I'll never think it's okay, even if a woman tells me she's okay with being a whore—that whole aspect of the subservience/servant role as opposed to a willing partner, even if only for an hour, or 15 minutes. Someone who enjoys treating their sexual partners like livestock bothers me.

Josh Levin: Well said.

Washington: I hope this isn't a stupid question, but doesn't some sex actually have to take place for it to constitute prostitution? If the expert you quote is right that 40 percent of the men don't have sex, why couldn't someone in Spitzer's dilemma say "well I just wanted someone to talk to" (not to say that would fly with his wife, but it might work against criminal charges).

Emily Bazelon: Not a stupid question. The Mann Act, which is one of the options for prosecuting Spitzer (though usually it's only used for going after pimps) makes it a crime to induce someone to cross state lines for the purpose of prostitution. That seems like it would be pretty easy to prove in this case. Mostly, though, I don't think Spitzer wants this to go to court and turn on what he and Kristen/Ashley actually did.

curiousgemini: Prostitution cannot be defended on moral grounds; neither can getting drunk every night, having sex with a new person every week, and other activities which are legal but might strike many people as immoral and reckless. Some people find guns immoral. Does that mean we should ban all guns? Do the members of PETA have the right to ban eating meat? Indeed, it's perfectly legal for a person to have unprotected sex with an unlimited number of people. Yet if so much as a cent exchanges hands, that person has committed a crime!

Outlawing a vice is not the only way to discourage it—tobacco, for instance, is legal, but we tax and regulate the hell out of it. Legalize prostitution, but get rid of the pimps, ban street-walking, tax it a lot, and require prostitutes to get checked for sexual diseases every month and educate them in safer sex practices. At the same time, the government could encourage women (and men) to find another line of work.

Emily Bazelon: True. For me the interesting question is how we decide to structure our hierarchy of vices. Alcohol, legal. Marijuana, not. Unlimited unprotected sex for free, legal. Buying sex once, not. At the same time, I'm not sure how much the comparisons matter, in the end, or whether legalizing prostitution would have the effects you lay out.

Re: Geisha: Even in their heyday, they were still "working girls" who were valued for their beauty and put on pedestals, but still of the streets. Good upstanding people didn't talk to them in the streets and good families didn't let their girls do it; it was poor families who literally sold their girls to the houses. As much as a man claimed to love a geisha and support her

financially, he'd *never* marry her. She's still, at the end of the day, a prostitute—there for fun, but not for marrying.

Josh Levin: That's right. Your point here reminds me of the section of the criminal complaint against the Emperors' Club wherein "Kristen" (Ashley Dupre) describes her interaction with "Client 9" (Spitzer): "I'm here for a purpose. I know what my purpose is. I am not a . . . moron, you know what I mean."

On legalizing prostitution: Consider this: Is prostitution a profession to which you aspire to? Is it one that school counselors should explore as a career choice? Would you want it for your daughter? Just a moment ago someone called Josh a prostitute, and he immediately found it offensive. I'm just sayin'...

Emily Bazelon: Nope, I don't aspire to it, and I don't imagine a lot of people do. But to me the key question is what laws will create the best working conditions for prostitutes, not which laws will shame people.

Emily Bazelon: Hey Everyone, thank you very much for writing in. Josh and I enjoyed your smart questions.

the dismal science Skinflint

Did Eliot Spitzer get caught because he didn't spend *enough* on prostitutes?

By Sudhir Venkatesh

Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 6:53 PM ET

The first thing that grabs your attention about the sex scandal involving New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer is, of course, the client. But, there's another aspect to the story that should raise eyebrows: \$4,300. That's [the bill](#) Spitzer incurred for his dangerous liaison at the Mayflower hotel. Who would pay that much, and could you ever *really* get your money's worth?

In fact, \$4,300 is not an altogether alarming sum of money in the high-end sex market. Spitzer got a bargain—and that may have been his downfall.

In many so-called global cities, like New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, sex is part of a lucrative service sector that has developed for those with expendable income. Soliciting a prostitute can be as pricey as hiring a personal chef or finding a private school for your kids. In New York, it's not hard to find

sex workers who charge \$10,000 per "session," which can last for 15 minutes or two hours (jokes aside).

Although you can still drive through neighborhoods where prices aren't nearly so high—in New York, the average rate for intercourse is around \$75 if you find a street-based prostitute—the biggest changes in recent years have occurred at the upper end of the market. Cities that cleaned up their red-light districts, like Chicago's West Side or Hell's Kitchen in Manhattan, pushed the sex-work trade indoors—to the Internet, to strip clubs, to escort services. These indoor sex workers created a larger, less publicly visible market that tends to serve the middle and upper classes.

I found this world by accident in 1999, when I started interviewing sex workers in Hell's Kitchen, Spanish Harlem, and other New York neighborhoods that were points of entry for newly arrived immigrants. I expected to hang out on the streets, but in fact I had to enter apartments, public-housing projects, strip clubs, bars, and brothels to locate subjects. What I found was women checking voice mail or sitting behind computers watching their online ads and e-mail accounts. This was the sex world that New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani helped to create when he drove prostitutes off the streets as part of his effort to make the city hospitable for upper-end residential development and tourism. While it's hard to say whether the total number of prostitutes increased, the Giuliani strategy did expand the indoor market: the white-collar workers who may have visited a street prostitute now and then quickly discovered a discreet, online, and referral-based world of higher-priced sex workers. The higher end of the market exploded.

The new "indoor" sex worker differs from the older prototype. In the past, sex workers tended to view their role as part-time "survivors"—selling sex to keep up a drug habit, to pay rent, or to eke out a living until something better came along. Pushed indoors, some became "careerist." They were professionals offering a legitimate service, like nursing or counseling; they looked at their work as partly therapeutic. These indoor workers stay in the game for longer periods of time because they find a level of autonomy and flexibility that the legitimate economy often does not provide. They're also less likely to be targeted by cops, social workers, or clergy, all of whom work to get street-based prostitutes out of the profession. The street-based prostitute tends to leave the job after six to nine months, returning when money is tight or drugs need to be purchased.

At the lucrative end of the market, I have found it useful to think of three tiers of women (men constitute only about 10 percent of high-end prostitutes). Spitzer was paying for "Tier 1" sex workers: Fees usually range from \$2,000 to \$5,000 per session; women come in all ages and ethnic stripes; they rigorously guard their health and watch for STDs; and most have a high-school degree but have limited work experience. They can promise you discretion, but most work through escort services that are

routinely under surveillance. In practice, this means buyer beware.

"Tier 2" includes women who charge up to \$7,500 for a session. These women tend to be white, they may have a college degree (or be actively enrolled in school), and they usually require a referral before they will take on a new john. They also have a small, exclusive clientele, sometimes as few as a dozen men whom they service. Unlike Tier 1 workers, they do not rely on escort agencies, so they keep all of their money.

Finally, there are the "Tier 3" sex workers, who can charge in excess of \$10,000 per rendezvous. They may have only four or five clients, and they typically charge their clients an additional monthly surcharge for their various needs—rent, clothing, medicine.

Both Tier 2 and Tier 3 workers can typically do more to safeguard a client's privacy. There are no guarantees, of course, but they tend to shun contractual relationships with agencies that advertise their services. There is less of a paper trail. They typically will only take a john via a referral, and even then, they may require that the john "date" them for weeks before deciding to offer up sex. I have heard of Tier 2 and 3 sex workers who vet prospective clients for months, sometimes hiring a private detective to see if the john is stable—psychologically and financially. As a former attorney general, Spitzer must have known all this.

What high-end clients pay for may surprise you. For example, according to my ongoing interviews of several hundred sex workers, approximately 40 percent of trades in New York's sex economy fail to include a physical act beyond light petting or kissing. No intercourse, no oral stimulation, etc. That's one helluva conversation. But it's what many clients want. Flush with cash, these elite men routinely turn their prostitute into a second partner or spouse. Over the course of a year, they will sometimes persuade the woman to take on a new identity, replete with a fake name, a fake job, a fake life history, and so on. They may want to have sex or they may simply want to be treated like King for a Day.

Melissa is a 38-year-old white woman living in Hoboken, N.J. (She asked that I not use her full name.) I met her in 2002, when she was in Hell's Kitchen trying to get her sister to stop turning tricks in local bars. Instead, she ended up entering the sex trade herself. She felt unable to advance in her corporate job and grew tired of watching men with less experience receive promotions. In the words of elite sex workers, she is currently "on retainer" to a partner at a Manhattan law firm—I love the irony of the phrasing. She receives \$10,000 per month, which usually translates into three meetings. "The last time I met him, I gave him a bath," she told me. "I told him he was the most sensitive man I'd ever met. I never tell him he's a piece of shit; I make him feel like superman." Melissa estimates that she has sex with him

about once a month, but as often he will simply masturbate in front of her.

Although women may charge more for their services in New York, there is a burgeoning high-end sex market in most global cities, and men from the financial sector are an important part of the clientele. Spitzer got caught, but it is actually quite rare for either sex worker or client to be apprehended; usually, it's the low-end folks who get their pictures on the police department's Web site. While the street-based prostitutes I study report getting apprehended four to six times per year, the majority of higher-tier women seem to have relatively little trouble with the law.

This doesn't mean the elite women have a great life. Melissa and other high-end workers routinely experience physical abuse at the hands of their clients—on average, they report getting abused twice per year, which is better than the six times a year that street-based workers report but still, clearly, troubling. Escort services (usually owned by men) often charge Tier 1 prostitutes various fees that reduce their take-home pay. If they work as independent contractors, as Tier 2 and 3 women tend to, they have to fight their clients to get paid on time. Plus, their lives are cash-based—they can't plan for the future or make any real investments.

The moral of the story, I suppose, is that even in the black market, you can find a glass ceiling.

the green lantern

A Green St. Patrick's Day?

The eco-guide to responsible drinking.

By Brendan I. Koerner

Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 7:34 AM ET

I've been gearing up for next week's St. Patrick's Day drink-a-thon. If I'm intent on being an environmentally correct lush, should I plan on quaffing my suds from bottles or cans?

That's a tough question to answer without knowing how far you live from your favorite brewery, as well as your brewery's stance on using recycled materials. If your chosen tippie is produced very close to home and your town has a robust recycling program, then glass bottles are probably the way to go. But if your preferred suds are brewed far away, by a company that's even mildly eco-aware, aluminum cans are the wiser choice.

Between the mine and the brewery's loading dock, at least, glass bottles are the clear winner. Aluminum is made from [bauxite](#), which requires substantial, land-scarring effort to extract from the Earth; the United States imports virtually all of its bauxite

from the likes of Australia, Guinea, and Jamaica, where mining operations have caused [environmental controversy](#). Glass, by contrast, is made from the more easily accessible [silica](#).

As a result of bauxite mining's environmental toll, manufacturing a 12-ounce aluminum can is twice as energy-intensive as making a similarly sized glass bottle: 2.07 kilowatt hours of electricity for the can vs. 1.09 kilowatt hours for the bottle.

But those figures assume that the materials used in the containers are 100 percent virgin—that is, entirely lacking in recycled content. The average beer can contains 40 percent recycled aluminum, while American beer bottles are typically composed of 20 percent to 30 percent recycled glass. But the energy savings that accumulate when you recycle a ton of aluminum are far greater than they are for glass—96 percent vs. a mere 26.5 percent. So if your brewery uses cans that contain lots of secondhand aluminum, the bottle's environmental edge narrows considerably.

That edge vanishes if your beer is trucked across several states. Without its liquid payload, the average beer can weighs less than an ounce, while an empty bottle clocks in at close to 6 ounces. That disparity makes a real difference in terms of overall greenhouse-gas emissions, since heavier items require more fuel to transport. [This intriguing breakdown](#), which relies on transport data compiled by Germany's [Wuppertal Institute](#), claims that once a cross-country truck journey is factored into the equation, a bottle ends up emitting 20 percent more greenhouse gases than a can. (In this example, the hypothetical can is made from 100 percent virgin aluminum; the recycled content of the glass bottle is not specified, but the energy required to mine the necessary silica is included in the calculation.)

You can avoid this part of the environmental equation by drinking local beers, though you might want to check where those nearby breweries obtain their containers—it's alarmingly common for empty cans and bottles to travel hundreds of miles from manufacturer to bottling plant.

Regardless of the road miles involved, aluminum cans enjoy a more promising post-celebration fate. About 45 percent of cans are recycled, compared with around 25 percent of bottles. This is partly because consumers erroneously believe that bottles will biodegrade in landfills, so they toss them in with their regular trash. But there's also a weaker demand for the glass that does end up in the blue bags. While automakers and other manufacturers crave aluminum, 90 percent of recycled glass simply ends up going back into bottles and similar containers. And sorting facilities usually separate brown, green, and clear bottles from one another before processing, a laborious and pricey endeavor. It takes a lot of energy to rid green glass, in particular, of the metals (such as iron and copper) that are used

to tint it, and there's little market for the stuff once it's been recycled; as a result, a lot of towns don't even bother to recycle your Heineken empties.

Glass bottles would make more environmental sense if they were refillable, as they are in parts of Europe and Canada. Yes, there are energy costs associated with trucking the empty bottles back to the brewery. But according to a 2001 study conducted on behalf of the European Commission, refillables still come out ahead of single-use bottles and cans. In fact, if we assume that a refillable bottle were used 20 times, and that the glass bottles used over that period were recycled at a rate of 42 percent, then the refillable would win over disposable options as long as the distance between the brewery and the local distribution center was less than 2,608 miles. (As myriad beverage-industry professionals have pointed out, refillable bottles would be even more efficient if they were made of [polyethylene terephthalate](#) rather than glass.)

In lieu of waiting around (probably forever) for American brewers to adopt refillable bottles en masse, how about taking a pulled pint instead? Draught beer is the greenest means of getting your hops-and-barley fix, as kegs can last between 15 and 20 years. Sure, they're heavy, but in terms of packaging per serving they're actually lighter than glass bottles—based on an empty weight of 29.7 pounds, a 15.5-gallon keg provides just 2.88 ounces of packaging per 12-ounce beer.

While you're preparing to get smashed, also give some thought to how your beer is created. Brewing requires a lot of energy, especially during the heat-intensive [wort-boil phase](#). Beer makers have begun taking steps to reduce their environmental impact: New York's [Brooklyn Brewery](#), for example, uses wind-generated electricity to power all of its operations.

Ah, but is wind power all it's cracked up to be? That's fodder for a future column—until then, enjoy toasting the man who apocryphally drove the snakes out of Ireland, and take comfort in the fact that puke is fully biodegradable.

Is there an environmental quandary that's been keeping you up at night? Send it to ask.the.lantern@gmail.com, and check this space every Tuesday.

the has-been

How Big Is Your Hypocrite?

Who's worse—Larry Craig or Eliot Spitzer?

By Bruce Reed

Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 5:45 PM ET

Thursday, Mar. 13, 2008

Craigenfreude: In a new high for the partisan divide, a mini-debate has broken out in far-flung corners of the blogosphere on the urgent question: Who's the bigger hypocrite, Larry Craig or Eliot Spitzer?

Conservative blogger Michael Medved of [Townhall](#) offers a long list of reasons why Craig doesn't need to go as urgently as Spitzer did. He finds Craig less hypocritical ("trolling for sex in a men's room, doesn't logically require that you support gay marriage"), much easier to pity, and "pathetic and vulnerable" in a way Spitzer is not. Liberal blogger [Anonymous Is a Woman](#) counters that while Craig and Louisiana Sen. David Vitter remain in office, at least Spitzer resigned.

Warning, much political baggage may look alike. So, party labels aside, who's the bigger hypocrite? Certainly, a politician caught red-handed committing the very crimes he used to prosecute can make a strong case for himself. In his resignation speech, Spitzer admitted as much: "Over the course of my public life, I have insisted, I believe correctly, that people, regardless of their position or power, take responsibility for their conduct. I can and will ask no less of myself."

Moreover, for all the [conservative complaints about media bias](#), the circumstances of Spitzer's fall from grace ensure that tales of his hypocrisy will reverberate louder and longer than Craig's. Already [a media star](#) in the media capital of the world, he managed to destroy his career with a flair even a tabloid editor couldn't have imagined. Every detail of his case is more titillating than Craig's—call girls with MySpace pages and stories to tell, not a lone cop who won't talk to the press; hotel suites instead of bathroom stalls; bank rolls instead of toilet rolls; [wide angles](#) instead of wide stances; a club for emperors, not [Red Carpet](#).

Spitzer flew much closer to the sun than Craig, so his sudden plunge is the far greater political tragedy. No matter how far his dive, Craig couldn't make that kind of splash. You'll never see the headline "Craig Resigns" splashed across six columns of the *New York Times*. Of course, since he refuses to resign, you won't see it in the *Idaho Statesman*, either.

Yet out of stubborn home-state chauvinism, if nothing else, we Idahoans still marvel at the level of hypocrisy our boy has achieved, even without all the wealth, fame, and privilege that a rich New Yorker was handed on a silver platter. Many Easterners think it's easy for an Idahoan to be embarrassing—that just being from Boise means you're halfway there.

We disagree. Craig didn't grow up in the center of attention, surrounded by money, glamour, and all the accouterments of hypocrisy. He grew up in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by mountains. When he got arrested, he didn't have paid help to bring him down. No Mann Act for our guy: He carried his own bags and did his own travel.

Larry Craig is a self-made hypocrite. He achieved his humiliation the old-fashioned way: He earned it.

Unlike Spitzer, who folded his cards without a fight, Craig upped the ante by privately admitting guilt, then publicly denying it. His lawyers filed yet another appellate brief this week, insisting that the prosecution is wrong to accuse him of making a "[prehensile stare](#)."

While it's admittedly a low standard, Craig may have had his least-awful week since his scandal broke in August. A Minnesota jury acquitted a man who was arrested by the same airport sting operation. Craig [didn't finish last](#) in the Senate power rankings by Congress.org. Thanks to Spitzer, Craig can now tell folks back home that whatever they think of what he did, at least they don't have to be embarrassed by how much he spent. In fact, he is probably feeling some *Craigenfreude*—taking pleasure in someone else's troubles because those troubles leave people a little less time to take pleasure in your own.

Like misery, hypocrisy loves company—which, for both Spitzer and Craig, turned out to be the problem. But Spitzer was right to step down, and Craig should long ago have done the same. Politics is a tragic place to chase your demons. ... **5:30 P.M.** ([link](#))

Wednesday, Mar. 5, 2008

All the Way: As death-defying Clinton comebacks go, the primaries in Ohio and Texas were very nearly not heart-stopping enough. On Monday, public polls started predicting a Clinton rebound, threatening to spoil the key to any wild ride: surprise. Luckily, the early exit polls on Tuesday evening showed Obama with narrow leads in both do-or-die states, giving those of us in Clinton World who live for such moments a few more hours to stare into the abyss.

Now that the race is once again up for grabs, much of the political establishment is dreading the seven-week slog to the next big primary in Pennsylvania. Many journalists had wanted to go home and put off seeing Scranton until [The Office](#) returns on April 10. Some Democrats in Washington were in a rush to find out the winner so they could decide who they've been for all along.

As a Clintonite, I'm delighted that the show will go on. But even if I were on the sidelines, my reaction would have been the same. No matter which team you're rooting for, you've got to admit: We will never see another contest like this one, and the political junkie in all of us hopes it will never end.

It looks like we could get our wish—so we might as well rejoice and be glad in it. A long, exciting race for the nomination will be good for the Democratic Party, good for the eventual nominee, and the ride of a lifetime for every true political fan.

For the party, the benefits are obvious: By making this contest go the distance, the voters have done what party leaders wanted to do all along. This cycle, the Democratic National Committee was desperate to avoid the front-loaded calendar that backfired last time. As [David Greenberg](#) points out, the 2004 race was over by the first week of March—and promptly handed Republicans a full eight months to destroy our nominee. This time, the DNC begged states to back-load the calendar, even offering bonus delegates for moving primaries to late spring. Two dozen states flocked to Super Tuesday anyway.

Happily, voters took matters into their own hands and gave the spring states more clout than party leaders ever could have hoped for. Last fall, NPR ran a whimsical story about [the plight of South](#)

[Dakota voters](#), whose June 3 contest is the last primary (along with Montana) on the calendar. Now restaurateurs, innkeepers, and vendors from Pierre to Rapid City look forward to that primary as Christmas in June.

But the national party, state parties, and Sioux Falls cafes aren't the only ones who'll benefit. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, the biggest beneficiaries of a protracted battle for the nomination are the two contestants themselves. Primaries are designed to be a warm-up for the general election, and a few more months of spring training will only improve their swings for the fall.

And let's face it: These two candidates know how to put on a show. Both are raising astonishing sums of money and attracting swarms of voters to the polls. Over the past month, their three head-to-head debates have drawn the largest audiences in cable television history. The second half of last week's MSNBC debate was the most watched show on any channel, with [nearly 8 million viewers](#). An astonishing 4 million people tuned in to watch MSNBC's post-debate analysis, an experience so excruciating that it's as if every person in the Bay Area picked the same night to jump off the Golden Gate Bridge.

The permanent campaign turns out to be the best reality show ever invented. Any contest that can sustain that kind of excitement is like the World Series of poker: The value of the pot goes up with each hand, and whoever wins it won't be the least bit sorry that both sides went all-in.

No matter how it turns out, all of us who love politics have to pinch ourselves that we're alive to see a race that future generations will only read about. Most campaigns, even winning ones, only seem historic in retrospect. This time, we already know it's one for the ages; we just don't know how, when, or whether it's going to end.

Even journalists who dread spending the next seven weeks on the Pennsylvania Turnpike have to shake their heads in wonderment. In the lede of their lead story in Wednesday's *Washington Post*, Dan Balz and Jon Cohen referred to "[the remarkable contest](#)" that could stretch on till summer. They didn't sign on to spend the spring in Scranton and Sioux Falls. But, like the rest of us,

they wouldn't miss this amazing stretch of history for anything. ... **11:59 P.M.** ([link](#))

Monday, Feb. 25, 2008

Hope Springs Eternal: With this weekend's [victory in Puerto Rico](#) and even more resounding [triumph over the New York Times](#), John McCain moved within 200 delegates of mathematically clinching the Republican nomination. Mike Huckabee is [having a good time](#) playing out the string, but the rest of us have been forced to get on with our lives and accept that it's just not the same without Mitt.

But soft! What light through yonder window breaks? Out in Salt Lake City, [in an interview with the Deseret Morning News](#), Josh Romney leaves open the possibility that his father might get back in the race:

Josh Romney called speculation that his father could be back in the race as either a vice presidential candidate or even at the top of the ticket as the GOP's presidential candidate "possible. Unlikely, but possible."

That's not much of an opening and no doubt more of one than he intended. But from mountain to prairie, the groundswell is spreading. Endorsements are flooding in from conservative bloggers like [this one](#):

Mitt Romney was not my first choice for a presidential candidate, but he came third after Duncan Hunter and Fred Thompson. ... I would love to see Mitt reenter the race.

Even if re-entry is too much to hope for, Josh hints that another Romney comeback may be in the works. He says he has been approached about running for Congress in Utah's 2nd District.

That, too, may be an unlikely trial balloon. Josh is just 32, has three young children, and would face a Democratic incumbent, Rep. Jim Matheson, who is [one of the most popular politicians in the state](#). Matheson's father was a governor, too. But unlike

Mitt Romney, Scott Matheson was governor of Utah.

If Mitt Romney has his eye on the No. 2 spot, Josh didn't do him any favors. "It's one thing to campaign for my dad, someone whose principles I line up with almost entirely," he told the *Morning News*. "I can't say the same thing for Sen. McCain."

Even so, Romney watchers can only take heart that after a year on the campaign trail, Josh has bounced back so quickly. "I was not that upset," he says of his father's defeat. "I didn't cry or anything."

In his year on the stump, Josh came across as the most down-to-earth of the Romney boys. He visited all 99 of Iowa's counties in the campaign Winnebago, [the Mitt Mobile](#). He joked about [his father's faults](#), such as "he has way too much energy." He let a Fox newswoman interview him [in the master bedroom of the Mitt Mobile](#). (He showed her the air fresheners.) He blogged about the [moose, salmon, and whale](#) he ate while campaigning in Alaska—but when the feast was over, he delivered the Super Tuesday state for his dad.

As Jonathan Martin of *Politico* reported last summer, Josh was campaigning with his parents at the Fourth of July parade in Clear Lake, Iowa, [when the Romneys ran into the Clintons](#). After Mitt told the Clintons how many counties Josh had visited, Hillary said, "You've got this built-in campaign team with your sons." Mitt replied, to Ann's apparent dismay, "If we had known, we would've had more."

We'll never know whether that could have made the difference. For now, we'll have to settle for the unlikely but possible hope that Mitt will come back to take another bow. ... **4:13 P.M.** ([link](#))

Monday, Feb. 11, 2008

Face Time: When Ralph Reed showed up at a Romney fundraiser last May, [Mitt thought he was Gary Bauer](#) – perpetuating the tiresome stereotype that like some Reeds, all Christian conservatives look alike. Now, in Mitt's hour of need, Ralph is returning the favor. According to the *Washington*

Times, he and 50 other right-wing leaders met with Romney on Thursday "to discuss the former Massachusetts governor becoming [the face of conservatism](#)."

Nothing against Romney, who surely would have been a better president than he let on. But if he were "the face of conservatism," he'd be planning his acceptance speech, not interviewing with Ralph Reed and friends for the next time around.

Conservatives could not have imagined it would end this way: the movement that produced Ollie North, Alan Keyes, and ardent armies of true believers, now mulling over an arranged marriage of convenience with a Harvard man who converted for the occasion. George Will must be reaching for his Yeats: "Was it for this ... that all that blood was shed?"

For more than a year, Republican presidential candidates tried to win the Reagan Primary. Their final tableau came at a debate in the Gipper's library, with his airplane as a backdrop and his widow in the front row. It was bad enough to see them reach back 20 years to find a conservative president they could believe in, but this might be worse: Now Romney's competing to claim he's the biggest conservative *loser* since Reagan. If McCain comes up short like Gerald Ford, Mitt wants to launch a comeback like it's 1976.

Even conservative leaders can't hide their astonishment over finding themselves in this position. "If someone had suggested a year ago and a half ago that we would be welcoming Mitt Romney as a potential leader of the conservative movement, no one would have believed it," American Conservative Union chairman David Keene reportedly told the group. "But over the last year and a half, he has convinced us he is one of us and walks with us."

Conservative activist Jay Sekulow told the *Washington Times* that Romney is a "turnaround specialist" who can revive conservatism's fortunes. But presumably, Romney's number-crunching skills are the last thing the movement needs: there are no voters left to fire.

To be sure, Mitt was with conservatives when the music stopped. Right-wing activists who voted in

the [CPAC straw poll](#) narrowly supported him over McCain, 35% to 34%. By comparison, they favored getting out of the United Nations by 57% to 42% and opposed a foreign policy based on spreading democracy by 82% to 15%. Small-government conservatism trounced social conservatism 59% to 22%, with only 16% for national-security conservatism.

As voters reminded him more Tuesdays than not, Mitt Romney is not quite Ronald Reagan. He doesn't have an issue like the Panama Canal. Far from taking the race down to the wire, he'll end up third. While he's a good communicator, many voters looking for the face of conservatism couldn't see past what one analyst in the *Deseret News* described as the "[CEO robot from Jupiter](#)."

If anything, Romney was born to be the face of the Ford wing of the Republican Party – an economic conservative with only a passing interest in the other two legs of Reagan's conservative stool. Like Ford, Mitt won the Michigan primary. He won all the places he calls home, and it's not his fault his father wasn't governor of more states.

Romney does have one advantage. With a conservative president nearing historic lows in the polls and a presumptive nominee more intent on leading the country, heading the conservative movement might be like running the 2002 Olympics – a job nobody else wants.

Paul Erickson, the Romney strategist who organized the conservative powwow, called McCain's nomination "an existential crisis for the Republican Party," and held out Mitt as a possible Messiah: "You could tell everybody at the table sitting with Romney was asking himself: 'Is he the one?'"

Romney has demonstrated many strengths over the years, but impersonating a diehard conservative and leading a confused movement out of the wilderness aren't foremost among them. It might be time for the right to take up another existential question: If conservatism needs Mitt Romney and Ralph Reed to make a comeback, is there enough face left to save? ... **3:37 P.M.** ([link](#))

Thursday, Feb. 7, 2008

Romney, We Hardly Knew Ye: When Mitt Romney launched his campaign last year, he struck many Republicans as the perfect candidate. He was a businessman with a Midas touch, an optimist with a charmed life and family, a governor who had slain the Democratic dragon in the blue state Republicans love to hate. In a race against national heroes like John McCain and Rudy Giuliani, he started out as a dark horse, but to handicappers, he was a dark horse with great teeth.

When Democrats looked at Romney, we also saw the perfect candidate—for us to run against. The best presidential candidates have the ability to change people's minds. Mitt Romney never got that far because he never failed to change his own mind first.

So when Romney gamely suspended his campaign this afternoon, there was heartfelt sadness on both sides of the aisle. Democrats are sorry to lose an adversary whose ideological marathon vividly illustrated the vast distance a man must travel to reach the right wing of the Republican Party. Romney fans lose a candidate who just three months ago led the polls in Iowa and New Hampshire and was the smart pick to win the nomination.

With a formidable nominee in John McCain, the GOP won't be sorry. But Romney's farewell at the Conservative Political Action Committee meeting shows how far the once-mighty right wing has fallen. In an introduction laced with barbs in McCain's direction, Laura Ingraham's description of Mitt as "a conservative's conservative" said all there is to say about Romney's campaign and the state of the conservative movement. If their last, best hope is a guy who only signed up two years ago and could hardly convince them he belonged, the movement is in even worse shape than it looks.

Had Romney run on his real strength—as an intelligent, pragmatic, and competent manager—his road to the nomination might have gone the way of Rudy Giuliani's. Yet ironically, his eagerness to preach the conservative gospel brought on his demise. Romney pandered with conviction. He even tried to make it a virtue, defending his conversion on abortion by telling audiences that he would never apologize for being a latecomer to the

cause of standing up for human life. Conservatives thanked him for trying but preferred the genuine article. In Iowa, Romney came in second to a true believer, and New Hampshire doesn't have enough diehards to put him over the top.

Romney's best week came in Michigan, when a sinking economy gave him a chance to talk about the one subject where his party credentials were in order. In Michigan, Romney sounded like a 21st-century version of the business Republicans who dominated that state in the '50s and '60s—proud, decent, organization men like Gerald Ford and George Romney. As he sold his plan to turn the Michigan economy around, Mitt seemed as surprised as the voters by how much better he could be when he genuinely cared about the subject.

By then, however, he had been too many things to too many people for too long. McCain was authentic, Huckabee was conservative, and Romney couldn't convince enough voters he was either one.

Good sport to the end, Romney went down pandering. His swansong at CPAC touched all the right's hot buttons. He blamed out-of-wedlock births on government programs, attacks on religion, and "tolerance for pornography." He got his biggest applause for attacking the welfare state, declaring dependency a culture-killing poison that is "death to initiative."

Even in defeat, he gave glimpses of the Mitt we'll miss—the lovably square, *Father Knows Best* figure with the impossibly wholesome family and perfect life. He talked about taking "a weed-whacker to regulations." He warned that we might soon become "the France of the 21st century." He pointed out that he had won nearly as many states as McCain, but joked awkwardly with the ultraconservative audience that he lost "because size does matter."

He didn't say whether we'll have the Romneys to kick around anymore. But with the family fortune largely intact and five sons to carry on the torch, we can keep hope alive. In the Salt Lake City paper this morning, a leading political scientist predicted that if Democrats win the White House in 2008,

Romney "[would automatically be a frontrunner for 2012.](#)"

It's hard to imagine a more perfect outcome. For now, sadness reigns. As the Five Brothers might say, somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere children shout; but there is no joy in Mittville—Guy Smiley has dropped out. ... **5:42 P.M.** ([link](#))

Tuesday, Feb. 5, 2008

Mittmentum: With John McCain on cruise control toward the Republican nomination, Mitt Romney finds himself in a desperate quest to rally true believers – a role for which his even temper and uneven record leave him spectacularly unsuited. Romney knows how to tell the party faithful everything they want to hear. But it's not easy for a man who prides himself on his optimism, polish, and good fortune to stir anger and mutiny in the conservative base. Only a pitchfork rebellion can stop McCain now, and Luddites won't man the ramparts because they like your PowerPoint.

So far, the Republican base seems neither shaken nor stirred. McCain has a commanding 2-1 margin in national polls, and leads Romney most everywhere except California, where Mitt hopes for an upset tonight. Professional troublemakers like Ann Coulter and Rush Limbaugh are up in arms, trying to persuade their followers that McCain is somehow Hillary by other means. On Monday, Limbaugh did his best imitation of Romney's stump speech, dubbing Mitt the only candidate who stands for all three legs of the conservative stool. Strange bedfellows indeed: Rush-Romney is like a hot-blooded android – the first Dittohead-Conehead pairing in galactic history.

On Saturday, Mitt Romney wandered to the back of his campaign plane and told the press, "[These droids aren't the droids you're looking for.](#)" Oddly enough, that's exactly the reaction most Republicans have had to his campaign.

But in the home stretch, Romney has energized one key part of his base: his own family. Yesterday, the Romney boys set a campaign record by putting up six posts on the Five Brothers blog – matching their high from when they launched last April. Mitt may be down, but the Five Brothers are back.

The past month has been grim for the happy-go-lucky Romney boys. They sometimes went days between posts. When they did post, it was often from [states they had just campaigned in and lost](#). Bright spots were hard to come by. After South Carolina, Tagg found a "[Romney girl](#)" video, set to the tune of "1985," in which a smiling young Alabaman named Danielle sang of Mitt as the next Reagan. One commenter recommended raising \$3 million to run the clip as a Super Bowl ad; another asked Danielle out on behalf of his own five sons. A few days later, Matt put up a clip of a [computerized prank call](#) to his dad, pretending to be Arnold Schwarzenegger – prompting a priceless exchange between robo-candidate and Terminator. Then the real Arnold spoiled the joke by endorsing the real McCain.

In the run-up to Super Tuesday, however, a spring is back in the Five Brothers' step. On Sunday, Josh wrote a post about his campaign trip to Alaska. Richard Nixon may have lost in 1960 because his pledge to campaign in all 50 states forced him to spend the last weekend in Alaska. That didn't stop Josh Romney, who posted a [gorgeous photo of Mount McKinley](#) and a snapshot of some Romney supporters shivering somewhere outside Fairbanks, where the high was 13 below. He wrote, "I sampled all of the Alaskan classics: moose, salmon and whale. Oh so good." Eating whale would certainly be red meat for a liberal crowd, but conservatives loved it too. "Moose is good stuff," one fan wrote. Another supporter mentioned friends who've gone on missions abroad and "talk about eating dog, horse, cow stomach, bugs." Rush, take note: McCain was ordering room service at the Hanoi Hilton while Mitt was keeping the faith by choking down tripe in Paris.

The rest of the family sounds like it's on the trail of big game as well. Ben Romney, the least prolific of the Five Brothers, didn't post from Thanksgiving through the South Carolina primary. Yesterday, he posted twice in one day – with a link to Limbaugh and a helpful guide to tonight's results, noting that in the past week members of the Romney family have campaigned in 17 of 21 states up for grabs on Super Tuesday. Now we can scientifically measure the Romney effect, by comparing the results in those 17 states with the four states (Idaho, Montana, Connecticut, Arizona) no Romney visited. After Huckabee's victory in West Virginia, the early score is 1-0 in favor of no Romneys.

Tagg, the team captain, also posted twice, urging the faithful to "Keep Fighting," and touting Mitt's evangelical appeal: "The Base Is Beginning to Rally." Back in June, Tagg joked with readers about [who would win a family farting contest](#). Now he's quoting evangelical Christian ministers. The brothers are so focused on the race, they haven't even mentioned their beloved Patriots' loss, although there has been no word from young Craig, the one they [tease](#) as [a Tom Brady lookalike](#).

Of course, if the Republican race ends tonight, the inheritance Mitt has told the boys not to count on will be safe at last. By all accounts, they couldn't care less. They seem to share Tagg's easy-come-easy-go view that no matter what happens, this will have been the best trip the family has ever taken, and [this time no dogs were harmed along the way](#) (just moose, salmon, and whale).

At the moment, the Five Brothers must feel the same nostalgia to keep going that the rest of us will feel for their antics when they're gone. Back when the campaign began, Tagg joked that they would love their father win or lose, although he might become something of a national laughingstock in the meantime. Mitt did his part, but whatever happens tonight, he can be proud the firewall he cares most about – his family – has held up its end of the bargain. ... **6:15 P.M.** ([link](#))

today's blogs

Wright or Wrong

By Michael Weiss

Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 6:26 PM ET

Bloggers respond to a fulminating sermon by Barack Obama's pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, and also to a new poll that suggests a majority of Americans think the war in Iraq is going well again.

Wright or wrong: Barack Obama's pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright—who married the candidate, baptized both of his children, and who serves on his African-American Religious Leadership Committee—was [caught](#) on film delivering an inflammatory [sermon](#) to his Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago. Wright said the United States brought the 9/11 attacks on itself through its own "terrorism." And "the government gives [blacks] the drugs, builds bigger prisons, passes a three-strike

law and then wants us to sing 'God Bless America.' No, no, no, God damn America." And, in the most attention-grabbing line, that "Hillary Clinton has never been called a nigger." Obama has likened Wright to a kooky but lovable uncle whose words the family doesn't heed.

Polimom at the **Moderate Voice** [cuts](#) Obama and Wright *some* slack but concludes: "I firmly believe that Barack Obama's feelings and views about race are precisely as he's presented them — both on the campaign trail and in his books. However, I also think Obama's going to have to draw very strong, clear distinctions between himself and Jeremiah Wright for the citizens of this country — much more than he's thus far done." "[W]e don't choose our family," [writes](#) **Roger L. Simon**, "but Obama chose this racist demagogue as his pastor for decades. It's not funny. Barack is running for President of the United States." Tom Maguire at **JustOneMinute** has two [questions](#): "1. When does Barack work his reconciliation magic on his minister? 2. Does Barack actually bring his two young daughters to that church to listen to that stuff?"

John Cole at **Balloon Juice** [wants](#) you to know that he doesn't care what preachers think: "Why does anyone give a shit what Obama's minister thinks? Seriously? Why does anyone care what Hagee (McCain's gay-bashing BFF) thinks? They are religious leaders. Who cares what they think- they are paid to peddle mythology to the masses, so who cares what sort of nonsense they spout?"

Josh Marshall at **Talking Points Memo** [blames](#) Hillary Clinton for the fact that we're seeing stuff like this because it's of a piece with the kind of campaign she's decided to wage. Also, he writes, "I'm not sure there's much in [Wright's sermon] that doesn't come out of the sermon tradition of African-American Christianity with a 60s twist. ... Particulars aside, the political relevance is to show Wright as angry black man; and to tie him to Obama." Jim Geraghty at *National Review's* **Campaign Spot** [scuppers](#) the Obama camp's damage control, which consisted of its rejection of the kind of "personal attacks" Wright was supposedly peddling: "[N]otice the default setting of the Obama campaign, decrying a "personal attack." But this wasn't a personal attack. Wright didn't denounce any individual personally. He denounced the country. It was a national attack, if anything."

Chris Beam at *Slate's* own **Trailhead** [submits](#) one theory as to why the Clinton camp has stayed mum on Wright far: "Wright is right. However inflammatory his rhetoric, his basic case against Hillary—that she doesn't understand the American black experience in the way Obama does—is irrefutable. 'Hillary Clinton has never been called a nigger,' he said in one video. And it's something Clinton would rather not draw attention to. While his words were disrespectful, they weren't necessarily wrong."

[Read](#) more about Wright's sermon.

Iraq going well? A new Pew poll has come out [suggesting](#) that 53 percent of Americans think "the U.S. will ultimately succeed in achieving its goals" in Iraq. Other upward trends include Americans who think the war is going "very well" or "fairly well." The same day, however, a *USA Today*/Gallup poll [indicates](#) that 60 percent of the population still believes the war to have been a mistake and want a timetable for troop withdrawal.

Abe Greenwald at *Commentary's* **contentions** [notes](#): "Here is [Clinton's or Obama's] unenviable task: to tell the American voter that his or her confidence in America's ability to win at last is misplaced; to convince them what we need to do instead is pull our troops out and call for a troop surge in Afghanistan. Even more challenging for the Democrats is that time is not on their side. As recently as September 2007, only 42 percent of Americans believed the U.S. would succeed in Iraq. That number jumped 11 points in five months."

Donklephant [asks](#): "[W]ho benefits the most politically if the situation remains more stablized? Conventional wisdom holds that a less chaotic Iraq would lift the fortunes of John McCain and the Republican party because fewer voters would be demanding American withdrawal. However, greater stability would also give credence to the Democratic position that it's time to begin our departure."

Steve Benan at the **Carpetbagger Report** [sees](#) only mixed messages and confusion in the American perception of Iraq: "Oh my. A majority want to withdraw, but about 20% want an immediate departure, while another 20% want to wait until Iraq is more stable. About 10% see the war as a disaster, but think we'll be stuck there anyway for at least five more years, while another 10% are opposed to the war but have given up thinking about it. Great."

Glenn Greenwald is, predictably, [mad as hell](#): "[W]hat matters even more is that perceptions of 'progress' do not mean that Americans support McCain's position and want to remain in Iraq indefinitely or even until stability is achieved. Polls ... have continuously shown that even when American perceive that the 'surge' has decreased violence, they still are against the war as much as ever before and support withdrawal."

[Read](#) more about the Pew poll.

today's blogs
B.S. Eliot

By Alex Joseph
Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 6:29 PM ET

Bloggers weigh in on Eliot Spitzer's resignation and Geraldine Ferraro's refusal to apologize for inflammatory comments about Barack Obama.

B.S. Eliot: New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer [resigned](#) Wednesday amid the turmoil over his involvement with a prostitution ring. He'll leave office Monday. The blogosphere was characteristically unsympathetic.

Jim Newell at **Wonkette** [wonders](#) what Spitzer's wife, Silda, was thinking during the press conference. "Here's our friendly New York Governor Eliot Spitzer resigning, with his wife, who still *really doesn't want to be there*. ... Maybe Silda just wanted to make him look like more of a wretch, and she did a good job of that." Over at **Ankle Biting Pundits**, conservative Bull Dog Pundit [focuses](#) on Mr. Spitzer: "It's all about him, what he did for the state, and what he plans to do later, and oh yeah, an apology for his 'private failings,' and lamenting 'what could have been.' What a contemptable, egomaniacal, jackass. He deserves all the scorn, embarrassment, humiliation, and hopefully criminal consequences that come his way."

Citing Henry David Thoreau, Bill Maher [offers](#) a lukewarm defense on **Huffington Post**: "It's easy to point fingers, but how about some recognition that society's rules are so at odds with human nature that there are actually no good options for an Eliot Spitzer, and the ZILLIONS OF PEOPLE JUST LIKE HIM, many of who are tut-tut-ing today. I guess a guy is a hero who sticks it out and leads a life of quiet desperation."

But **Megan McArdle's** [not feeling the sympathy](#): "I think 'structuring' and 'money-laundering' charges are [repugnant](#). The Mann act is garbage. Prostitution, drugs, and arranging homosexual liasons should be legal, though the airports have a perfect right--and good reason--to keep it out of the restrooms. But Eliot Spitzer was caught doing something that, regardless of its moral status, is in fact illegal, and which, moreover, he was more than happy to prosecute others for engaging in."

Samantha Sault, [posting](#) on *Weekly Standard's* **Blog**, predicts we'll see more of the soon-to-be-former gov: "Spitzer is a rapaciously ambitious guy. Remember, this is a fellow who without remorse persecuted innocent people to further his ambitions. Such a man isn't going to abandon his dreams just because he had a rough week. He's more likely to focus every fiber of his being on a comeback, however implausible such a thing may seem at this hour."

Courtney Martin of **Feministing** [wonders](#) if sexual mishaps like Spitzer's would occur with women in office: "And now this. I have to admit that though [I just publicly came out as an Obama](#)

[supporter](#), this news gave me one of those gross feelings in my gut and I found myself wondering: Would we all be better off with a woman in office, in part, because she would be less likely to get involved in these kinds of scandals?"

[Read](#) more about Eliot Spitzer's resignation. **Slate's XX Factor** [can't stop talking](#) about Spitzer. Read **Slate's** [collected Spitzer coverage](#).

Fuel to the fire: Geraldine Ferraro, the 1984 Democratic vice presidential candidate and a Hillary Clinton supporter, [reignited claims of racist conduct](#) by Clinton's campaign when she said, "If Obama was a white man, he would not be in this position."

At **Too Hot for TNR**, journalist Spencer Ackerman [mocks](#) Ferraro's statements. "Often times, I think to myself: God, I'm *so disadvantaged* by not being black in America! It's like you can't even find work in the media as a Jew these days. Everywhere you go, the country just yields more and more African-Americans in positions of power, prestige and responsibility and builds prisons and blighted schools and substandard levees for white people."

DHinMI at **Daily Kos**, on the other hand, [worries](#) that these attacks may be more effective than some would like to admit, pointing out that the fear of black favoritism was a very real concern that spurred some Democrats to jump ship in 1980. "The fact is, there are a lot of White people in American who believe they're at a disadvantage, that Blacks get things handed to them. ... It's not a fringe belief. It's at the heart of the belief system of the so-called Reagan Democrats—swing voters and even some Democrats who were cradle Democrats but defected to Reagan and have been up for grabs in most elections since 1992."

Jonathan Kay at the *National Post's* **Full Comment** [defends](#) Ferraro. "But optics and political strategy aside, I'm having a hard time disagreeing with the substance of Ferraro's remarks. The fact is, she's right. ... One final point: Though I've never been a huge fan of Ferraro, I really admire the manner in which she's [sticking to her guns](#) on this issue — instead of publishing some touchy-feely apology," he writes. **Vodka Pundit** Stephen Green [forecasts](#) more pointed attacks from both sides in the lead up to Pennsylvania: "Ferraro made remarks to the effect that Obama wouldn't be where he is today if he weren't black. When confronted, she reiterated. If you think conservative Republicans hate John McCain, wait'll you see just how much left-of-center Democrats hate slightly-more-left-of-center Democrats. You ain't seen nothin' till you see what happens in the run-up to Pennsylvania."

Andrew Romano of **Stumper** [points out](#) that the recent row over race is most detrimental to the voters: "The sad part is that the day started out on a substantive note, with Team Obama questioning Clinton's foreign-policy cred and the Clinton camp delivering a serious, factual rebuttal. International experience is

a crucial question, and voters deserve to hear the candidates debate. But once race and gender enter the equation, the cable channels swarm, the pundits sharpen their knives--and the campaigns play along."

[Read](#) more about the Ferraro flap.

today's blogs

Eliot's Waste Land

By Michael Weiss

Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 6:22 PM ET

Eliot's waste land: After the disclosure Monday that he was involved in a high-priced prostitution ring, New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer remained holed up in his Fifth Avenue apartment trying to decide whether to resign. (The latest [reports](#) suggest he won't resign Tuesday, if at all.) Many bloggers glory in the high-handed former state attorney general's comeuppance with a hooker named Kristen; others feel for his family. And if "Eliot Mess" is rung up on charges of violating the Mann Act, would that be anything like getting Al Capone on tax evasion?

Orin Kerr at [Volokh Conspiracy](#) [reveals](#) in the irony of how Spitzer got caught—by transferring suspicious amounts of money from banks, which then reported the transactions to the IRS: "Spitzer, aggressive former white collar crime prosecutor, was brought down because he couldn't outsmart banks looking for evidence of white collar crimes." But those same bank transfers have Jane Hamsher at [firedoglake](#) smelling [conspiracy](#): "How did Spitzer's name get leaked to the media, and who did it? Didn't happen to Dave Vitter. Why did Mike Bloomberg suddenly start talking about running for governor recently? And why did he give \$500,000 to Joe Bruno? He's good buddies with Mike Mukasey. What did he know and how did he know it?"

At [Hot Air](#), Ed Morrissey [isn't buying](#) Alan Dershowitz's claim that Spitzer is absolved from hypocrisy because he really wanted to legalize prostitution: "If Spitzer thought that prostitution should be legal, he has been in uniquely well-suited positions to make that argument. Instead, he positioned himself publicly as disgusted by the exploitation of women through prostitution, even campaigning on it. That isn't just a story about a married man going to a prostitute, it's a story of hypocrisy and deception." While Roger Kimball at [Pajamas Media](#) [doesn't want](#) Spitzer's hypocrisy to overshadow his other more significant shortcomings: "His behavior gives that ambiguous vice a bad name. ... Really, he was a power-hungry, regulation-crazed functionary whose chief sin was to harness the power of the state to destroy his enemies and aggrandize himself. Had he been a little more hypocritical he might have been less dangerous."

Dan Slater at [WSJ's Law Blog](#) [wonders](#) "whether federal prosecutors will go after him at all. If they do, what will they charge him with? One theoretical possibility, as we alluded to yesterday: a violation under The Mann Act, which, broadly speaking, deals with prostitution and trafficking. Commentators aren't so sure this is where the feds are headed." Jennifer Rubin at [Commentary's contentions](#) [writes](#): "[A] savvy ex- attorney general knows that in a prosecution of a public official (one potentially involving the Mann Act and financial hanky panky as well) a significant bargaining chip is the official's resignation from public office. Why would Spitzer leave without a deal with the feds on potential charges? It's not like he has shown a predilection to put the interests of his family, his Party or his state above his own."

Liberal Lindsay Beyerstein at [Majikthise](#) [accuses](#) Spitzer of a "Nixonian level of hubris." "Regardless of what you think of the morality of paying for sex, and irrespective of whatever understanding Mr. and Mrs. Spitzer might have had, ... Eliot Spitzer was a self-indulgent fool to think that he could arrange for sex over the telephone and move his money around to cover it!"

This is all bad news for Hillary, given Spitzer's superdelegate support for her, right? [Not so](#), says John Riley at [Newsweek's Spin Cycle](#): "We think it actually hurts Obama. First, politically Bill Clinton's affair with an intern was great for Hillary, earning her both sympathy and respect for the way she handled it, and skyrocketing her public standing. Eliot and Silda Spitzer will put people back in touch with that same emotional reaction, reminding people who like Hillary of why they like Hillary."

At the [Huffington Post's Eat the Press](#), media blogger Rachel Sklar has the Jewish media's [take](#) on the fall of Spitzer: "Oy, such a nice Jewish boy, on his way to becoming the first Jewish President! What's this girl's name, Kristen? Sigh. To think he threw it all away for a shiksa." The reliable [Wonkette](#) [sums up the scandal thusly](#): "Spitzer got busted because the IRS thought he was moving money around to conceal a classier crime, like bribery. The lesson, we believe, is to always pay in cash."

At [Portfolio's Daily Brief](#), Jeffrey Cane [intersperses](#) the affidavit detailing Spitzer's alleged behavior with his testimony to a House committee on bond insurance and the subprime mess—the reason he was in Washington in the first place. [Ann Althouse](#) rounds up [video clips](#) of the late-night talk-show hosts having their fun.

[Read](#) more about Spitzer's trouble with hookers. [Slate's XX Factor](#) has a lengthy discussion on [all matters Spitzer](#), while [Trailhead](#) weighs the [political implications](#) for Hillary Clinton. Read the [rest](#) of [Slate's](#) coverage.

today's blogs

Who Wants a Do-Over?

By Rachael Larimore

Monday, March 10, 2008, at 5:04 PM ET

Bloggers are sussing out the do-over scenarios for the Florida and Michigan primaries and bidding farewell to *The Wire*.

Who wants a do-over? Michigan and Florida wanted attention, but maybe not like this. The Democratic National Committee [stripped both states](#) of their convention delegates after they disobeyed DNC orders and scheduled early primaries. But with the race between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama so tight, the party is now deciding whether to [seat the delegates](#) based on the primary results (Clinton won both states), exclude them, or [have a do-over](#).

Some bloggers are confident that the DNC will take action. "In some way, shape, or form Michigan and Florida will undoubtedly have some type of primary redo," [writes](#) Nate at **You Decide 2008**. "In order to satisfy the voters and the state party organizations, they are going to have to figure out how to seat these delegates."

But Publius at **Obsidian Wings** thinks seating the delegates [would leave many Democrats angry](#): "I would not accept a Clinton victory that depended on seating the Michigan and Florida delegates (assuming no re-vote, etc.). That's breaking the rules, pure and simple, and the Clinton campaign should understand in no uncertain terms that the 'nuclear strategy' will drive away supporters for the fall and leave lasting damage."

Kate Phillips at the *New York Times*' **Caucus** rounds up the chatter on the topic from the Sunday-morning talk shows and [raises another possibility](#): "With or without the Florida and Michigan delegates, the specter of a brokered convention keeps getting raised as the Obama-Clinton supporters remain so deeply loyal to their candidate." Uh-oh. **Brendan Nyhan** journeys back to 1968—when Hubert Humphrey emerged as the nominee only to lose to Richard Nixon—to [explain why](#) a brokered convention might not work so well for the Democrats. "Humphrey drastically underperformed in 1968 relative to what we would expect given the state of the economy at the time (a result that is often attributed to Vietnam War deaths). We can't quantify what damage was done by the polarizing primary campaign, but it's hard to see how it would help. Democrats risk a similar scenario—a destructive primary campaign could turn a possible rout in November into a 50/50 coin flip a la 1968."

Party, schmarty. Bloggers are trying to figure out whether either candidate can benefit from the possible do-overs. At **Talk Left**, Big Tent Democrat [thinks](#) that with John Edwards out of the way, Clinton would do much better in the revotes, which could

fuel her momentum. What would Obama get? Not much, but "it will help him in the general election in Michigan and Florida. I believe that if this is not done, he will have no chance in those two states. If Obama could build a plausible narrative for not counting Florida and Michigan, he would use it. But that train has left the station. He has no choice, imo, but to put a good face on it and fight like crazy to keep Hillary from winning big in both states."

Conservative **Allahpundit** at Hot Air is [scratching his head](#) over Hillary's motivations. "All that's accomplished by the victories is to make her task of wooing superdels ... marginally easier by reducing the number she'll need to convince to clinch the nomination. I've always assumed that party bigwigs will broker some kind of deal among the undecided superdelegates to vote en masse for one candidate or another—especially since the bulk of them are DNC apparatchiks—so even that very marginal improvement isn't hugely significant. So what's the big deal about the two states?" Indeed, the math doesn't get much better for Clinton, as Ron Levitt [points out](#) at the **Huffington Post**. "Because delegates are elected based on proportional Congressional district votes, Clinton only would be ahead of Obama by a handful of delegates in Florida. Most observers believe a redo of the election would have much the same results, at an unnecessary cost of 4 to 5 million dollars."

High Wire act: HBO's critically acclaimed drama *The Wire* [ended Sunday night](#). Marlo returns to the streets, Michael is the new Omar, and scandal is brushed under the rug at both the local paper and the cop shop. Bloggers give it mixed reviews.

At **Critical Mass**, the culture blog of the *Baltimore Sun* (the same paper featured in a major storyline this season), David Zurawik [is not impressed](#): "I could go on, and I suspect I just might in coming days. That's how astounded I am by the dramatic, sociological and intellectual emptiness of the finale of this once great and epic series. There was no poetry in this ending."

Andrew Golis of **TPM Cafe** says the *Sun* storyline failed [because it wasn't as complex](#) as some of the others that made the show famous. "Instead, we get a civic republican nostalgiafest. We get a Hero fighting Villains in a show that is supposed to be about the fact that neither really exist. The 'why' for this deep flaw is painfully obvious. David Simon spent 12 years as the kind of gritty, idealistic city reporter he glorifies. He left and turned to writing fiction for the very reasons he outlines in this season. The depth of his grudge against *The Sun* ... left him unable to fit the media into his normally more nuanced world view."

At *New York* magazine's **Vulture** blog, Aileen Gallagher and Dan Kois [analyze](#) the series-ending montage. "The montage ends with a series of Baltimore citizens going about their day: parents with kids, junkies buying drugs, young men on bikes, city

employees, whites, blacks, smiles, frowns. If you needed one last reminder that the true star of this show was not McNulty, or Omar, or even David Simon, but the city of Baltimore, then here you go."

Read [more](#) about *The Wire*. *Slate*'s "TV Club" dialogue compares [The Wire and The Sopranos finales](#) and more.

today's papers

A Dollar Short

By Ryan Grim

Friday, March 14, 2008, at 8:25 AM ET

The [Washington Post](#) and [New York Times](#) lead with, and the [Los Angeles Times](#) fronts, administration proposals to stave off a recession—the next one. The [L.A. Times](#) leads with a report that Southern California home prices have fallen back to 2004 levels, and the [Wall Street Journal](#) tops its newsbox with an item on Democratic efforts to challenge the White House on spying authority. [USA Today leads with](#) fears among Democrats that attacks by Hillary Clinton on Barack Obama could cost the party the White House in November.

The bulk of the proposals to prevent the next recession focus on regulating the "securitization" of mortgages, report the papers. Securitization is a financial trick that magically turns a bunch of unrelated, risky investments into one big, safe bet—*C'mon, honey! It's a sure thing!*

[The Post neatly sums up](#) how the financial industry lost the nation's house and says that the administration effort "seeks to cure three paramount failings behind the credit meltdown: Financial firms at each step of the securitization process didn't know what they were buying, didn't care as long as they were making money, and didn't have enough cash to cover mistaken bets."

[The Times, though, spies a problem](#), noting that "the plan relies on the same market participants—from mortgage brokers to credit-rating agencies and Wall Street firms—that government officials and other experts blame for the current crisis." It's called capitalism, and the *Times* seems to be going a bit squishy on it.

Not without reason, as all the papers prominently report: [Consumer confidence tumbled](#) along with the dollar, gold prices cracked \$1,000 an ounce, and oil hit a record high of \$110 per barrel. [Southern California home prices](#) plunged nearly one-fifth from last year's peak, a shockingly rapid decline, causing forecasters to "rethink their previous forecasts." The [Wall Street Journal's top headline](#) describes a Carlyle Group investment

fund as in "free fall." Carlyle Capital's stock is down 97 percent and is at risk of having its assets seized. The paper suggests that "connections don't mean much in today's credit crunch," a reference to the apparent powerlessness of the powerful owners of the legendary Carlyle Group to defy economic gravity.

Democrats, [seconded by a Times editorial](#), countered that the administration plan does too little to calm the current turmoil—"a day late and a dollar short," in the words of New York Sen. Charles E. Schumer. Democrats see it instead as a way to deflect congressional energy away from its more vigorous proposals to use government power to encourage mortgage companies to renegotiate and write down home loans to stave off foreclosures or at least prevent them from pulling the economy further down.

[Paul Krugman isn't optimistic](#) that anyone can. He notes that, as a result of a recent fed move to back the securitization magic trick, "no advanced-country's central bank has ever exposed itself to this much market risk." (*TP* plans to lump all his upset picks in the NCAA tournament together, then sell them to investors as one risk-free product.)

[USAT has a harsh assessment](#) of Clinton's recent campaign tactics. The first line of its lead story: "Democrats are increasingly worried about their chances for victory in November after a series of attacks by Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton on rival Sen. Barack Obama's leadership, credibility, readiness as commander in chief and, now, his ability to win the White House."

Lorne Michaels can't get too fired up, though, as the story quotes top Clinton pollster Mark Penn saying on a conference call Thursday that "Sen. Obama really can't win the general election." This angle throws out the standard practice whereby members of the same party insist that any fellow contender—Dennis Kucinich, whoever—would be able to beat the other party's candidate.

Clinton spokesman Howard Wolfson clarified that Pennsylvania was the context of the remark. "If you don't compete in Pennsylvania, you can't win a general election," he said. (President John Kerry won Pennsylvania in the general, as *TP* recalls.)

[The Post fronts](#) the next piece of the puzzle that is former National Republican Congressional Committee Treasurer Christopher J. Ward, a highly regarded accountant who is under investigation for allegedly skimming hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not more, from GOP coffers.

Unlike Wall Street rip-offs, which tend to require fleets of trucks to haul the stolen loot, Ward is accused of having picked one trusting pocket at a time. "Rep. [Peter T. King](#) (R-N.Y.) told *The Post* this week that Ward paid himself \$6,000 from King's PAC

in 2007 after the congressman thought he had closed down the committee." [Politico.com](#)—TP's other employer—"reported last night that Ward lent himself more than \$4,200 from the political action committee of [Rep. Jeb Hensarling](#) (R-Tex.), an unusual expenditure for a campaign treasurer to make. Ward repaid the money early last month, after the FBI was called in to investigate his work at the NRCC."

[The Journal splashes](#) a big story across the front about the impact of the crashing dollar on the Japanese economy. Japan, already facing economic pressures, could have its export industry crippled by the currency disparity.

The fall of soon-to-be-former New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer continues, though attention is waning, with the *Times* taking the lead in what could evolve into a local story. [The paper has word that](#) investigators suspect Spitzer might have used campaign funds to pay for prostitutes.

[Lt. Gov. David A. Paterson's profile](#) is given a huge above-the-fold photo in the *Times*. Asked if he has even visited a prostitute himself, he said, "Only the lobbyists."

[USA Today is in its comfort zone](#), the month of March and the madness that the paper lives to cover. Today's cover story is a look at American University's hopes and dreams. The Eagles, with a win against Colgate on Friday afternoon, will qualify for the NCAA tournament for the first time in NCAA history.

The *Wall Street Journal* says it [has cracked the bracket](#) and has discovered "some hidden truths, broad patterns and statistical oddities that might be helpful to anyone who wants to dominate the office pool." *This one can't miss!*

today's papers

They Shot the Sheriff

By Daniel Politi

Thursday, March 13, 2008, at 6:23 AM ET

The *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Wall Street Journal's* world-wide newsbox all lead with the [resignation of New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer](#). With his wife at his side, Spitzer apologized to his family and supporters: "I cannot allow my private failings to disrupt the people's work." He said his resignation would be effective Monday, a date that was suggested by his successor, Lt. Gov. David Paterson. A veteran New York politician with [more than 20 years of experience as a legislator](#), Paterson will become the state's first African-American governor and the first of any state [who is legally blind](#). The question now is whether the man who was once known as the "sheriff of Wall Street" will face prosecution.

[USA Today](#) leads with news that the Environmental Protection Agency lowered the allowable limits on ozone pollution yesterday. Under the new federal limits, [more than 300 counties](#) across the country would be in violation of the standard. But by lowering the smog limit to 75 parts per billion from the current standard, which is effectively 84 ppb, the agency ignored the advice of its own advisory council, which had pushed for an even stricter standard. The EPA administrator also said he would try to persuade Congress to rewrite the Clean Air Act so regulators can take into account costs when revising pollution standards.

Everyone notes that Spitzer's resignation, which came a mere two days after news broke that he was a client of a high-priced prostitution ring, marks a spectacular fall for a politician who was elected governor with [69 percent of the vote](#), was seen as a rising star in the Democratic Party, and who many thought could be the country's first Jewish president. The *NYT* says, "Spitzer appeared to struggle with the decision to relinquish power" and decided to give up only when it became clear that many Democrats in Albany were ready to abandon him if he [decided to stay in office](#).

Responding to speculation that Spitzer's resignation had come after a deal with prosecutors, the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York issued a statement where he denied there was any agreement. A former prosecutor tells *USAT* that since "the U.S. attorney's office knew he was being forced out of office," it's unlikely his resignation [could have been used as leverage](#). But the *WSJ*, which has by far the most comprehensive coverage of the [legal landscape](#), says Spitzer's resignation "could work to his benefit, in that prosecutors may have less interest in aggressively pursuing what may be a relatively weak case against him once he is out of office."

Everyone points out that the legal questions surrounding the case are far from clear since prosecutors are still investigating and weighing whether to file charges. But the *WSJ* suggests that, so far, it seems any serious charges are unlikely. Even though Spitzer could face charges relating to the actual hiring of a sex worker and paying for her travel across state lines, "federal prosecutions on such charges are rare," [says the WSJ](#). Spitzer could also face charges that he structured his payments in a way to avoid federal oversight. But, again, the *WSJ* says that "the transactions were ultimately executed under his name and in accordance with other regulations." Plus, prosecutors would have to prove he actually meant to break the law instead of just avoid embarrassment. It seems the one easy case prosecutors could make is to charge him with breaking a law that prohibits financial movements that have the "intent to promote the carrying on of specified unlawful activity."

But legal questions are boring and can't come close to the front-page *NYT* story that puts a face on the prostitute who allegedly had the [encounter with Spitzer at the Mayflower hotel on Feb.](#)

13. The woman identified as "Kristen" is really Ashley Alexandra Dupré, a 22-year-old aspiring musician from New Jersey who (surprise!) has a [MySpace page](#), where she says she was abused, left "a broken family" when she was 17, and eventually moved to New York to pursue a music career. The *NYT* appears to be the only media outlet that was able to talk to her directly. "I just don't want to be thought of as a monster," she said. "This has been a very difficult time. It is complicated." The *WP* [takes a close look](#) at the affidavit that details the investigation and says the Emperors' Club "sometimes sounds less like a sophisticated sex ring than an overstressed start-up."

In the *WSJ*'s op-ed page, [Alan Dershowitz](#) writes that although there's no evidence that Spitzer was targeted, "the story of how he was caught does not ring entirely true to many experienced former prosecutors and current criminal lawyers." Although there's been lots of talk about how it all started with suspicious banking transactions, the amount of money in question was quite small, and it seems strange that so much attention would be paid to a few thousand dollars going to corporations that weren't under investigation. If the government really wanted to shut down a prostitution ring, there were easier (and far cheaper) ways to do that without wiretapping or the interception of e-mails. (The *WSJ* says [it's still not clear](#) whether officials were already investigating the prostitution ring or if the inquiries into Spitzer's financial transactions were what started everything.) But all this talk is pointless, writes [John Farmer](#), a former New Jersey attorney general, in the *NYT*. "No offensive strategy will work in these circumstances," Farmer writes. "The governor's alleged conduct was too brazen."

The *NYT* fronts word that after news broke that the CIA had destroyed interrogation videotapes, the Defense Department began its own review and has so far found nearly [50 tapes of interrogations at military facilities](#). Pentagon officials say there has never been a clear policy about videotaping interrogations, and some tapes have been destroyed. So far, it seems only one of the tapes shows rough interrogation techniques, but officials insist it consists of nothing close to water-boarding "or any other treatment approaching what they believed could be classified as torture."

Both the *NYT* and *LAT* take a look at how Geraldine Ferraro's comments, in which she said that if Sen. Barack Obama "was a white man, he would not be in this position," once again catapulted the issue of race to the forefront of the Democratic contest. As much as the candidates say they are trying to get away from the issues of race and sex, they ["have been unavoidable subtexts"](#) (*NYT*). Ferraro resigned from Sen. Hillary Clinton's finance committee, but she didn't apologize for the comments. Unlike any other issue, race has the potential to cause a deep divide in the party. The *LAT* points out that two prominent black pastors said black voters could become so disenchanted if Clinton is the nominee that they could very well [stay home in the general election](#). "This is a virtual race war,

politically," one of the country's leading Pentecostal ministers said.

Seven *Harry Potter* books were enough for J.K. Rowling, but apparently not for Warner Bros. Pictures, which is eager to continue the extremely lucrative franchise as long as possible, [notes the LAT](#). The studio announced that the final part of the saga will be divided into two movies. Of course, those behind the movies insist that it's all about trying to stay faithful to the story and has nothing to do with money.

today's papers Fallon Down

By Daniel Politi

Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 6:14 AM ET

The [Washington Post](#) and [USA Today](#) lead with the abrupt resignation of Adm. William Fallon, the top commander of U.S. forces in the Middle East. Fallon, who ran the U.S. Central Command and had [publicly disagreed](#) with the Bush administration over Iran and Iraq strategy, [issued a statement](#) acknowledging that "recent press reports suggesting a disconnect between my views and the president's policy objectives have become a distraction." A profile in *Esquire* published last week on the [magazine's Web site](#) said Fallon was "brazenly challenging his commander in chief" and described him as the only person who could stop a war from breaking out with Iran.

The [Los Angeles Times](#) and [New York Times](#) lead with the Federal Reserve announcing a plan to lend major Wall Street banks and investment houses up to \$200 billion in Treasury securities [in exchange for mortgage-backed securities](#). By offering safe securities in exchange for ones that have been difficult to trade lately due to uncertainties in the market, the Fed is hoping to ease the credit crunch and make these financial institutions [more willing to lend](#). The surprise announcement sent the stock market soaring, and it had its biggest gain in five years. The *Post* [calls the move](#), which was coordinated with central banks in Europe and Canada, "the most aggressive step the Fed has taken to address the spreading credit crisis." But as the *Wall Street Journal* [points out](#), the new effort "won't eliminate the root cause of the economy's problems: falling home prices and a mounting wave of mortgage defaults." The *WSJ*'s worldwide newsbox leads with New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer ignoring calls for his resignation while his lawyers are in talks with prosecutors to avoid criminal charges.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates said no one pushed Fallon to retire early but emphasized, "I believe it was the right thing to do, even though I do not believe there are, in fact, significant differences between his views and administration policy." Fallon

had long pushed for diplomacy instead of confrontation in the administration's dealings with Iran and had also butted heads with the White House by calling for a [faster withdrawal of troops from Iraq](#). The author of the *Esquire* article, Thomas P.M. Barnett, a former Naval War College professor, wrote that if Fallon were to leave his post, it could be a sign that the administration is planning to go to war with Iran. When asked about this, Gates characterized the proposition as "[ridiculous](#)." Democrats immediately seized on the resignation and said it was another example of how the Bush administration can't tolerate dissent.

The *NYT* notes that President Bush [issued a statement that](#), "while complimentary, was pale by comparison to other messages of farewell for senior officials." A retired general tells the *Post* that the *Esquire* article "was definitely the straw that broke the camel's back," and many in the military community expected that he would [face consequences](#). The *WSJ* [says the article](#) "sparked an immediate furor within the White House and the Pentagon," and one administration official tells the paper that "it was seen as a form of insubordination." The *Post* notes that a "likely successor" to Fallon is [Gen. David Petraeus](#).

The *WSJ's* [editorial board](#) thinks Fallon "has made more than enough dissenting statements ... to warrant his dismissal as much as early retirement" and wonders "if it means that President Bush is beginning to pay attention to the internal Pentagon dispute over Iraq." Many senior Pentagon officials want to withdraw troops out of Iraq more quickly than Petraeus does. Bush, who has never been particularly good at dealing with disagreements within his administration, "has a particular obligation to engage in this debate," so Petraeus can "make troop recommendations based on the facts in Iraq, not on pressure from Washington."

The *WP* and *USAT* front, and everyone mentions, Sen. Barack Obama's easy victory in the [Mississippi primary](#), where he received 61 percent of the vote. Obama's win was expected, in a state where African-Americans accounted for approximately half of those who turned out to vote. The ballots showed a stark division according to race. While more than nine in 10 African-Americans voted for Obama, seven in 10 white voters picked Sen. Hillary Clinton. Interestingly enough, the *LAT* [points out](#) that Republicans made up about 10 percent of the voters, and they chose Clinton by a 3-to-1 margin.

Race was also at the forefront of the latest back-and-forth between the Clinton and Obama camps. Geraldine Ferraro, the Democratic vice presidential candidate in 1984, [said in an interview](#), "If Obama was a white man, he would not be in this position. And if he was a woman of any color, he would not be in this position. He happens to be very lucky to be who he is." Obama called the comments "patently absurd," and Clinton said she disagreed with Ferraro, who defended her statement and said her words were being twisted. "Every time that campaign is

upset about something, they call it racist," [she said](#). Ferraro's statements overshadowed Obama's latest attack against Clinton's claims of foreign-policy experience. Greg Craig, a former aide to Bill Clinton, wrote a memo calling Clinton's claims of experience "exaggerated."

The more than 70 reporters who were camped outside Spitzer's home waiting for some sort of statement were disappointed yesterday as the governor stayed behind closed doors in his apartment, where he met with his lawyers and a few close aides. The *NYT* says several aides expect him to [resign today](#). The governor apparently considered staying on but realizes that he would have little support from fellow Democrats if the Republicans begin impeachment proceedings, as several have promised. Meanwhile, the *WP* gets word that [several weeks](#) before the now-famous Feb. 13 encounter, the FBI had placed a surveillance team outside the Mayflower Hotel because officials believed Spitzer would be meeting with a prostitute then, but the agents didn't see anything.

Author and former sex worker [Tracy Quan](#) writes an op-ed piece in the *NYT*, where she says she is "puzzled" by Spitzer's alleged "preference for the riskiest form of indoor prostitution I have ever experienced." Typically, powerful men hire low-profile prostitutes from personal recommendations instead of going through an organization that can easily be raided by law enforcement officials. "That someone like the governor would shop for sex through an Internet escort service is mind-boggling."

The *LAT* takes a look at how the main topic of conversation across the country relating to the scandal was about Spitzer's wife and how she could stand by him during a news conference. "That moment of public humiliation stayed with people," [says the LAT](#). In the *NYT's* op-ed page, [Dina Matos McGreevey](#), who knows something about awkward news conferences, since she stood by her husband when he declared, "I am a gay American," says, "It's a personal decision." She writes that, in her case, she "was in a fog" and "certainly didn't volunteer" but was mainly thinking about her daughter. "This will happen again. And when it does, let's skip the psychoanalysis and judgments heaped on the wife. She's not the elected official. Let him face the cameras on his own."

today's papers Eliot's Mess

By Daniel Politi
Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 6:43 AM ET

The [New York Times](#), [Washington Post](#), [Los Angeles Times](#), and the *Wall Street Journal's* world-wide newsbox all lead with the

bombshell revelation that New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer was a repeat client of [a prostitution ring](#). A federal wiretap caught Spitzer arranging to meet a New York prostitute in a [Washington, D.C., hotel on Feb. 13](#). An hour after the *NYT*'s Web site published a story that revealed Spitzer's involvement, the governor held a brief news conference. With his wife at his side, Spitzer apologized but didn't mention specifics. "I have disappointed and failed to live up to the standard I expected of myself," he said. Everyone mentions that a resignation is likely, and the *WSJ* says it could come as early as today.

USA Today gives big play to the Spitzer story but devotes its traditional lead spot to a look at how more people are choosing to [cash out](#) their 401(k) retirement accounts to pay their bills. Instead of borrowing money from their retirement accounts, many are simply choosing to get all their money out, which implies lots of taxes and fees, mainly to prevent eviction or foreclosure. Several plan administrators say the number of "hardship withdrawals" increased at least 20 percent in January compared with the same month last year.

Last week, federal authorities announced they had broken up an international prostitution ring and arrested four people accused of running Emperors' Club VIP, which arranged encounters between wealthy clients and more than 50 prostitutes in several cities around the world for a fee that ranged [from \\$1,000 to \\$5,500 an hour](#). The news received little attention until yesterday's revelation that a man identified as "Client-9" was Spitzer. According to documents, Spitzer talked to one of the people charged about arranging a meeting with a [prostitute named Kristen](#).

Complicating matters for Spitzer is that the conversation seems to clearly suggest that it wasn't the first time Spitzer used the Emperors' Club VIP services. "Same as in the past, no question about it," is how Client 9 responded when he was asked about how he had sent the money for the encounter. The *Post* says Spitzer "expressed some evidence of familiarity" when he was told that "Kristen" would be the one to meet him because he responded by saying, "Great, okay, wonderful." Kristen spent about two hours with the governor at the Mayflower hotel and collected \$4,300 from him, which included extra money (the *LAT* says [about \\$1,600](#)) as a deposit for future encounters. The *WSJ* and *NYT* report that Spitzer had registered under the name "George Fox," who, in reality, is a hedge-fund consultant and a [longtime friend and supporter](#) of the governor.

The day after the encounter, which most papers make sure to point out was Valentine's Day, Spitzer testified before Congress on the bond insurance industry. The *WP* says Spitzer was not "initially scheduled to appear at the hearing" and was only included after he called to [insist on testifying](#).

The *LAT*, *NYT*, and *USAT* quote the most salacious details of the story, which came as part of a conversation that took place

between Kristen and one of the company's booking agents after the encounter with Spitzer. Kristen reported that the encounter had gone well, and, in an apparent reference to Spitzer, the booker said she had heard he would [sometimes ask women](#) "to do things that, like, you might not think were safe."

"This is not even a nail in the coffin--this is a spike," a political science professor [tells the WP](#). "It would be difficult for him to govern. His moral authority is nonexistent."

Spitzer hasn't been charged with any crime, but if he does resign, it would mark a dramatic end for a politician who made a name for himself as New York's attorney general. He won huge praise, grabbed lots of headlines, and was nicknamed the "Sheriff of Wall Street" for the aggressive way he pursued high-profile cases against some of the most well-known names in the financial industry. Spitzer also broke up [two prostitution rings in New York](#). The aggressive, and very public, manner in which he pursued Wall Street titans, often for practices that were considered routine, meant he had lots of enemies. Yesterday, many in the financial world could barely hide their glee that the man known as "Mr.Clean," who had vowed to bring high ethical standards to Albany, is now caught in this situation. "I'm sure everybody on Wall Street is happy," one man [tells the WSJ](#).

The *NYT*, which had more than 25 reporters working on the Spitzer stories, fronts a separate piece that provides the most detailed account of how the [investigation got started](#). Apparently, "prostitution ... was the furthest thing from the minds of the investigators," who were looking at suspicious financial transactions that they thought might have involved bribery or something to do with campaign finance. The governor was moving large quantities of money that seemed to end in shell companies. The *WSJ* notes that a bank had filed "suspicious activity" reports about the governor out of concern that he was involved in "structuring," which is when financial transactions are kept under \$10,000 to avoid [federal reporting requirements](#). The *NYT* says that it was only after investigators realized that Spitzer was using the money to meet with prostitutes that they asked a judge to approve wiretaps on the phones of the suspected ringleaders.

In other news, the *LAT* and *NYT* are alone in fronting news out of Iraq, where five U.S. soldiers were killed by a [suicide bomber in Baghdad](#). The *LAT* catches late-breaking word that [three more soldiers](#) were killed by a roadside bomb in Diyala province yesterday. The attack that killed the five soldiers in Baghdad was the deadliest single attack against U.S. forces since June, when the "surge" of troops was completed. The *NYT* notes that witness reports "suggest that the soldiers may have let down their guard because of the relative quiet of the last few months." There were at least three other suicide bombings across the country yesterday. The *NYT* says the attacks "underscored how fragile security in Iraq remains," while the *LAT* says that if violence

continues increasing it would inevitably raise questions about plans to pull out most of the remaining "surge" forces.

USAT fronts, and everyone mentions, Sen. Barack Obama went on the attack yesterday and discounted any idea that he would be Sen. Hillary Clinton's [running mate](#). Obama told supporters, "I don't want anybody here thinking that ... maybe I can get both" and said that "they are trying to hookwink you," in a reference to how the subject of a "dream ticket" has been recently brought up by [both Clinton and her husband](#). "I don't know how somebody who's in second place can offer the vice presidency to someone who's in first place," he said. Yesterday, Clinton said it was "premature to talk about whoever might be on the ticket."

While Clinton's recent "3 a.m. phone call" ad has been criticized by many who describe it as fear-mongering, [Orlando Patterson](#) was troubled by something else. Patterson writes in the *NYT*'s op-ed page that the image of innocent children and a worried mother "brought to my mind scenes from the past." Patterson thinks that, particularly since it doesn't include images of black people and terrorism is never mentioned, "the danger implicit in the phone ad ... is that the person answering the phone might be a black man, someone who could not be trusted to protect us from this threat."

today's papers Truth, Lies, and Intelligence

By Daniel Politi

Monday, March 10, 2008, at 6:28 AM ET

The [Los Angeles Times](#) leads with word that the Senate intelligence committee is getting ready to release a critical analysis of claims that were made by Bush administration officials in the [run-up to the invasion of Iraq](#). The long-delayed report, which is one of the last in a series of investigations relating to the Iraq war, sounds like it could be a bombshell, but officials emphasized it reaches a "mixed verdict" in its evaluation of whether the White House misused intelligence to make the case for war. [USA Today](#) leads with new documents that claim Federal Aviation Administration officials gave Southwest Airlines preferential treatment and allowed the company to [skip important safety inspections](#) for years.

The [New York Times](#) leads with news that the leaders of Pakistan's two main political parties agreed to a power-sharing deal and vowed to [reinstate judges who were fired](#) by President Pervez Musharraf. The announcement is likely to lead the new government into a direct confrontation with Musharraf since the judges could decide to challenge his re-election. The new coalition also said it would work toward rescinding many of Musharraf's powers, including his ability to dissolve Parliament.

The [Washington Post](#) leads with a look at how colleges and universities are working to adapt to changes in the [country's demographic landscape](#) (the *NYT* had a [similar story yesterday](#)). Starting next year, there will be fewer high-school graduates coupled with a steep increase in the number of minority students who traditionally are less likely to go to college. Some higher education institutions, including big public universities, are likely to adapt well to these changes, while smaller schools in remote areas could suffer. The *Wall Street Journal* leads its world-wide newsbox with Sen. Barack Obama's victory in Wyoming, which is likely to be followed by a win in tomorrow's Mississippi primary. The paper also notes up high that several big-name Democrats have come out in favor of holding mail-in primaries in Michigan and Florida.

Officials familiar with the new Senate intelligence committee report say it's unlikely to satisfy either side of the political divide. While it criticizes White House officials for not making clear that there were disagreements [within the intelligence community about Iraq](#), it also notes that several of the claims that proved to be erroneous were in line with the intelligence that was available at the time. "The left is not going to be happy. The right is not going to be happy. Nobody is going to be happy," one official said. But there's little doubt that the White House is not eager to open up this debate again, particularly during a heated presidential campaign season when the candidates are likely to pick up certain aspects of the report and turn them into sound bites. Although members of the Senate intelligence committee will receive the report this week, it could be awhile before it's released to the public since lawmakers can propose changes and much of what is in the report could be considered classified.

Last week, the FAA fined Southwest \$10.2 million for continuing to fly planes that hadn't gone through the [necessary inspections](#). FAA officials had been raising concerns about Southwest's ability to keep up with inspections since as early as 2003 but were repeatedly ignored by agency officials who had close relationships with airline managers. Oversight was only increased after Congress got involved in the issue last fall. Transportation committee Chairman Jim Oberstar said the investigation that led to the fine revealed "the most serious lapse in safety I have been aware of at the FAA in the past 23 years."

The Bush administration had been hoping that the winners of Pakistan's parliamentary elections would be able to have a working relationship with Musharraf, but yesterday's announcement seemed to clarify that they're not afraid to confront him on several key issues. The *WSJ* says some believe that if the chief justice is reinstated, Musharraf [would be forced to quit](#).

The *WSJ* fronts a look at how the National Security Agency plays a little-known but pivotal role in [domestic surveillance programs](#). The NSA traditionally handles foreign surveillance,

but it's now involved in analyzing huge amounts of data that it gets from several different domestic agencies to seek out suspicious patterns that could point to terrorist activity. The NSA uses powerful programs to analyze basic data from e-mail, Internet searches, airlines, telephone records, and financial information. As much as the agency can insist it's focused on foreign threats, the truth is that "it's increasingly difficult to distinguish between domestic and international communications in a digital era." The NSA doesn't need a judge's permission to gather the data and carry out the type of analysis that gives the agency the power to build a detailed profile of someone's behavior.

The *WP* fronts a look at a number of new studies published over the past few weeks that say countries need to work toward [reducing carbon emissions to almost zero](#) in order to prevent a dangerous rise in temperatures. But some think these types of goals are unrealistic and it's better to focus on reducing emissions rather than "debating whether 88 percent or 99 percent is sufficient," a climate expert at NASA said. "It's like you're starting off on a road trip from New York to California, and before you even start, you're arguing about where you're going to park at the end."

Despite all the recent talk of stagflation, the *WSJ* says the chances of it [actually taking place are slim](#). The tightening up of the credit markets probably means that the inflation part of the equation "will ultimately remain consigned to the attic, along with bell-bottom pants and disco balls." An economist tells the paper that it's common for inflation to increase during a recession but it ultimately ends up falling when a weak economy means a decrease in demand. "You get stagflation false signals in most recessions."

The *NYT* notes that to advertise its commemorative *Thriller* album, Sony BMG [videotaped professional dancers](#) performing the well-known zombie dance in everyday settings, including the London Underground and a supermarket (watch the videos [here](#) and [here](#)). The videos have been a huge hit online and even attracted a fair bit of media attention, but also raised some controversy over when a promotional stunt sponsored by a corporation should be disclosed.

today's papers

Executive Outcome

By Barron YoungSmith
Sunday, March 9, 2008, at 6:14 AM ET

The *New York Times* leads with, and the *Los Angeles Times* [reefers](#), Bush's veto of a bill to stop the CIA from using harsh

interrogation techniques like water-boarding. (The *Washington Post* reported the veto [yesterday](#).)

The *LAT* [leads](#) with, and everyone else stuffs, Obama's 61-38 win in the Wyoming caucus—a result *Slate* has already [pronounced](#) inconsequential. The *WP* leads with [news](#) that Clinton's wins have persuaded uncommitted superdelegates to reserve judgment till June.

President Bush's veto kills a bill that would limit CIA interrogation techniques to those approved in the Army field manual. Bush, the CIA director, and—*now!*—Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., say it's wrong to apply Army standards to the CIA, since the agency requires more flexibility. The *NYT* and *LAT* say the veto underscores Bush's commitment to expanding the power of the executive branch.

Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., won Wyoming by a large margin. The *NYT* [piece](#) on the caucus notes Bill Clinton is openly talking about an "unstoppable" Clinton-Obama ticket.

A *WP* survey of 80 uncommitted superdelegates reveals that Clinton's wins last week pushed many to remain undecided till June. If no candidate has a solid lead by then, the supers say they'll trust their own judgment—with an eye to winning the White House and healing a divided party.

The *NYT* [fronts](#) an installment of its "The Long Run" series examining Obama's first two years in the Senate. The piece hints at Obama's dislike of legislative gridlock and his tendency to remain separate from the Senate fray.

The *WP* [fronts](#) a look at [Doug Feith's](#) upcoming "score-settling" memoir, *War and Decision*. The paper says it's the first Iraq war book written from the Pentagon's point of view, and boy, is it exactly as you'd expect. Feith blames the CIA and State for intel failures; slams Bremer and Franks for refusing to adopt his Chalabi-heavy postwar plan; and lauds Donald Rumsfeld.

The *NYT* goes up top with a [piece](#) about how the Fed's market interventions haven't yet fixed the economy, playing up the possibility the Fed can't handle a crisis. In the end, though, the paper acknowledges more rate cuts are in the works, and that—surprise—"we haven't done away with the business cycle."

The *WP* fronts a look at China's [latest](#) industrial boon and environmental disaster. Skyrocketing demand for solar power is driving Chinese firms to double the global output of polysilicon, a key solar panel component. But polysilicon production creates toxic byproducts that Chinese firms don't know how to recycle—as a result, they're dumping it in unsuspecting villages.

The *NYT* fronts [news](#) that booming global grain prices are hurting consumers but fueling a revival of U.S. agriculture.

The *NYT* fronts a look at the [upcoming dip](#) in college applicants after 2009. Demographers say competition among high-schoolers will [slacken](#) between 2009 and 2015.

GOP internecine war watch: In William F. Buckley's absence, conservative wise man L. Brent Bozell penned a must-read *WP* [op-ed](#) calling John McCain's attitude toward movement conservatives "beyond folly. It is political suicide."

And you think superdelegates have it rough. The *WP* fronts a [piece](#) on the dilemma kids face when friended by their parents on Facebook. TP is accepting bets on how quickly this piece makes the "most e-mailed" list.

today's papers

Take These Jobs ...

By Joshua Kucera

Saturday, March 8, 2008, at 5:58 AM ET

The top national story in all the papers is that the U.S. economy lost 63,000 jobs last month—the most in five years—the Labor Department announced yesterday. That news, coming on the heels of net losses the month before, makes it all but certain we are in or headed for a recession.

The *Washington Post* focuses on the [political impact](#) of the report, even though most of the presidential candidates didn't really have anything new to say. President Bush said he's got the situation under control and that the stimulus package approved last month—including \$600 checks for most people—will give the economy a "booster shot."

And everyone quotes the chair of the White House Council of Economic Advisors: "There is no denying that when you get negative job numbers, realistically the economy is less strong than we had hoped it would be," he said. "The question is how quickly will it pick up. ... We think it will pick up by the summer."

But, as the *New York Times* puts it: "Few private forecasters were so buoyant. Many firms had already concluded that a recession was under way. Within minutes of the new report on employment, many in the dwindling pool of optimists changed their positions." JPMorgan Chase and Lehman Brothers both declared the economy in a recession after the report came out.

The *NYT* and *Wall Street Journal* delve much more deeply into the nitty-gritty of the fallout of the report, which surprised everyone. They both go high with related financial news: that a top mortgage company and a major private-equity firm both said

they are in trouble after they couldn't meet demands from lenders to post more collateral.

"I believe we are facing the most serious ... economic and financial stresses that the U.S. has faced in at least a generation—and possibly much longer," said Lawrence Summers, treasury secretary under Bill Clinton, as quoted in the *Journal*. "We are in nearly unprecedented territory with respect to financial strain."

The *NYT* and *Post* both have front-page stories second-guessing Barack Obama's strategy in light of his losses on Tuesday—the *Times* on his taking the high road and refraining from attacking Hillary Clinton, and the *Post* on Obama's small-state strategy.

One of those small states, Wyoming, hasn't had a presidential candidate visit in 20 years, and the race was so little-considered that there are no polls. But with the Democratic race still up in the air, the state's caucuses are getting an unprecedented amount of attention, the *Los Angeles Times* reports. Obama and all three Clintons spent time there yesterday, hoping to get its 12 delegates in play today and some momentum for the bigger contests to come.

Everyone goes inside with news that Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador have made up after Colombia's president apologized and said he would never again violate another country's borders, as he did when the Colombian military killed rebels in Ecuador last week. The incursion prompted Colombia to accuse Ecuador of aiding terrorists and Venezuela to move troops close to the Colombian border. All was apparently forgiven when the presidents of the three countries shook hands and embraced at a summit of Latin American leaders in the Dominican Republic and agreed to restore diplomatic relations with each other. However, as the *Post* notes, "the most serious issue raised in the debate—that Colombian rebels operate with the help of foreign governments—has not been resolved and is sure to fester."

The *Post* has a terrific [dispatch](#) and [photo gallery](#) of Turkish Kurdish rebels in Iraq. Turkey claimed victory after it crossed the Iraqi border two weeks ago to attack bases of the PKK rebels. But the PKK, the *Post* finds, is unbowed. "The Turkish army could not capture any of our territory, could not get one of our bases, our weapons or even a scrap of nylon," the commander told his troops, with the reporters listening in. "The Turkish army didn't have any chance to rest. When they attacked, we hit them. When they made camp, we hit them. Even when they pulled back, we hit them."

Another excellent wartime dispatch is in the *Journal*, on how a U.S. commander in Afghanistan—following centuries-old tradition—writes handwritten letters to the parents of soldiers killed under their command: "Before coming here from his battalion's home base in Italy, he bought some parchment stationery bearing the wing-and-sword crest of the 173rd

Airborne Brigade. He knew he would likely have to write letters such as these. He didn't want to use printer paper." It's a moving read.

Also in the papers ... Today, President Bush is going to veto a bill that would ban water-boarding and other harsh interrogation techniques, the *Post* [reports](#). Democrats have a shot at filling the seat in Congress vacated by Dennis Hastert in a special election today, the *Post* [reports](#). China is rethinking its controversial Darfur policy as the Olympics approach, the *LAT* and *NYT* report. The *NYT* says European vote monitors have [revised their assessment](#) of Armenia's elections last month, now saying the vote was less fair than they had originally said. John McCain [will not pick John Kerry](#) as his running mate, the *NYT* says.

Didn't this used be called "selling out"? The *Journal* [finds](#) that selling music to television shows and advertisements is no particular shame for at least some of the bands participating in the hipster-mecca music festival South by Southwest next week. With music sales declining, such sales are an increasingly attractive way to make money for emerging bands. And among the many music fans at the shows in Austin, Texas, will be marketers representing E-Trade and Playtex. One musician tells the paper: "TV is almost the new radio."

tv club

The Wire Final Season

Week 10: How *sheee-it* started.

By Emily Bazelon, Andy Bowers, Jeffrey Goldberg, Melinda Henneberger, David Plotz, John Swansburg, and June Thomas
Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 11:15 AM ET

From: David Plotz

To: Jeffrey Goldberg

Subject: Week 1: How Do You Follow Up the Best Season of the Best Show Ever?

Updated Monday, January 7, 2008, at 4:17 PM ET

Remember that time you had an awesome college girlfriend and you hadn't seen her all summer and it was finally the first day back on campus? That's approximately how I feel about the return of *The Wire* for its fifth and final season.

As *Slate* Editor Jacob Weisberg [observed](#) a year ago, *The Wire* is not merely the best show on television now, but the best show that has *ever* been on television. And Season 4, which focused on the catastrophic lives of four Baltimore schoolboys, was *The Wire's* best season. So, Season 5 has a practically impossible

task: It's following the best season ever of the best show ever—how could it not be a letdown? (Compare this to *The Sopranos*, *The Wire's* rival for show of the century. *The Sopranos* limped into its final run, coming off two bad years. Its last episodes—which really were incredible—seemed even better because they followed dud seasons. *The Wire* has no such luck.)

Here's a good sign: Season 5 begins with a tight close-up on the face of homicide detective Bunk Moreland, who's in the process of conning a particularly dim murder suspect into confessing, in part by rigging up a Xerox machine as a "lie detector." Bunk, the profane teddy bear, is one of my favorite *Wire* regulars (though that list is so long it's hardly worth keeping anymore: Bunk, Omar, Clay Davis, Stringer Bell, Prop Joe, Herc, Snoop, Namond, Dukie, Norman, Cutty ...). Now that I think of it, Jeff, if you were a *Wire* character, you'd be Bunk—funny, ironic, lovable, and brilliant. Anyway, if this season is going to give us plenty of Bunk, it's going to be all right with me.

That said, I found the opening episode promising but a little too busy. It threw a huge number of balls in the air, almost too many to follow: a brewing battle between Marlo and Prop Joe; the collapse of the police department, McNulty's return to alcoholism, womanizing, and the homicide squad; Bubbles' sorry attempt at rehab; a shady real estate deal rigged by the city-council president; the investigation of Clay Davis; Carcetti's descent into pure political opportunism; Herc's new dirty tricks; Dukie's failure as a drug dealer. ... And I am skipping a bunch, notably the *Baltimore Sun*, which is going to be a central character in Season 5 the way the schools were in Season 4 and the docks were in Season 2.

I'm a little worried about the *Baltimore Sun* plot. I've had two brief conversations with David Simon—he's a friend of a friend—and my wife has had two long ones. In all four of those exchanges, Simon demonstrated an obsession with the *Sun* that bordered on monomania. There Hanna and I were, slobbering to him about Omar, and Simon kept changing the subject to stories that his editors had screwed up 19 years ago. I'm praying that his fury at the *Sun* won't overwhelm his genius for storytelling. The signs in Episode 1 are good: The *Sun* characters—most notably city editor Gus Haynes—are vivid and humane, and there's only one heavy-handed scene (the one where the *Sun's* blowhard editor squashes a story idea). And it gets the newspaper uniform—the cheap looking ties and dingy striped dress shirts—exactly right.

Finally, let me pay homage to the miracle of Snoop: She utters only one sentence, and it's the best line in the episode. She's explaining to a reluctant partner of Marlo how she'll retaliate if he doesn't cooperate: "We will be brief with all you mother-----rs—I think you know."

Best,
David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 1: I'm Worried
Posted Monday, January 7, 2008, at 11:01 AM ET

Dear David,

Yes, I remember the time I had an awesome college girlfriend and I hadn't seen her all summer and it was finally the first day back on campus. I remember that time very well, because she had decided, over the summer, to start wearing black nail polish, stop shaving her armpits, and go to Nicaragua to help the Sandinistas pick coffee beans or some shit like that. Luckily, I didn't like her anyway.

The way I felt when I made these unhappy discoveries is a little bit the way I felt after watching the first episode of the final season of *The Wire* last night. I was enjoying myself just fine for the first 20 minutes or so, becoming reacquainted with some of my favorite drug dealers—the intensely lovable psycho-killer Snoop most of all—and scandalous cops. But then we entered the newsroom of the *Baltimore Sun*, and it was straight-up whiskey-tango-foxtrot time for me. I thought the show stopped dead, just about the time we were introduced to the saintly city editor and the darkly ambitious white-boy reporter. But let me not get ahead of myself here. We are told that the collapse of big-city journalism is the show's theme this season, so the two of us will have plenty of time to discuss the thing that interests all reporters more than anything else—namely, us.

First, let me dissent from Mr. Weisberg's audacious claim that *The Wire* is the best show on television ever. I think that I would have agreed with his assertion, except that I recently watched, in seriatum, the first season of *The Sopranos*, which is just pure Shakespeare. Actually, it's better than Shakespeare, because Paulie Walnuts isn't in Shakespeare.

It has become a cliché to call *The Wire* Dickensian, because it so clearly is, but it's no insult to Dickens to say that he's no Shakespeare. Of course, *The Sopranos* has had more bad seasons than *The Wire*, but that is in part because it has had more seasons than *The Wire*. So, I would say that *The Wire* is perhaps the second-best series on television ever. *Welcome Back, Kotter*, of course, rounds out the top three. Talk about a realistic portrayal of urban school life!

In re: the comparison between me and Bunk: Are you calling me fat?

I agree with you that Bunk is a wonderful character, and I agree with you that the list of great characters is nearly as long as the cast list itself. My favorite, Snoop aside, is Omar, and I missed him last night. I'll take more Bunk, more Omar, and less of the *Baltimore Sun*. Why, you ask, have I had such a negative reaction to the *Sun* crew? The brilliance of this show is its complexity: Never before, apart from the novels of Richard Price or the genius George Pelecanos (both of whom write for *The Wire*, naturally), have we had such a fully realized, tangled-up, humane, and morally ambiguous portrayal of the black inner-city, and not only its criminal underclass, but the cops who fight the robbers: Bunny Colvin, the erstwhile mayor of Hamsterdam, was one of David Simon's greatest creations, and, in a just world, Clarke Peters, who plays Det. Lester Freamon, would win a bucketful of Emmys. (Of course, the show has won exactly no Emmys, which is insane and worthy of much discussion.)

In our early glimpse of the *Sun* newsroom, we're not seeing much in the way of gray: just asshole bosses, a fantasy-camp city editor, a brooding and envious general assignment reporter and his naive-seeming Hispanic colleague, who gave us the most unrealistic moment last night: After she is publicly humiliated by the grammarians of the city desk, she actually seems grateful. Give me a break.

I have to tell you, David, I'm worried about this: We all know that David Simon is obsessed by the injustices wrought against the *Sun*, his former employer, but I'm hoping that his desire for revenge hasn't blinded him to the need for dramatic complexity.

Best,
Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 1: Does the Journalism Feel Clichéd Because We're Journalists?
Posted Monday, January 7, 2008, at 12:12 PM ET

Jeff,

Having now seen the episode again—I watched the first time when my wife was out, which is a hanging offense in our house, so I had to do a second viewing with her—I share some of your concerns about the *Sun* newsroom. I actually like the darkly ambitious white-boy reporter. He reminds me powerfully of, oh, three or four or 40 friends at the *Post* and *Times*. And the exchange about the photo of the burned doll was inspired. But you're right that most of the newsroom characters—the crusty, big-hearted city editor, the pompous editor, the crotchety

grammar-fascist old-timer—arrive as caricatures, and do very little in Episode 1 to flesh themselves out.

Still, it's not surprising that the newspaper seems familiar—and trite—to us, because it's the ocean we swim in. If we were drug dealers or cops (God help the public!), maybe we would have felt the same way about Episode 1 of *The Wire*'s first season. Maybe drunk-cynical-but-brilliant homicide detective McNulty is just as much a cliché in Copworld as cranky-romantic-and-fearless city editor Gus is in ours. Maybe we have to make a conscious effort to watch the newspaper subplot as outsiders rather than insiders. If we watch as insiders, we're bound to be disappointed: It will inevitably feel clichéd or dishonest.

Don't you think that Simon is taking Mayor Carcetti a little too far to the dark side? When we left him at the end of Season 4, his political ambitions and his idealism were synchronized: They fed on each other. Now he's nothing but naked political ambition. If I'm remembering correctly, the very first words he speaks in the episode are about crime stats, the subject he spent all of last season deriding. I suspect he'd be more realistic, and more interesting, if they let him retain some trace of his old goo-goo self.

Oh, and calling you a "Teddy Bear" was too subtle for you? You need me to spell it out?

David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 1: Baltimore Is No Longer a Viable Enterprise
Posted Monday, January 7, 2008, at 2:14 PM ET

Dear David,

I admit, I wondered whether my reaction to the newsroom scenes was one of contempt born of familiarity. And it's certainly true that I've run into editors who have been monochromatically assholeish, and reporters who absolutely burned with ambition. Why, it's even been said that I have, on occasion, burned with ambition. You, too, burn with ambition, but it's not so noticeable, because you're so unambitious about it.

But: I think I know a little bit about cops, being related to cops, and, more to the point, having written about cops, and David Simon's cops generally pass the verisimilitude test, and this newsroom, so far at least, does not. But, as they say on the TV news, only time will tell.

I don't see what you see in Carcetti. He's not shaking anyone down, is he? He's just trying to better his city and himself, which is what you'd expect. And his attack on the scumbag U.S. Attorney seemed motivated by righteous fury. It's no surprise that a sitting mayor would have an appreciation for low crime statistics. I've actually thought that Carcetti was, in a way, a stand-in for David Simon, who is made angry by—well, most everything, as Mark Bowden's [new piece in the Atlantic](#) shows—but mostly by the systematic abandonment of urban America. The bleakest moments for me in *The Wire* have not been the scenes of drug violence (although the harassment of Bubbles last season did break my heart), but those very effective moments, many starring Carcetti, which persuasively show that Baltimore itself is no longer a viable enterprise, and the reason it's not is because it is populated mainly by poor African-Americans, about whom America—Barack Obama notwithstanding—still doesn't give a shit. America's general disinterest in *The Wire* (and certainly the general disinterest of the people who vote for the Emmys) is a corollary to this larger disinterest, by the way.

Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 1: Do We Really Want a President Who Would Skip *The Wire* Premiere?
Posted Monday, January 7, 2008, at 4:17 PM ET

Dear Jeff,

Speaking of Obama, did you know that *The Wire* is [one of his favorite shows](#)? But—and here's the kind of scoop that makes *Slate* the must-read that it is—according to my colleague Chris Beam, Obama actually [missed last night's premiere](#). I know Obama's busy, but *The Wire* is *The Wire*! Doesn't the Manchester, N.H., Radisson have HBO?

As for your excellent observation that *The Wire* is bleakest when it shows the nonviability of Baltimore, I've been puzzling over that question for a long time. When I was in college, during the depths of the crack epidemic, it was widely believed that the American city was doomed. Sure, centerless megasuburbs like Phoenix would survive, but the sunny-side-up city, with a rich delicious center, was written off. In the 20 years since, though, center cities have bounced back: most notably New York, but lots of other ones, too—Boston, Chicago, even our own fair city of Washington, D.C., have filled back in with downtowns livelier than they were 30 years ago. So, why is the renaissance not universal? Why are some cities worse than ever? For a sheltered white yuppie like me, Baltimore remains a terrifying, I

Am Legend-nightmare, where any wrong turn can take you down a street that's at once empty and terrifying.

So, what is it, ultimately, that distinguishes the New Yorks from the Baltimores? Is it race? Or poverty? Or the vagaries of the global economy? (New York has rebounded because Wall Street and the entertainment industry have had 15 fantastic years.) Or governing and policing strategies? Is it truly inevitable that Baltimore must fail?

David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 1: I Get Why David Simon Is Angry
Posted Monday, January 7, 2008, at 4:47 PM ET

Dear David,

Well, you're one deep-thinking dude. I thought we were going to talk about killer Snoop and Robin Hood Omar the whole time.

Let's look at the cities you mentioned: New York is New York, the world capital of finance. So, it has the money to stay afloat. Boston is the world academic center. If Washington goes out of business, America goes out of business. Baltimore, on the other hand, has what? Johns Hopkins, which is something, but not enough. It doesn't give meaning to Baltimore the way Yale gives meaning to New Haven, and believe me, as someone who lived in New Haven (don't worry, Yale wouldn't have taken me in a million years; it was my wife that brung me to that dance), New Haven is barely floating. What else does Baltimore have? That crappy Inner Harbor, with its wildly overpriced aquarium and its World's Fair-circa-1972 feel? Some cities get passed by, and some don't. Baltimore seems to have been passed by. And you're on to something: The percentage of a city's population that's African-American has something to do with the overall health of the city; there's simply no way around the fact that the murder and sickness and general debasement of urban African-Americans don't register as crises to most Americans. Every time I read a front-page story about death in Baghdad, I ask myself: How many African-Americans died violent deaths in the same time period in American cities, without anything more than a news brief to record the awful fact? In other words, I get why David Simon is angry.

By the way, Obama's love of *The Wire* speaks well of him. I don't picture Hillary going in for this sort of thing.

Jeff

From: John Swansburg
To: Jeffrey Goldberg and David Plotz
Subject: David Simon Responds
Posted Tuesday, January 8, 2008, at 5:25 PM ET

David and Jeff,

A quick note from your TV Club editor. It seems David Simon came across David's [first TV Club post](#) on a blog called [Ubiquitous Marketing](#) and had [a few thoughts](#) on it. Here they are:

Just curious:

What were the circumstances at which those conversations occurred? When I am at say, at a book-release party with a bunch of journos, or at a wedding table, where I am seated exclusively with newspaper people, or simply talking to a noted reporter or editor, the conversation is often about journalism and quite naturally, my unlikely transition from newspapering to television also is a topic and yes, I am very blunt about what went bad for me at The Sun, and for many, many others there as well.

If it were at a party of say, Baltimore cops, then the drug war, or the copshop, or the bar tab itself would predominate. And journalism and/or my experiences in journalism would go unmentioned in any regard.

Entertainment industry people? We talk about the business.

Drug dealers? We talk about the, um, business.

And in all instances when people come up to me to discuss how much they love them some Omar and how he's the bestest character ever, well, okay, my eyes do glaze to the point of distraction and I do desperately try to change the subject back to whatever the collective conversational zeitgeist might be at a given gathering.

I was a newspaperman from my high school paper until I left the Sun at age 35. It was a delight to me. It informs my work in myriad

ways. At some point, it went bad. And the fact is, you'll not find me speaking openly against the fellows who made it go bad for long after my departure. I held my tongue pretty well despite my low regard for those fellows. But in 2000, five years after I left The Sun, those cats finally made clear that they had dragged The Sun into a journalistic fraud through the same myopia and indifference that later cost [Howell] Raines and Gerald Boyd their careers, except they did so despite private warnings about the reporter who was the problem. Why yes, at that point—which you describe as 19 years ago, though it is in fact, seven—I got angry and vocal and direct.

Mr. Carroll and Mr. Marimow are notable journalists with impressive resumes. They have done some fine things, I am sure. But in Baltimore, in their hunger for prizes, they tolerated and defended a reporter who was making it up wholesale. Events, quotes, meetings at which people were supposed to have spoken powerfully about The Sun's powerful coverage of a Pulitzer-worthy issue but never said any such thing—it was simply farce. Yet even after that third retracted article, they continued to defend the behavior as the honest mistakes of a good, aggressive reporter.

To flourish, shit like that relies on silence and fear within the newsroom, and complicity within the industry itself. And at the point when the third story had been retracted in full and these guys were still trying to mitigate the fraud and accept no responsibility for it, I resolved that I was going to speak to it openly and without regard to decorum. I make no apologies whatsoever for that. I grew up a newspaperman; I do not know how to regard newspapermen who would go out of their way, over a period of years, to continually retract stories by the same reporter and continue to defend such. And so, when I meet other journos, I am full-throated in a way that everyone still in the game never manages to be when it comes to a yet-to-be-outed Blair, Bragg, Kelley, or Glass. These scandals keep coming one after another and everyone pretends that they are aberrations, that the only guilty parties have all been caught, that there isn't an underlying and fundamental problem with prizes and ambition and accountability that is inherent within the shrinking pond that is print journalism.

I loved my newspaper and I loved working for my newspaper; and given the basic ethics of newspapering, I don't know how not to be angry over what happened there. You want to call that sour grapes? No problem. Call it spoiled roast. It is what it is. I got in the business thinking certain things about journalism; naively, maybe, I took that shit to heart. My mistake, apparently.

That said, if you've ever taken an Introduction to Logic course, you know that Argumentum Ad Hominem, while a stock maneuver in most half-assed journalism and commentary, is the weakest sort of intellectual crutch. If you are serious in addressing something, then ideas matter, not the man. The Wire's depiction of the multitude of problems facing newspapers and high-end journalism will either stand or fall on what happens on screen, not on the back-hallway debate over the past histories, opinions passions or peculiarities of those who create it. I've got a secret for you cats: Ed Burns has some pretty fierce feelings about the people he worked for and with in the Baltimore Police Department and the Baltimore Public School System. Do you really believe that insiders in the B.P.D. and school system can't recognize certain specific references to reality in the previous 50 hours of television? Writers of fiction cannibalize their most meaningful experiences and then regurgitate them and hope for the best. There is nothing at all new to this.

The only difference between your discussion of seasons one through four and the current one seems to be that you did not encounter Ed Burns at a party. Next time we meet, remind me to talk about the Orioles parsimony when it comes to pitching or my complete collection of Professor Longhair albums in order that you might be able to address yourselves to the work itself, for better or for worse.

Best,

David Simon

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 2: All Thrust, No Vector

Posted Monday, January 14, 2008, at 7:42 AM ET

David,

Well, you've achieved the possible—you've [pissed off](#) David Simon. You have now gone where, well, thousands of people have gone before. Perhaps it was this line of yours, from last week's dialogue, that triggered the attack: "*The Wire* is not merely the best show on television now, but the best show that has ever been on television."

What did you expect after you delivered yourself of such praise? A thank you? A basket of muffins?

I reread Mark Bowden's [excellent piece](#) on Simon in this month's issue of my magazine, the *Atlantic*, after receiving Simon's complaint about you. Bowden, like you, is an unabashed partisan of the show: "The show's boxed sets blend nicely on the bookshelf with the great novels of American history," he wrote. Naturally, Simon is infuriated with him, as well. In the course of unpacking Simon's epic, unidirectional dispute with Bill Marimow and John Carroll, the one-time *Baltimore Sun* editors who, in Simon's view, destroyed the paper, Bowden makes an obvious mistake: He decides to remain neutral in the fight. "When I discovered," Bowden wrote, "after my last conversation with Simon, that the final season of the show would be based on his experiences at *The Sun*, I felt compelled to describe the dispute, but I resolved to characterize it without entering it." Bowden showed Simon a draft of his piece, "which provoked a series of angry, long-winded accusations" in which Simon impugned Bowden's journalistic integrity to the editor of the *Atlantic*, which is amusing, of course, because Bowden is one of the five or six best reporters in America.

Which brings me back to your [first posting](#) and Simon's response to it. Simon accuses you of ... I'm not sure what, precisely. Violating his privacy by reporting on a conversation you had at a wedding? Sort of. Mischaracterizing that conversation? Not exactly, either, since he pretty much admits that, in conversation with other reporters, he's fairly monomaniacal on the subject of Marimow and Carroll and their manifold sins. His lengthy post seems to confirm your analysis. As did the second episode, which I'll get to, briefly, in a second. But to conclude this sorry conversation: This is a man who is all thrust, no vector. He's mad at the rapacious capitalists who have destroyed the American city, and he's mad at reporters who praise him. A little bit of discernment would be useful here. I don't know much about the Carroll-Marimow years at the *Sun*, but I do know that Marimow, as a reporter, was one of the greats, taking on a grotesque and frightening Philadelphia Police Department, and changing his city for the better, and I do know that Carroll quit the *Los Angeles Times* rather than gut its newsroom.

Which is why his Carroll stand-in, the dim-bulb, corporate hack executive editor, seems like a semi-unreal character to me. Very few big-city-paper editors are quite so ostentatiously stupid and venal as the Carroll of Simon's imagination, and so, once again, the *Sun* subplot was not at all compelling to me. Also, it's almost ridiculously telegraphed. We've learned that the overambitious Templeton is already suspected of creating a Baltimore variant of [Janet Cooke's](#) "Jimmy" (we've learned this thanks to a most unnaturally perceptive city desk), and we also know that top management just adores our sweater-vest-wearing [Stephen Glass](#) and is giving him the opportunity to write a Pulitzer-bait "Dickensian" series (I like the way Simon subverts the Dickens meme by associating it with one of his villains) on a city classroom. I have no idea what will happen to McNulty and Bunk and Marlo and Proposition Joe. I have a very good idea what will happen in the *Baltimore Sun* newsroom. But I'll let you defend Simon from the charge of excessive obviousness.

It's a shame that Simon gets in the way of his own great work; he's doing something very important here. I was reminded of this by [the discovery](#) last week in a Washington house of the decomposing bodies of four girls, who were not found by neighbors, or the police, or the schools, or by child protection agencies, but by marshals acting on behalf of a mortgage company that was foreclosing on the property. How can this horror happen in America? David Simon is one of the few people asking this question.

Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 2: Too Much Moralizing, Not Enough Omar
Posted Monday, January 14, 2008, at 10:06 AM ET

Dear Jeff,

At the risk of making this a *Slate* dialogue that is mostly about itself, let me just say a few more words about Simon's furious response to my post last week. And those words are: He was right. It was wrong for me to write about social conversations we had at a mutual friend's wedding and book party. He had every right to expect privacy when we talked and to be angry when I turned the conversations into journalistic fodder.

OK, back to the show. There was something off about the second episode, but I don't think it's the *Sun* subplot. The conniving ascent of the Cooke/Glass fabulist, egged on by the two evil editors, doesn't bother me the way it bothers you. I agree that it's obvious—I don't think the *Sun* editor needed both

horns *and* a pitchfork—but it's not boring. In fact, my favorite part of the episode is the bull session in the *Sun's* loading dock. How could you not crack up at Gus' riff about the mother of four who died from an allergic reaction to blue crabs: "Ever notice how 'mother of four' is always catching hell? Murder. Hit and run. Burned up in row house fire. Swindled by bigamists." I'm giggling just typing it. "Swindled by bigamists"—give that writer an Emmy!

So, it's not the newsroom that's confounding me. No, I think the problem is that *The Wire* has gotten preachy. The show has always had a didactic streak, but a relatively subtle one. For all that Simon is seething with righteous anger, he never let that overwhelm the show. It was a backbeat. He let the story and the characters do the work, and didn't lay the lessons on thick. Like the great journalist that he is, he showed, he didn't tell. He and his colleagues understood that no "the game is rigged" speech could ever mean one-fiftieth as much as, say, the momentary shot of Dukie selling drugs at the end of Season 4.

But the first two episodes of this season repeatedly pause—stop dead—for heavy-handed moralizing. It didn't bother me in Episode 1—I figured they were just breaking us in—but now I'm getting worried. Just checking my notes from Episode 2, I see:

1. The hooker's overwrought speech about her addiction
2. Lester's majestic peroration about the importance of the Clay Davis case
3. Steve Earle's exhortation to Bubbs, urging him to stop bottling up his sorrow about Sherrod and live again
4. The face-off between Gus and the *Sun's* editor about their schools series—the editor pompous, Gus biting, both sermonizing
5. Michael's conscience-ridden argument with Chris and Snoop about killing a guy who may have insulted Marlo
6. Bunk, Lester, and Jimmy's chorus about the devaluation of black men's lives ("You can go a long way in this country killing black folk.")

In every one of these scenes, *The Wire's* characters are just a bit too grandiloquent, their dialogue a shade too portentous. Maybe because this is the final season, Simon and Ed Burns don't want to leave anything unsaid, but they're saying too much.

Two episodes and counting without Omar! On the upside, Avon Barksdale is back, and flashing that awesome West Baltimore "W" hand signal. We need one of those—a three-finger "S"—for *Slate*.

David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 2: Give Me More Clay Davis!
Posted Monday, January 14, 2008, at 11:01 AM ET

Dear David,

I appreciate your deep morals, I really do. But still: Your post was fairly inoffensive and had the benefit of being true. So, no guilt!

Like you, I love the expression "swindled by bigamists." David Simon and his writers love words, and I love them for loving words. That said, I thought the scene in which this marvelous line was embedded, on the loading dock, was forced and ostentatious and heavy-handed. Why not just have St. City Editor say, "Man, Baltimore hacks are so witty and hard-boiled and yet they have hearts of gold, all except that yuppie shit who is obviously going to Jayson Blair our newspaper half to death."

I was so busy hating the *Baltimore Sun* story line that I neglected to notice what you picked up: that it's not only the reporters who are ardently speechifying. I don't mind speeches—give me more Clay Davis any day! It's the moralizing that's getting me. Why do they have to tell us that the lives of black men are cast away by our society? Isn't that the whole point of this show? We get it. We've been watching for years.

These occasional bumps in the writing are not so noticeable in most cases because the acting is so good—otherworldly good. Have you noticed that Isiah Whitlock Jr., as the febrile and corrupt Clay Davis, is a genius? One question I'm always left with after an episode of *The Wire* is this: Where will these brilliant African-Americans actors go when *The Wire* is finished? Maybe this is why David Simon is so pissed—he knows that Hollywood hasn't figured out how to showcase large quantities of black talent and fears for the careers of his cast. I can't think of another cast of such astonishingly good unknown actors, except maybe for *The Sopranos*—though if you watch *Goodfellas* [carefully](#), you'll see that they're all there. (Weirdly, Isiah Whitlock Jr. was also in *Goodfellas*.) So, let's have a moment of appreciation for Lance Reddick, who plays Cedric Daniels; and our mutual favorite, Wendell Pierce, who plays Bunk; and, of course, Clarke Peters, who plays Lester Freamon; and Andre Royo as Bubbles; and Jamie Hector as Marlo Stanfield; and, for his voice alone, Anwan Glover as Slim Charles. The list goes on and on. Every so often, the writing fails, but the cast never does.

As Sarah Silverman says, I have a dream, too: My dream is that some savvy Shakespeare company hires, en masse, the cast of *The Wire* for what would be just a thrilling *Julius Caesar*. Wood Harris, who plays Avon Barksdale, has already appeared in *Troilus and Cressida*. Just imagine him as Brutus.

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 2: Where Is Simon Going With the Parallel Fraud Plots?
Posted Monday, January 14, 2008, at 11:49 AM ET

Jeff,

One of the weirdest moments of my *Wire* offseason was when I spotted Clay Davis—I mean Isiah Whitlock Jr.—playing a goofy dad in a Verizon cell phone [commercial](#). Much to my disappointment, his several lines didn't include his trademark "[sheee-it](#)." (Maybe he could do late-night toilet paper spots instead?) And he's not the only one of *The Wire*'s great black actors who's moonlighting to make ends meet: Lance "Cedric Daniels" Reddick brightened my NFL watching this year by showing up as the new face of Cadillac.

I share your amazement at the concentration of acting talent on *The Wire*, and your concern about what will happen to all these great black actors now that the show is ending. I'm hoping that they get to cash in on their talent the way [Idris Elba](#) (Stringer Bell) has since his character got murdered at the end of Season 3. But I fear you're right that Hollywood isn't going to figure out a way to employ idiosyncratic geniuses like Felicia "Snoop" Pearson, Michael K. Williams, and Anwan Glover as anything but "Street Thug #3" in crime dramas.

Where are Simon & Co. going with the parallel fraud plots? We've got the newsroom con artist Scott fabricating a sob-story 13-year-old cripple to advance his own career. And now Jimmy McNulty is fabricating a serial killer to ... do what exactly?

Seeing it for a second time, it occurs to me that the final minutes of the episode, when Jimmy turns an accidental death into a homicide while Bunk observes in horror, is a grim echo of that Season 1 scene when Jimmy and Bunk solve a murder with nothing but gestures and 38 utterances of the word "fuck." [Watch the "fuck" scene again](#): It is one of the *Wire*'s all-time great moments.

David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 2: Templeton Needs a Big Story and McNulty's Selling One
Posted Monday, January 14, 2008, at 1:30 PM ET

David,

It's not only actors on *The Wire* who have a tendency to show up in dispiriting commercials: The guy who played Agent Harris on *The Sopranos* now appears as a chef in a Campbell Soup commercial, and—if you don't mind me saying so—looks like a fuckwad.

And speaking of *fuck*, you're right, that scene between Bunk and Jimmy possesses *Raging Bull*-quality fuckedness. (Have you ever seen the *Flintstones* version? [Hysterical](#).)

Where are Simon & Co. going with the parallel fraud plots? It seems to me that he'll have to merge them. Stephen Glass needs a big story, and McNulty's selling one. I can't imagine McNulty having trouble closing the deal; Scott is dying for the story that gets him to the promised land of the *Washington Post* metro section. Ordinarily, I'd predict that Scott gets chewed up in the process, but isn't David Simon's main complaint against his one-time bosses at the *Sun* that they protected a Pulitzer-bound fabricator, rather than expose him? I feel like I've read about this complaint of his a dozen times already.

You've noticed, of course, that more people write about *The Wire* than actually watch it? The magazine articles never stop coming.

Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 2: Avon Returns
Posted Monday, January 14, 2008, at 2:48 PM ET

Jeff,

I know what you mean about the endless *Wire* commentary. I'm having a hard time separating what I see on the show from what I read in the papers (and magazines, and blogs). Sometimes that's because what I'm seeing on the show *is* what I am reading in the papers. During the episode last night, it's-hard-to-be-a-

saint-in-the-city editor Gus Haynes savages the *Sun* editor's idea for a public schools expose:

[If] you want to look at who these kids really are, you have to look at the parenting or lack of it in the city, the drug culture, the economics of these neighborhoods. ... It's like you're up on the corner of a roof and you're showing some people how a couple shingles came loose. Meanwhile, a hurricane wrecked the rest of the damn house.

This morning, I read the [Columbia Journalism Review's opus](#) about Simon's war with Marimow and Carroll and saw this quote from Simon:

You can carve off a symptom and talk about how bad drugs are, and you can blame the police department for fucking up the drug war, but that's kind of like coming up to a house hit by a hurricane and making a lot of voluminous notes about the fact that some roof tiles are off.

It's a great metaphor, incidentally.

Let me just return to my other favorite moment in last night's episode: the visiting-room negotiation between Avon and Marlo. It plays a great trick by making us root for the heartless murderer Avon because he's putting one over on the even-more-despicable Marlo. (That kind of sympathy manipulation is a specialty of *The Wire*. See also: Prop Joe, Omar, Bodie ...) Also, how great was the final moment of chitchat between them, when Avon, hungry for details about the street, asks: "What about you, how you been?" And Marlo answers with a shrug: "You know. The game is the game." That's what I'm going to start saying whenever anyone asks me about my job.

David

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 3: Whiplashed by Jimmy McNulty's Fall
Posted Monday, January 21, 2008, at 6:31 AM ET

Dear Jeff,

Maybe it was just that melodramatically tight closing shot of Omar—thank God! Omar—distraught over Butchie's death, but I thought there was a slight *telenovela* feel to Episode 3. Or maybe it is the too-fast way the show has altered its characters

this season. We're not in *Bold and the Beautiful* territory—no one has suddenly remembered that she's actually a lesbian incest victim—but McNulty, Marlo, and Clay Davis have all become very different men, very fast. Sen. Davis, who has always projected omniscience in his sleazy dealings, is uncharacteristically panicky as the grand jury investigation tightens around him. Marlo, who's terrifying because of his total lack of affect, cracked this week, revealing an unexpected anxiety about his money.

And Jimmy McNulty—well, what to say about Jimmy's extreme makeover? [In](#) this episode, Jimmy embellishes his serial-killer fabrication, inventing—over Bunk's fierce objections and with the help of a flask of Jameson's—a murderer who targets homeless men and marks his victims with red ribbons.* Jimmy plants evidence, tampers with a corpse, and forges documents, drinking and screwing blondes in the few minutes he's not inventing crimes. I'm whiplashed by Jimmy's fall: We've always known that his sweet domesticity couldn't last, but don't you think this nose dive is too much, too quickly?

As for the serial-killer plot itself, I'm ambivalent. It seems a little far-fetched to imagine that Jimmy and ultimate good cop Lester could betray the job so easily. On the other hand, Simon proved in Season 3 that he could take an outlandish premise and make it enthralling. The drug-legalization zone of Amsterdam, the great idea of Season 3, was as far-fetched as Jimmy's fake serial killer, and Simon made it utterly gripping and persuasive. Maybe he will do it again this year.

What I loved most in this episode was its variations on the theme of escape, or rather, the impossibility of it. The scene of Marlo, fish out of water, trying to get his money at the Antilles bank reminded me of Season 4's most powerful moment, when Bunny took the kids to a fancy downtown restaurant and they panicked. Then there was Omar's brief fling with beach life at the end of the episode, another reminder that the game will keep sucking you back in. And there was Michael and Dukie's glorious day out at the amusement park, which ends with Michael in trouble for leaving the corner. Some of the best scenes in *The Sopranos* were when the insular characters encountered the outside world—Vito hiding out in the New Hampshire B&B, Paulie and Christopher lost in the snowy pine barrens. *The Wire* too understands the power of claustrophobia, the terrible difficulty of leaving the familiar.

As for the newspaper subplot, the less said, the better. (I wish I had a dollar for every time someone said, "do more with less" this season—I could afford to take the *Sun* buyout.)

David

Correction, Jan. 22, 2008: *The article originally stated that McNulty relied on the help of Jim Beam. ([Return](#) to the corrected sentence.)*

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 3: Does the *Baltimore Sun* Not Have a Web Site?
Posted Monday, January 21, 2008, at 10:35 AM ET

Dear David,

Since you won't take on the newspaper subplot, let me.

But before I do, let me attach myself to your comments re: the terrible difficulty of leaving the familiar. There is one other *Sopranos* analogy here, in this case, having to do with Adriana's disappearance. You'll recall a meeting at the offices of the FBI, when one of the agents suggests that Adriana might have not, in fact, been murdered but had instead taken off to China. This suggestion was met by looks of absolute incredulity from her colleagues. It was an absurd notion, the idea that Adriana had the will, knowledge, and wherewithal to escape North Jersey. I thought of this scene while watching Marlo at the bank. Here is the lion out of his den and, without any defenses, just a shmuck who can't speak French (which is also an apt description of me). It's a useful reminder of the completely circumscribed lives these characters lead, though I do prefer to take my Marlo straight up and affectless—I like my gangsters cold. What next? Scenes of Snoop playing with her American Girl collection?

Unlike you (presumably, since your tight-lippedness on the matter of the *Baltimore Sun* has me guessing just a bit), I found the newsroom scene moving, perhaps because I had just read about the latest coup at the formerly great *L.A. Times*; the "fellows" from Chicago—as David Simon calls them in his [latest elegy](#) to the lost world of the Sun papers—have taken to murdering their own now, firing a corporate-shill editor who wouldn't shill enough, apparently refusing to carry out more newsroom head-chopping during the labor-intensive presidential campaign.

That scene in the newsroom was near perfect because it had the power of truth, right down to the moment when the patrician executive editor, Whiting, forces his sweaty, ferretish managing editor, Klebanow ([sounds like](#) ...), to deliver the actual bad news. How can your heart not break for 40- and 50-year-old reporters, with no discernible skills other than the ability to work the phones, who are cast adrift by a newspaper company that still makes barrels of money?

The problem, of course, is that these realistic scenes of newsroom life circa 2008 are undermined by deeply unrealistic scenes of newsroom life circa never. In other words, why does Roger Twigg, the discarded police reporter, have to be so

encyclopedically perfect? Why does Scott, the unpleasant upstart, have to be so ostentatiously Glass-ian (or Blair-ian)? And why is there no reference whatsoever to the newspaper's Web site? Simon makes it clear in his *Washington Post* Outlook piece that he neither knows very much nor cares very much about the Web, but doesn't reality demand that we see the newsroom of the *Sun* feeding the beast? All this talk of finals and double dots is so archaic. Are you telling me that the cub reporter, Alma Gutierrez, would run all over the city looking for an early edition of the paper before checking to see how her story was played on the Web? I just looked—the *Baltimore Sun* actually does [have a Web site](#).

All this raises a larger question: Just how good was the *Sun* in David Simon's day? Was the golden age really so golden? I'm not equipped to answer this question. Perhaps there's someone out there who can.

Best,
Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: David Plotz
Subject: The Skeleton in Daniels' Closet
Posted Tuesday, January 22, 2008, at 7:50 AM ET

Dear Jeff,

Thank you for figuring out why Alma's early-edition odyssey bugged me so much! A real Alma wouldn't even have woken up early to see her story. She would have checked the Web site at midnight the night before, when the paper went live (and then immediately updated her [Facebook](#) status to read "Alma Gutierrez is getting screwed by her editors," and [Twittered](#) same to 135 friends). Heck, the single act of her logging onto the free Sun Web site rather than schlepping out to buy the paper would have explained more about the newspaper crisis than 17 close-ups of Whiting's I'm-an-asshole suspenders ever could.

It's weird that *The Wire* clings to a 1999 vision of the newspaper—no e-mail, no texting, barely even cell phones—when it's so incredibly au courant about the practices of drug dealers. According to one of the 18 zillion *Wire* articles from the past couple of weeks (though I can't remember which one), New York gangbangers actually watch the show for tips on how to avoid cell-phone wiretaps and other popo surveillance.

Its newspaper Luddism gives me another thought: *The Wire* is in many ways the useful counterpoint to another cultic TV show that began around the same time, *24*. In *24*, conspiracies are

everywhere and institutions are corrupt, but technology is omnipotent and the individual can triumph. In *The Wire*, conspiracies are everywhere and institutions are corrupt, but technology always betrays us, and the individual can never triumph. All anyone can hope for is sheltered, private happiness. Needless to say, I find *The Wire* much truer to the world I live in. (Hmm, does this help explain why *24* is revered by Republicans and *The Wire* by Democrats? I have to think about that.)

I'm not a newspaper guy, and I lack the profound emotional connection to them that drives Simon. So, I'm skeptical about this newspaper nostalgia. Our mutual friend and *Slate* media critic Jack Shafer has explained that the newspaper glory years—1950s through the '80s, right Jack?—were anomalous, a period of artificially high profits that allowed papers to overstaff, throw resources into huge projects, and avoid the exigencies that plague most competitive businesses. So, maybe what's happening now isn't a rape, but a long overdue correction. And maybe it's not true that smaller newspapers mean less journalism—or even less great journalism. Web journalism is thriving. So is magazine journalism. Public radio is bigger and better than ever. It's true that they're not the same as newspaper journalism. Certain wonderful kinds of newspaper stories don't get done anymore. On the other hand, it doesn't mean they're worse. I like [Thomas Edsall](#) even more as a blogger and political analyst at the Huffington Post than I did when he was a campaign-finance reporter for the *Washington Post*.

Now you've made me talk about all the newspaper stuff I vowed to avoid! Let's get back to the show. I've forgotten: What was it that Cedric Daniels did wrong, deep in his past? (It's the *All the King's Men* subplot: Everyone, even Saint Cedric, is dirty: "Man is conceived in sin and born in corruption.")

David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 3: I Will Not Be Criticizing the *Baltimore Sun* Plot Today
Posted Tuesday, January 22, 2008, at 11:38 AM ET

Dear David,

Sorry, I don't see the *All the King's Men* subplot. Cedric Daniels is the personification of rectitude. I like the character, but he always struck me as one of David Simon's less complicated creations. Maybe I'll be proven wrong, but this episode of alleged corruption buried in Daniels' past seems to be a bit of a red herring. I can't even remember what it was he's said to have

done wrong; I think the allegation dates to when he ran McNulty's squad. Now you're forcing me to watch all of the first season again.

I would like to get back to Snoop and Omar and Butchie (what a man, huh?—though they should have tried water-boarding; it's quite effective, according to many Republicans), but I have to say this, in light of the firing of the editor of the *Los Angeles Times*: I will not be criticizing David Simon's *Baltimore Sun* plot today. The truth is, the battle between David Simon and the Tribune Company is the battle between the Forces of Good and the Forces of Evil. The Forces of Good whine a lot, but I'll take David Simon's whining over corporate pillaging, gladly. There's an astonishing quote today from David Hiller, the publisher of the *L.A. Times*, who fired the editor (who—and this shows you how bad things have gotten—was the corporate lackey put into the editorship after the previous editors were shit-canned for standing up for their newsroom) and who will be held responsible by God for the gutting of a great American newspaper. Hiller asked, "Can you solve the newspaper industry's problems by spending more? It's an attractive theory, but it doesn't work."

Of course it doesn't. Spending more money to gather more news and hire better reporters couldn't possibly help the newspaper industry, could it?

What a barbarian. David Hiller is the Marlo Stanfield of daily journalism.

Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 3: Would Somebody Please Give Daniels a Sandwich?
Posted Tuesday, January 22, 2008, at 12:34 PM ET

Dear Jeff,

One big difference: Marlo is a *West* Baltimore gangster trying to muscle in on the *East* Side, while Hiller is an *East* Side tough trying to muscle in on the *West* Side. (Also, I suspect that Hiller would be perfectly comfortable talking up a French-speaking bank clerk.)

Nothing more from me today about *The Wire* and the state of newspaper journalism. I'm going to leave that to my colleague, *Slate* media critic Jack Shafer. I mentioned Jack's views on

newspaper nostalgia in [my last entry](#), and I'm happy to report that he is going to write a piece today about David Simon's critique of the newspaper business. Since Jack is so much smarter than I am about this subject (and most others, for that matter), I'll read his piece to find out what I really should think.

I agree that Daniels is one of *The Wire's* thinner creations. (Thinner in all ways: His cadaverous frame, which is meant to suggest that rectitude you're talking about, mostly makes me think: "Someone give that man a sandwich.") That said, his mysterious ugly past is what makes him more than just a stick figure. Like Judge Irwin, he is haunted by a sin that could destroy him. At the same time, that sin—and the deep shame he feels about it—may be what turned him into the upright cop he has become. *The Wire* is brilliant in giving us characters who sin and overcome it, or rather, harness it to redeem themselves: Cutty, Carver, Daniels, to name a few. And they are all the more persuasive because they stand next to the weaker men, such as Herc, who refuse to own their sins.

Later,

D

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 3: Who Doesn't Like a Blind Bartender?
Posted Tuesday, January 22, 2008, at 4:52 PM ET

Dear David,

The people of America—including the .00003 percent who watch *The Wire*—can rest easy now that Jack Shafer is going to weigh in on Simon. Prediction: Jack pisses him off.

This means, I suppose, that we can go back to talking about the show next week. Which is a relief, of course. A thought struck me not long ago, a dangerous one: Perhaps the weakness of the *Baltimore Sun* subplot is not Simon's fault, but ours. And by "ours," I mean all of us in journalism. Maybe we're just not that interesting; David Simon can't make us interesting; David Milch couldn't make us interesting; maybe even David Chase himself couldn't make us interesting. Well, maybe he couldn't make me interesting. You, he could build a show around.

An amendment to an earlier post: Alert reader (and Jack Shafer [acolyte](#)) Ryan Grim points out that, though Butchie was not water-boarded by Chris and Snoop, he was in fact "liquor-boarded," before he was shot in the legs and then murdered. Butchie's demise was unfortunate—who doesn't like a blind

bartender?—but at least it brings Omar back into our lives, and, with any luck, Omar's return will set off all sorts of conflicts between Marlo and Chris and Prop Joe and Slim Charles and Cheese, all of whom are much more interesting than the sad-sack denizens of the *Sun* newsroom. As Mitt Romney recently said, "Woof woof."

Jeff

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 4: Cheese Must Die!
Posted Monday, January 28, 2008, at 10:29 AM ET

Dear David,

Cheese must die! I feel very strongly about this, which is why I placed an exclamation point at the end of the previous sentence. Also, Marlo and Chris, but to repair a tear in the moral universe, Cheese must die, not only for betraying his uncle, Proposition Joe Stewart, but for participating in what we assume was the torture-murder of the man who invented the Swanson Hungry Man TV dinner. You know, it's a damn shame that Method Man, a stalwart of the remarkable Wu-Tang Clan, was cast as the most unspeakable bastard on *The Wire*. I'll never listen to *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)* the same way. Not that I've listened to it in 10 years, but you get the point. What next? The RZA as a stoolie? (For the moment, [he has my old job](#) at *The New Yorker*.)

Sorry, back to the coldest execution scene this side of Abe Vigoda. Actually, colder, because, really, did you care that much about Tessio? Clemenza, yes, of course, but Tessio? I liked Abe Vigoda (still alive! www.abevigoda.com) better in *Fish*, anyway.

That was an extraordinarily powerful scene, the martyrdom of Prop Joe. "Close your eyes. It won't hurt none," Marlo said, and my blood froze. It's true that Tom Hagen's "Can't do it, Sally" marked one of the most unforgettable moments in *The Godfather*, but Marlo seemed to actually embody the Angel of Death. Prop Joe's murder also has a metaphorical power missing from Tessio's demise. What we just saw, I think, was a David Simon op-ed on the miseries of capitalism. The rising young executive learns what he can from his elders and then kills them. In corporate America, the murder victim is left alive, as opposed to what happens in the New Day Co-Op (there's an organization that just ceased to exist—I'll bet my lungs on that), but except for that technical issue, it's the same thing.

I think we can spend all day unpacking the meaning of Prop Joe's execution, but let me make one larger point: What we saw

in the undoing of Prop Joe was *The Wire* at its best. What we saw in the *Baltimore Sun* subplot this time around was *The Wire* at its worst. Prop Joe and Slim Charles and all the rest are complicated people; it's too bad David Simon couldn't make the newsroom similarly complicated. The editors of the *Sun* aren't characters; they're walking indictments. The low moment came when Klebanow warned Gus against cursing in the newsroom. Ridiculous. I'm not saying that once or twice between John Peter Zenger and now, some shmuck in some newsroom somewhere warned a colleague about the use of foul language. But for fuck's sake, that was the most unbelievable thing I've seen in *The Wire*'s five seasons.

Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 4: No Cursing in the Newsroom
Posted Monday, January 28, 2008, at 11:01 AM ET

Dear Jeff,

It's not just Prop Joe who got did this week. All the chunky old veterans were kicked to the curb. Joe got a bullet in the brain. Plus-size police commissioner Ervin Burrell got a plaque. And spare-tired police reporter Roger Twigg got a final scoop and one last byline. (Oh, and Hungry Man, who's not fat but is, apparently, hungry, got it worst of all.) Each was a victim of the octopuslike system that Simon believes is destroying America. The younger, colder Marlo—the living embodiment of conscienceless capitalism—sucks every bit of useful information from Joe before corpsing him. The mayor who cares for nothing but his own political ambition chops down Burrell, but not for any principled, improve-the-city purpose. Toolish editors Whiting and Klebanow force Twigg to quit, simply to serve their rapacious corporate masters.

(I also think it's sly that the fat old-timers are replaced by the lean-and-hungry: Marlo has never consumed anything but a lollipop on the screen. And as I wrote last week, Burrell's heir-apparent Daniels suffers from an acute case of manorexia.)

I totally agree about the power of the Prop Joe-Marlo drama. And I love watching Carver's frustration over the disintegration of his department, at the very moment his career is taking off. But I continue to puzzle over practically everything else. The fake serial killer story line is increasingly operatic and mannered: What did you make of that Hieronymous Bosch spectacle in the homeless encampment? A bit too much, if you

ask me. And as you say, the no-cursing-in-the-newsroom speech defied belief (though, even as I write that, I am betting we get e-mail from at least one reporter who's been on the receiving end of such a lecture from some newspaper-chain middle manager).

My favorite moment of the episode: when Prop Joe and Herc are waiting around in lawyer Levy's office and Joe tells Herc that he and Burrell attended high school together, back in the day (a connection, incidentally, that is meant to foreshadow their simultaneous downfalls). Prop Joe says of Burrell, in that inimitable Jovian drawl: "Ervin was a year before me at Dunbar. He was in the *glee* club."

Yours without profanity,
David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 4: Is My Intuition Growing Stronger, or Is *The Wire* Just Getting More Obvious?
Posted Monday, January 28, 2008, at 12:06 PM ET

Dear David,

Yes, that glee-club line was great. You remind me of something—it was immediately clear to me that Marlo and Herc were put in the same room, Levy's waiting room (speaking of Levy, where's Abe Foxman when you need him?), for a reason. Don't you think Herc is going to use his proximity to Levy to try to bring down Marlo? Is my superpower of intuition growing even greater, or is *The Wire* just becoming more obvious? Prop Joe's demise, in retrospect, was foreshadowed a million different ways. His murder was still a powerful and elegiac moment, but we were clearly meant to see it coming.

Interesting point about Burrell, though I'm not sure the analogy sustains itself. Unlike the heroin distributor Prop Joe, Chief Burrell deserved his fate. And Cedric Daniels is not the bureaucratic equivalent of Marlo Stanfield. Still, you make a compelling point about heartlessness. The world of *The Wire* often reminds me of a keen observation of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who once wrote, in lamenting the moral condition of modern man, "Living in fear he thinks that the ambush is the normal dwelling place of all men." Welcome to David Simon's Baltimore.

That said, I thought last night's tour of the homeless demimonde was a bit ripe. And McNulty's shenanigans are becoming more and more unbelievable. It's only a matter of time before the

scheming reporter Templeton and the wackadoo McNulty marry their ambitions, don't you think?

Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 4: Marlo Isn't the Bagels-in-the-Boardroom Type
Posted Monday, January 28, 2008, at 2:40 PM ET

Dear Jeff,

Sure enough, within five minutes of [my last entry](#) going live, I received e-mails from two reporters who've been chastised for their excessive profanity. One of them, *York Daily Record* [columnist](#) Mike Argento, writes, "An editor pulled me into a conference room and gave me a little lecture about swearing in the newsroom, that one of the editorial assistants, who was religious, complained mostly about taking the Lord's name in vain. Others also received the talk. Didn't do any fucking good."

Do I think Herc is going to help bring down Marlo? No chance. It's Marlo's cash that's keeping Herc in suits and bottled beer. And if there's anything we've learned about him in the past few seasons, it's that he's too stupid and amoral to do anything right.

You know what I'm going to miss most now that Prop Joe's dead? The co-op meetings. (I'm guessing that Marlo is not going to be a bagels-in-the-boardroom kind of drug lord.) Ever since Stringer Bell's funeral home assemblies back in Season 3, the drug dealer councils have been *The Wire's* funniest scenes, hilariously juxtaposing the aspiration for managerial order with the reality of criminal violence. Come to think of it, wasn't [the best scene in *The Untouchables*](#) the board meeting when Al Capone beats one of his lieutenants to death with a baseball bat? There's something inherently compelling about the combination of crime and bureaucracy (which is also why that [Wannsee conference movie](#) was so gripping, too). The choice line from the final co-op meeting comes from titty bar owner Fatface Rick, advising his fellow hoods to: "Buy you some property, hold on until the white people show up, and make a killing."

We're clearly not watching *The Wire* as carefully as our readers. Several wrote me to point out that the goateed guy boozing in the homeless encampment was Johnny "Fifty," Ziggy's friend from Season 2, who helped "misplace" cargo on the docks. He must have lost his union card after the cops busted Sobotka's fraud operation.

David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 4: Copy Desks: Indispensable in Real Life, Not Thrilling on TV
Posted Monday, January 28, 2008, at 4:59 PM ET

Yes, thank God for *Wire* watchers. They've called us out a couple of times.

So far, only two reporters who've been chastised for profanity? Sort of proves our point. Maybe we should get this up on [Romenesko](#) and see what comes in over the transom there.

On Herc, you're forgetting that Marlo got him fired, by stealing the surveillance camera. I'm not suggesting that Herc would be motivated by selfless idealism to trap Marlo; revenge is enough to get him going. Speaking of *The Untouchables*, did you notice the obvious nod in Capone's direction during the final meeting between Chief Burrell and Cedric Daniels? The chief picked up his golf club and started smacking his palm with it, just to the east of Daniels' head. I don't mind this at all, nor do I mind the obvious *Godfather* echo in the killing of Prop Joe. What I mind is the [Schoolhouse Rock](#) homage every time we visit the *Sun* newsroom. Copy desks are indispensable in real life, but they are not exactly thrilling on HBO. I have a premonition that this is only going to get worse as the season goes on.

So, have you ever been dissed by the *Washington Post*?

Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 4: How Does Omar Find So Many Perfect Observation Posts?
Posted Monday, January 28, 2008, at 5:46 PM ET

Dear Jeff,

Not just two—I've now heard from four potty-mouthed journalists who were slapped by bosses. Let's see if Romenesko turns up more.

My wife, Hanna Rosin, chastises me for pooh-pooing your idea that Herc will take down Marlo: She observes that "one thing that happens predictably this season is that everyone switches places: McNulty trades with Bubbles (one addict up, another

down); Kima becomes the baby-sitter; Lester goes dirty; Carver switches on a dime from protector to snitch."

We haven't talked about Omar's return. First of all, was that Michael he saw when he was spying from the window? Second, how does Omar find so many perfect observation posts? Isn't that a little convenient? (Remember how he also had a window on Marlo's secret hideout?) And, finally, I want to call out Omar's ambush of Slim Charles, which was a thrilling scene. (Partly because it was filmed as if by a security camera, as [Fray poster Isonomist notes](#).) Slim Charles' brush with death reminded me of a panel I moderated six months ago at a D.C. film festival. Anwan Glover, who plays Slim Charles and is [a D.C. go-go star](#), was one of the panelists. He had that week finished filming Episode 4. He wouldn't reveal anything about the season's plot, but he did say that his character was still alive. Now that we've seen it, I realize he must have been mighty pleased to have gotten through the episode alive—especially when he learned what had happened to fellow cast member [Robert Chew](#).

I've never been dissed by the *Washington Post*, because I was never good enough to get in the door for an interview. (And then Hanna worked there, so I could blame their lack of interest in me on their nepotism rules.)

Talk to you next week,
David

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 5: Omar Goes Too Far

Updated Monday, February 4, 2008, at 10:38 AM ET

Jeff,

So Omar is Batman now? He can dodge a hail of bullets, then fly off a fifth-story balcony, and slip away? *The Wire* has always allowed itself a little magical realism when it comes to Omar. Alone of the show's characters, he's allowed to exist outside the normal laws of space and time. We've seen that in small ways (last season's impossible, catbird-seat observation post) and large (his hilarious gunslinger duel with Brother Mouzone in Season 3). It's as though David Simon has decided, perhaps as a present to Omar's many fans, to suspend the show's otherwise ruthless realism when he walks on camera. That said, I fear the balcony escape stretches the Omar Rules too far.

I can explain in one word why this episode disappointed me so much: McNulty. I've already mentioned [my puzzlement over](#)

[Jimmy's too-fast decline](#) and my frustration over the serial-killer fabrication, but it's something else about him that's troubling me: The show drags whenever Dominic West is on the screen. He lacks the unexpected, living, three-dimensionality of practically everyone else on *The Wire*—from Bunk to Carcetti to Marlo to Dukie. West's McNulty is a dead weight, and I think this season is suffering in direct proportion to the amount of time he spends on the screen. (Also, my friend Jessica Lazar asks a great question: If McNulty is such a drunken wreck, why does he always look so natty? He dresses dandier and dandier every episode.)

Let me return to another point [I made a few weeks ago](#), about this season's over-preachiness. There was a stark example of that this week, in the heartbreaking scene between Cutty and Dukie. Having failed as a boxer, Dukie is finally realizing that he's not made for the streets, that he'll never have it in him to fight. (Boy, did I identify with him at that moment!) Cutty gently encourages him, saying that he has the intelligence to make something of himself. Dukie pleads, "How do you get from here to the rest of the world?" And Cutty answers, "I wish I knew." It's a beautiful scene, a perfect scene. But for reasons inexplicable, it continues. Dukie and Cutty are shot from behind as they leave the warm safety of the gym and enter the dark city. As they walk, they conduct a cliched, obvious version of the conversation they have already had. ("All I got is hopes and wishes ...") Not for the first time this season, I muttered, "They need an editor!"

Enough griping. Here are some favorite moments for this week. When Chris asks Marlo how Vondas took the news of Prop Joe's death, Marlo deadpans, "The man overcame his grief." Norman cautions the mayor not to celebrate the Clay Davis indictment: "You don't dance on Clay's grave unless you are sure the motherfucker's dead." And as for Davis himself—what a show! His talk-radio spiel was a hypnotizing monologue, and he also uttered the longest "sheeeeeee-it" in the history of *The Wire*.

Finally, big ups to you, [for predicting both](#) that Herc would betray Marlo and that McNulty and Templeton would merge their crazy fabrications. Also kudos to David Simon, who proved both of us wrong about newsroom cursing. Both of us doubted that any journalist had ever been chastised by a boss for excessive profanity, but [we invited our colleagues](#) to correct us. During the week, [Romenesko's Letters column](#) and my inbox crammed with stories from journalists who had been rebuked for their dirty mouths. I also liked all the letters celebrating the importance of vulgarity to the newsroom. I particularly recommend [this story](#), whose punch line is, "Thanks, sheriff. Now I owe you TWO blow jobs."

David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 5: I Called Marlo
Posted Monday, February 4, 2008, at 11:22 AM ET

Dear David,

I'll forgive David Simon the Flying Omar, and I'll forgive him McNulty's unexplained and uninteresting descent into professional and personal lunacy, but I won't forgive him for making me watch *Shattered Glass* again. Don't get me wrong—it was a good movie about a bad ex-friend of mine (and, as a bonus, the excellent Chloë Sevigny played your excellent wife). But I'm bored by stories of pathological fabricators, not because they don't exist (though I doubt they exist in numbers—ready, set, go: Stephen Glass, Jayson Blair, Mike Finkel, and ... who else, exactly?) but because they don't tell us much about the ailments of modern journalism. This was the promise of the fifth season of *The Wire*, that David Simon would take apart journalism the way he took apart public education and the decaying big-city economy. We were meant to be getting a sophisticated look at the demise of daily journalism, besieged by the Internet and by venal media companies. Well, what we've got is a newspaper edited by a pair of impossibly shmucky editors who seem, in 2008, unaware of the existence of the World Wide Web and who have in their employ a reporter who is doing something no fabricator, to the best of my knowledge, has ever done: manufacturing information about an ongoing homicide investigation. Put aside, please, the fact that said investigation is a sham as well; the reporter, Templeton, doesn't know that. Is this what David Simon really wants his viewers to believe happens at major newspapers? Is he that blinded by hate for the *Baltimore Sun*?

As you can tell, I am, like you, dispirited by the McNulty subplot, though I don't think it has quite gone off the rails yet. There were a couple of redeeming moments in this episode—for instance, the look on McNulty's face when he realized that Templeton was scamming the bosses at the *Sun* in much the same way that he was scamming his own at homicide. But most of the time, I thought I was watching *CSI: Baltimore*. That is to say, when I didn't think I was watching [Schoolhouse Rock again](#). What's all this talk about gerunds? Do you know actual editors who talk this way? The cops on *The Wire* talk like cops (best line of the night: Bunk accusing McNulty of being "nut deep in random pussy"), so why can't the editors sound like editors? None of the editors I've worked with, including the quietly persnickety David Plotz, would ever criticize me for the inappropriate use of gerunds. And not only because I've got a Ph.D. in gerundology.

There was one great, true moment in the newsroom, by the way, great not only because it was fleeting and subtle, but because it got at something real about journalism, which is that we miss much of what happens in the world. You'll recall the moment when Alma is running down the list of homicides and mentions a "Joseph Stewart," shot in his dining room? Gus tells her to give him two paragraphs on each killing, and off she goes. Baltimore's most important drug dealer, murdered, and he gets two grafts, because his name rings no bells. That's journalism.

By the way, I called Marlo's cell phone: (410) 915-0909. I was hoping someone would answer so I could test my bad Greek accent, but there's no service on the line.

Best,
Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 5: An Obit for Hungry Man
Posted Monday, February 4, 2008, at 3:30 PM ET

Dear Jeff,

That's disappointing about Marlo's phone. I was hoping they would use the number for opportunistic *Wire* marketing, selling [ringtones from Anwan "Slim Charles" Glover's Backyard Band](#) and vintage copies of the *Baltimore Sun*, from back when David Simon was still working there.

Gus and Alma's exchange about Joseph Stewart was wonderful. In fact, it may have been even better than either of us noticed. Reader Joshua Levine writes in an e-mail that "one of the other four (?) names [Alma] cited was 'Hungerford,' who she said was found in some building off an alleyway (or something like that). That had to be Hungry Man, so Alma et al. were missing out on more than just who Prop Joe was." (Levine isn't certain about the exact line, and I don't have my DVD at the office to check the quote, so I hope some reader will write in with the correct dialogue.)

This is a random train of thought: Over the past five seasons, *The Wire* has shown us schools, drug dealers, politicians, unions, cops, and a newspaper. But it occurs to me, as we near its finish, that it has never really shown us young black men at work. It has brilliantly captured the no-choice lives of the young street dealers and the way in which the smartest and most ruthless of them make a career from drugs. But *The Wire* has never presented the alternative path. Many young black men in Baltimore (or Washington, or Chicago, or wherever) end up in

crime, for lack of education, skills, and opportunity. But most of them don't. The unemployment rate for teenage black males—*The Wire* demographic—is an appallingly high 40 percent, but that still means 60 percent of them are employed. Among the poorest black teenagers, some join the Army, some work fast food or retail, some learn trades, some go on to college and professional careers. (And a few make it as cops: Bunk and Bunny Colvin were ghetto kids who worked their way out through the department.) Ignoring the working world of black men means *The Wire* shorts a key and tragic point about American life. The lives of the dealers are grim, but the lives of the working poor may be sadder still. There's little glamour serving chicken on the 4 p.m. to midnight shift at Popeyes, and it's hard (though perhaps not impossible) to make a career selling sneakers at Foot Locker. The world shuts out the young men who choose to go straight, just as it shuts out those who choose to sling heroin. Only once has *The Wire* watched a black man try to enter the noncriminal job market: In Season 3, Cutty finds under-the-table work as a landscaper; in Season 4, he briefly dabbles in the growth industry of truancy enforcement. I wish *The Wire* had given us a few more young men trying to make it outside of crime, and let us see the bleakness of their world, too.

David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 5: What, If Anything, Will Be Templeton's Undoing?
Posted Monday, February 4, 2008, at 5:11 PM ET

Dear David,

Excellent point. And very liberal. It is true most young black men in the inner city do not sling drugs, even when the opportunity avails itself, and even when the economic rationale for doing so is overwhelming. There is, as you point out, a whole other world of bleakness, of black men who stay out of the drug trade but find themselves in dead-end jobs at Popeyes and Foot Locker. But here's another point: Many black men, even some who were raised in conditions of West Baltimore poverty and taught by indifferent teachers in crappy schools, wind up not merely managing a Popeyes but managing mutual funds at T. Rowe Price on the Inner Harbor or practicing medicine at Johns Hopkins. *The Wire* is meant to dramatize the inner city, and we can't fault it for its tight focus, but some things are left out. Taken in isolation, *The Wire* suggests that life in black America is unrelievedly grim. For many people, it is, but for many others, it simply isn't.

Alert reader and *Slate* contributor [Emily Yoffe](#) writes to correct my too-short list of serial fabricators; she suggests *USA Today's*

Jack Kelley as a worthy addition. She also corrects my earlier assertion that no fabricator had ever interfered in an ongoing criminal investigation. Emily writes, "Jayson Blair came down to DC in the middle of the sniper shootings and started making stuff up about the investigation. ... The prosecutors ended up having a press conference to denounce one Blair story as a total lie, but because they refused to say what was actually going on inside their office, the Times, for a time, took it as confirmation of Blair's superpowers."

I want to thank Emily for correcting my mistakes so promptly (does she do that to you, too?). She also makes an interesting point about what could be Templeton's undoing: "Don't you think that Templeton laid his own trap when he used the name of a random homeless guy as the terrified homeless father of four?" Yes, using the name of an actual live person for a fictional character did seem dumb. On the other hand, do we really think that Templeton will get caught? Hasn't David Simon made it abundantly clear that evil has triumphed at the *Baltimore Sun*? Templeton will probably end up winning the Pulitzer.

By the way, David, I've noticed very little commentary from you of late on the *Sun* subplot. Do you secretly love it and not want to share that fact with me?

Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 5: Why I'm Shortchanging the *Sun* Plot
Posted Tuesday, February 5, 2008, at 10:49 AM ET

Dear Jeff

Pardon me while I pander to our readers. Within minutes of my [last post going live](#), Peter S. dropped me e-mail with the correct dialogue from the Alma-Gus scene:

Alma: Follow-ups on the recent murders. An arrest on one, which was the domestic cutting from Hampden. No arrests on a couple of drug-relateds from East Baltimore.

Gus: OK, give me a bit for the budget line.

Alma: Domestic was a Patricia Bogus, found in her car. Drug-relateds were one Joseph Stewart, found in his dining room, and one Nathaniel Manns, found in an alley garage.

Hungry Man, presumably, is Nathaniel Manns.

Second pander: [Fray poster Sasha](#) remembered the most chilling example of a straight-arrow worker intersecting *Wire* world: In Season 4, Marlo steals a lollipop right in front of a grocery store security guard. When the guard confronts him, Marlo has him killed.

Third and final pander: I'm shortchanging the *Sun* plot because that's what our readers want. Judging from my inbox and [the Fray](#), they think that we're obsessed with the *Sun* plot because we're journalists. And they're right. So stop being so self-involved, Jeff! Try to think about someone other than yourself, for a change!

David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 5: Hopes for the Second Half
Posted Tuesday, February 5, 2008, at 11:07 AM ET

Dear David,

You're shortchanging the *Sun* subplot because this is "what our readers want"?

What if our readers wanted you to jump out a fifth-floor window of a Baltimore apartment building?

What if our readers wanted you to stop Marlo Stanfield from boosting Tootsie Pops?

What if our readers wanted you ditch your wife for Snoop?

What if our readers wanted you to speak from now on with a ridiculous Greek accent?

Since when do you care about your readers? What do you think you're writing for, the Web?

The People of the Fray are only partially right; we do in fact (speak for yourself, Goldberg, I hear Plotz say) write about our industry because we are interested in it, but the truth is that we're supposed to write about David Simon's show, and David Simon's show has much to do with journalism. Unfortunately.

I'd like to write only about Omar's auto-defenestration, but this season is mainly about Simon's obsession with newspapering.

Halfway through, I still have hope (because, like Obama, I'm all about hope) that the newsroom drama will somehow become complicated and realistic. But I promise—if next week's episode has something interesting to tell us about Marlo or Omar or Bunk or Cedric Daniels, I'll be sure to make note of it. Before going back to complaining about the *Sun*.

Jeff

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 6: What the Hell Is Going On?
Posted Monday, February 11, 2008, at 7:27 AM ET

Dear David,

OK, I have to ask this: Am I mistaken, or did Jimmy McNulty kidnap a mentally and physically incapacitated homeless man, take his picture, and then drive him to Washington (or Richmond, Va.? Please inform) and hide him in a homeless shelter so that he could use the photo as evidence of an abduction in his make-believe homeless serial-killer investigation, evidence that will invariably, and quite soon, appear in the press and on national television, which should prompt the obviously competent shelter director to tell the police, "Why, that homeless man on television wasn't kidnapped; in fact, he's eating lunch right here," at which point the police will ask her how he arrived at the shelter, at which time she will describe to them the physical appearance of Jimmy McNulty, who by that time will probably be appearing on television anyway as the lead detective in the by-now most sensational murder-kidnap case in America, and did Jimmy McNulty kidnap this mentally and physically incapacitated homeless man in order to free several hundred dollars from his commanders so that Lester, who is already running an illegal wiretap, could unscramble the photo messages Marlo now apparently uses to communicate?

And, by the way, did Omar survive a five-story fall with only a leg injury?

And one other thing: Did Templeton really set out on a reporting trip to the underpasses of Baltimore wearing a *Kansas City Star* T-shirt?

Or am I missing something?

No, I just looked again: He's wearing a *Kansas City Star* T-shirt, all right. Is this because his "I'm a Douchebag" T-shirt was in the laundry?

David, you're a smart fellow. Tell me: What the hell is going on?

Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 6: The Sublime Bunk Moreland Soldiers On
Posted Monday, February 11, 2008, at 10:35 AM ET

Dear Jeff,

Evan threatens Lily and Lucinda with a poison syringe. Margo finds out the hostage taker is Evan Walsh. Lucinda promises to fund Evan's research offshore. Lily tries to save Lucinda. Evan is stabbed with the poison syringe. Lily blasts Lucinda for her scheming and blames her for Dusty's death. Holden admits he'd be lost without Lily. Lily feels the same. Chris tells Emily he never wants to see her again. ...

Oh, wait, that's from [As the World Turns](#).

I'm beginning to think [Wendell Pierce](#) is all that stands between this season of *The Wire* and farce. While all around him turn into parodic versions of themselves, the sublime Bunk Moreland soldiers on, exasperated by the incompetent crime lab, bullying Michael's mother to give up information about her boyfriend's death, and, in what was the most affecting scene in the episode, vainly trying to persuade a sullen Randy to cooperate in a murder investigation. Randy was the most delightful and promising of the Season 4 schoolboys—a joyful little bundle of entrepreneurial energy. His fall is as sad as anything *The Wire* has ever shown us. What's astonishing is that it takes only a few brilliant shots to show us his ruination: Randy muscled up in his wife-beater, Randy walking out on Bunk into the hellish chaos of the group home, Randy gratuitously shoving a little kid on the stairs. The destruction of an entire life, compressed into 15 seconds. Too bad it was shoved into such a stinking mess of an episode.

A quick journalistic procedural question for you, since you've been a daily newspaper reporter and I haven't: Do we really think Gus and Scott managed to check out that PTSD Marine's story in one day? Did they really manage to get the Marines to confirm that this guy was a Marine, that he has PTSD, that he was in an explosion outside Fallujah where someone lost his hands ... etc. Because judging by what my friends at the *Washington Post* go through, it would take about three weeks to get the military to confirm a story like that.

I'm sorry to see that [my prediction about Marlo and the co-op](#) came true. That was our last gathering of the drug dealer board, because, as Marlo says, "I ain't really one for meets no how."

Also, does Jimmy McNulty ever listen to anything besides the Pogues? (Not that I'm complaining: I'm going to the Pogues' D.C. concert next month.)

Your increasingly vexed colleague,
David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 6: Death of the Co-Op, Death of *The Wire*
Posted Monday, February 11, 2008, at 11:21 AM ET

Dear David,

It struck me while watching the sixth, and so far most implausible, episode of the final season that the death of the co-op signals the death of *The Wire*. How's that for a topic sentence? But think about it: The co-op was one of David Simon's cleverest inventions (the funeral home gatherings were my favorite, as they were yours, I believe). Now, he's giving us the inane, banal, and systematically unrealistic *Baltimore Sun* newsroom. Four episodes left, and hope grows dim.

Have you, by any chance, noticed that each episode now delivers some sodden journalistic cliché? Last week, Gus informed us, with knowing weariness, that "if it bleeds, it leads." Fascinating thought. This week, the judge helpfully instructs Pearlman and McNulty never to "pick a fight with someone who buys ink by the barrel." Next week, I imagine, we'll receive a lesson on the "Five Ws and How." I don't understand what's happening here. I still find it hard to believe that David Simon has nothing interesting to say about newspapering.

To answer your question, no, of course the alleged Marine's story would never pass muster in a day. Imagine this conversation between Plotz and Goldberg:

Goldberg: David, I just met a mentally ill homeless man under an overpass, and he told me the true story of the battle of Falluja in beautifully rendered detail.

Plotz: Hold the front page!

I'm not sure it would take three weeks to confirm the basics of the story, but it certainly would take a week or so just to confirm

his true identity. Besides, no capable city editor would allow this story even to come to the attention of his managing editor without doing some basic verification first, *especially* if the reporter who reeled in the story was so obviously mistrusted by his own desk. Thank you for pointing this out—I can't believe I missed the absurdity of this scene the first time around. I think I was too busy railing against Templeton's *Kansas City Star* T-shirt, which, you have to admit, *was* idiotic. More than idiotic, actually—it was insulting. We're not dumb; we get that Templeton is, among other things, a yokel and an outsider, unworthy of Simon's newsroom.

Aaargh.

At least we have the Bunk, as you note. Don't you get the sense that it will be the Bunk's careful police work, rather than McNulty's haywire scheming, that unravels Marlo? And that Michael is the thread he'll pull?

Jeff

P.S. I've got nothing for you on the Pogues. I'm comprehensively uninterested now in McNulty.

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 6: Institutional Loyalists vs. Noble Rebels
Posted Monday, February 11, 2008, at 3:38 PM ET

Dear Jeff,

I know you don't want to talk about Jimmy and Lester, but my colleague Emily Bazelon had an interesting insight about their lunatic freelance plot. Usually *The Wire* has asked us to sympathize with the rebels, to relish the way Lester and Jimmy (and Bunny Colvin, and Teacher Prez) broke the rules of the system to do good. But this season the rebels have befouled everything. Their homeless killer *mishigas* is ruining the good, institutional police work of Bunk and Kima. *The Wire* has put us in the unprecedented (and uncomfortable) position of siding with the institutional loyalists against the noble rebels.

Now that we're sliding down the back slope of the season, with only four episodes left to go, we should play the *Wire* Parlor Game. In the final couple of episodes of every season, *The Wire* generally does two things: First, it unravels the major plot complication (Hamsterdam in Season 3, the ports murder in Season 2); and second, murders a sympathetic and/or fascinating character (Wallace in Season 1, Stringer Bell in Season 3, Bodie in Season 4). So the game is: a) guess how they'll unravel the

Marlo/homeless murder/Omar mess and b) guess which beloved friend gets did.

With that in mind, here's my initial guess: Bunk's police work implicates Michael in his stepfather's murder. Feeling pangs of conscience, Michael agrees to help Bunk get Marlo, but Marlo has Michael killed first. Unfortunately, this does not help us with the homeless plot and Omar. I don't think Omar can die (because, [as we've discussed](#), he's outside the laws of space and time). On the other hand, I don't think Marlo can die either. He embodies the evils of modernity, as Simon sees them: sociopathy, lack of feeling, greed. So he can't be brought low. Yet it's hard to see how Omar and Marlo both live. So I've talked myself into a corner.

Plotz

P.S. Speaking of great Sunday-night television, I watched the Grammys last night, too, and had an entirely non-*Wire*-related question for you: What's the deal with Amy Winehouse and Judaism? Can you go find out? Our readers may not know this, but you are also the founder of [Jewsrock.org](#), the Jewish rock hall of fame. Can you please assign one your crack staffers to figure out: 1) What kind of Jew she is; 2) If there are any other Jewish rockers who have cracked up so spectacularly; and 3) Does she really recite the Shema in that crazy accent?

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 6: Predicting Who Lives and Who Dies
Posted Monday, February 11, 2008, at 4:14 PM ET

Dear David,

What kind of Jew is Amy Winehouse? My guess is a heroin-addicted Jew. With a great voice.

She's actually the offspring of London blue-collar Jewry (her father's a taxi driver), which is a fast-disappearing subset of a fast-disappearing community; and she's apparently excited—when she's not cooked—by her Jewishness. In fact, she keeps threatening to make a Hanukkah album, which, by the way, I'm all for. Winehouse would stand a good chance of introducing danger back into a once-thrilling and complicated holiday (When Elephants Attack Jews!—go look it up) that's been pasteurized and homogenized to within an inch of its eight-day life.

Interesting, very smart, point from Emily Bazelon. Maybe she's identified the reason that we've been so discombobulated by this

season. I'm particularly unhappy with Lester's transformation. He and Bunk were the moral centers of the cop-shop, and I need Lester to be Lester, not McNulty's partner in stupidity. It's strange to flip the script on us so late in the story, and it's not working. This is why I think there's still a chance Lester will trap Marlo, rather than Bunk; because if he doesn't, then he's just a shmuck, and that's a terrible way to end this show, with Lester a shmuck. What would be the argument for turning Lester into a shmuck? That the city, its oafishness, made its greatest detective crazy by denying him a shopping run to Best Buy?

Chris dies. That's my prediction. You're right about Marlo—Marlo has to live, because capitalism can't be put down, but Chris can be shed. Snoop, however, is too smart to die. And corruption most certainly won't die, which is why I predict that Clay Davis is left standing, and maybe Templeton, too. No, almost certainly Templeton: I can't imagine David Simon letting the good guys—and Gus is Simon's dashboard saint—win in the *Baltimore Sun* newsroom. For him, that would be a fairy tale.

As for Omar, I think it's quite possible Omar dies, for the same reason that Marlo lives. Omar still has a code; he's a throwback—he robs from the rich and gives to the poor, and he listens to Motown, just in case you didn't get that he's a throwback. Omar's way of life is over, and I think he could be over, as well.

Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 6: Stop Sending Me YouTube Spoilers!
Posted Monday, February 11, 2008, at 4:59 PM ET

Dear Jeff,

Actually, can you wait a second?

Dear Readers,

Please, please, please do not send me (or your friends) any more YouTube clips showing purported scenes from upcoming *Wire* episodes—particularly that monster spoiler showing you-know-who shooting you-know-who at the you-know-where. I don't know if the clips are real or if they're canny misdirections, and I don't care. Either way, they're aggravating! If they're genuine, I hope David Simon finds the guy who's been posting them and sends Snoop after him.

OK, Jeff, I'm back.

As I was writing my last entry, and thinking about how the murder of Stringer Bell capped Season 3, I remembered a fantastic story that *Wire* screenwriter and crime novelist George Pelecanos told at a panel I moderated during last year's [Filmfest D.C.](#) According to Pelecanos, the original version of the Stringer murder script had Omar urinating on Stringer's corpse. But Idris Elba, the actor playing Stringer, was quite unhappy about the pee scene and complained about it. (Although, as Pelecanos pointed out, Elba himself would not have been pissed on. There would have been a stunt double taking the stream.) Ultimately, Pelecanos said, the show's creators cut the pissing part.

David

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 7: This Is *The Wire* That I Fell in Love With
Posted Monday, February 18, 2008, at 7:01 AM ET

Dear Jeff,

Kima staring out on the moonlit streets of Baltimore and reciting this benediction to her sleepless semi-son: "Good night, moon. Good night, popos. Good night, fiends. Good night, hoppers. Good night, hustlers. Good night, scammers. Good night to everybody. Good night to one and all." What a spectacular ending to a sublime episode!

This is *The Wire* that I fell in love with. I didn't think there could be a television courtroom scene better than [Omar's testimony in the Season 2 murder trial](#), but last night's Clay Davis soliloquy, culminating with that grand gesture of standing up and turning his empty pockets inside out, topped it. If Isaiah Whitlock Jr. doesn't get an Emmy (or at least his own sitcom) after his performance this season, there's no justice. (Which, as we learned in the Davis trial, there isn't.)

You and I haven't paid much attention to *The Wire's* directors or writers, but Episode 7 was so great that I want to give all praise to novelist Richard Price (*Clockers*), who wrote it, and Dominic West, who directed it. West, who plays Jimmy McNulty, even improved his own performance. The Jimmy of Episode 7 is enthrallingly confused: anxious over his escalating fraud, gleeful at helping his colleagues advance their cases, embarrassed at his new sugar-daddy role as "boss."

A few things that stood out for me in Episode 7. First, the obsession with money. From Clay Davis' fee negotiation with his lawyer, to Carcetti's short-lived joy after raising \$92,000 for his gubernatorial campaign, to Davis' courtroom peroration, to

the judge nudging Rhonda to pick up the check, to the police department and newspaper pouring resources into their homeless-killer investigations, to Omar spurning Marlo's cash, money is the deep theme of the episode. Or rather, the fallacy of money: The police chiefs, the editors, and the mayor think money is the answer. But the dollar isn't almighty: Money can't solve a murder that never really happened.

Second: the continued martyrdom of Bunk. Did you notice how many shots of Bunk showed him squashed, as though a weight was bearing down on him? Watch those scenes of him in the office: He appears crushed in the foreground, struggling with his real police work, while the charade of the serial killer investigation plays out behind him.

Third: the lovely visual joke of Marlo's watches. The cops don't know what time it is!

I suspect that Omar signed his own death warrant this week. Correct me if I'm wrong, but Omar has never killed for sport before, never murdered an innocent. Savino isn't a choirboy, but he never wronged Omar directly. By doing Savino, cold-blooded, on the street, Omar betrays his own code. He's no longer a sanguinary angel, just an outlaw gangster. He may still have his revenge on Marlo, but he may have lost his halo of protection.

Yours with delight,
David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 7: No Room for Robin Hood in Marlo's Baltimore
Posted Monday, February 18, 2008, at 11:21 AM ET

Dear David,

Slow down there, Slim Plotz. You write as if you were watching *Chinatown*. Last night's episode had its moments—Clay Davis' moment most especially—but it also gave us more of McNulty's wearying, improbable scamming and more *Baltimore Sun* pedantry, of which this reporter is thoroughly sick.

And while I'm on a rampage, let me defend Omar's decision to shoot Savino in the head. Strike that, I won't defend Savino's killing, in case I run for office one day and someone dredges up this post as a defense of cold-blooded murder, but I would argue that the killing was of a piece with Omar's methods. That said, I agree with your previous assertion (or was that my previous

assertion?) that Omar is finished; there's no room for Robin Hood in Marlo Stanfield's Baltimore.

As you note, Richard Price and Isaiah Whitlock Jr., in the breakout performance of the season as Clay Davis (listen to me, I sound like Peter Travers), combined this week to remind us of what *The Wire* once was—a blunt, complicated exposé of the devastated American city, with jokes. Maybe it doesn't take vast courage to portray a black politician as a criminally conniving ignoramus (Aeschylus!), but the impiety of it all—the cynical nod last week to "Lift Every Voice and Sing" comes to mind—is refreshing.

I'll lay off the episode's manifest weaknesses for the moment, since you've fallen in love and I don't want to wound your tender heart, but because I can't help myself, let me point out one moment in which this episode was too clever by half. It came during the trial, when Clay Davis referred disparagingly to the prosecutor, Rupert Bond, as "Obonda." Maybe when the episode was filmed this seemed like a clever joke, but now, with everything we know about Obama's overwhelming popularity among African-Americans (and coming just several days after the Maryland primary), it fell awfully flat.

Dyspeptically yours,
Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 7: Bitey the Bloodthirsty
Posted Monday, February 18, 2008, at 12:16 PM ET

Dear Jeff,

Why be such a hater? (Or should that be *hata*?)

On the Obonda joke, cut David Simon and Richard Price some slack. Six months ago, they made a guess that 1) Barack Obama would be an important enough cultural figure in late February that they could risk a joke about him; and 2) Obama's support among black voters might be tenuous or touchy enough that the joke would make sense. They were dead right about No. 1 and a little bit off about No. 2. You really want to fault them for failing to predict the ebb and flow of the Democratic primary campaign? Do you actually think their six-month-out guess was worse than the (much more recent) forecasts by political reporters and pundits whose job it is to follow the race? I don't, and I give them ballsy points for risking the joke at all.

Yes, I share your general dismay about the linked faux serial killer/newspaper fabulist plots. (Klebanow, in particular, was ridiculous this week, more Dr. Evil than Marimow.) But given that we're yoked to these stories—this is not a Choose Your Own Adventure book, where you can start over with a different plot point—I think Simon and Co. did a dazzling job turning manure into fuel this week. As with *Hamsterdam*—the Season 3 premise that was almost as preposterous as this year's Bitey the Bloodthirsty—the unraveling can vindicate the awkward setup. The collapse of *Hamsterdam*, which gave us Bunny Colvin's disgrace, the return of crazed drug violence, and the seeds of Marlo's rise, was dazzling to watch. And while I'm not claiming that the Bitey plot holds a candle to *Hamsterdam*, I found this week's escalation at the mayor's office, police department, and yes, even the newspaper, fascinating and persuasive. It's going to be fun watching it all fall apart in the next couple of weeks.

Also, I think you're wrong that the killing of Savino is vintage Omar. He has killed while stealing from drug dealers, and he killed Stringer Bell for revenge, but I can't remember him taking out a random bad guy like that. Readers, who's right about this, me or Jeff? Is this the same old Robin Hood Omar or a new Omar?

A couple of weeks ago, I whined that *The Wire* doesn't show young black men in the working world, but this week it had a heartbreaking nod in that direction—Dukie flipping through the want ads. The jobs are hopelessly out of his reach. He doesn't even know what most of them are.

David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 7: What's More Outrageous, *Hamsterdam* or Bitey?
Posted Monday, February 18, 2008, at 12:41 PM ET

Dear David,

Cut them some slack?

If you say so. I'll stipulate that this is a minor complaint, but I think the "Obanda" reference bothered me because it represented an intrusion into an otherwise excellent subplot of the sort of faux-sophisticated knowingness that infects the newsroom dialogue so egregiously. You'll recall that this has happened before, at a story meeting at the *Sun*, where the small-talk among the editors concerned the baseball steroid scandal, except that all the supposedly sly references were six months out of date.

Speaking of egregiousness, how can you possibly believe that the *Hamsterdam* premise was as preposterous as the story line you call, quite succinctly, "Bitey the Bloodthirsty"? The first had to do with an experiment in de facto drug legalization in a small corner of the city by a thoughtful and frustrated police official. The second has formerly competent police detectives concocting from scratch the story of a serial murderer who bites homeless men on the ass, or the thighs, or wherever. I'm quite sure that, in real life, at various times in various places, thoughtful and frustrated police officials have conducted experiments along the lines of Bunny Colvin's; I have never heard of a story in which police detectives defile corpses and kidnap a homeless man, all in order to extract computer equipment from their superiors.

Since you've already asked the readers of this dialogue to contextualize Omar's killing of Savino, let me put this question out there as well: Is *Hamsterdam* as outrageous an idea as Bitey the Bloodthirsty?

That said, I will admit to something: I'm actually just a wee bit curious to see if Templeton gets caught. I'm assuming it's Gus who will go down, for questioning Templeton's bona fides (this is a guess, but an informed one, since we've all read David Simon on the real-life *Sun*), but I've become curious. But it's not the sort of curiosity I felt about the fate of, say, Bunny Colvin; it's the sort of curiosity that develops about one-third of the way through an episode of *Law & Order*.

Back to you, Bitey.

Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 7: How Marlo Stanfield Is Like Daniel Plainview
Posted Tuesday, February 19, 2008, at 11:33 AM ET

Dear Jeff,

This afternoon I took my kids to see [Roar: Lions of the Kalahari](#), an IMAX documentary at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, and, of course, it got me thinking about *The Wire*. In *Roar*, an old male lion rules a water hole at the Kalahari, with a bevy of hot young lionesses to hunt [springbok](#) for him and raise his cubs. But a younger, tougher male shows up at the hole, challenges and conquers the old king, takes his ladies, and exiles him to the desert, where he soon dies. It's the Marlo-Prop Joe story, or maybe the Marlo-Avon story, but with springbok as the bodies and the desert as the vacants.

Posted Tuesday, February 19, 2008, at 4:17 PM ET

Dear David,

It's uncanny the degree to which we think alike! As I was watching this most recent episode of *The Wire*, it suddenly occurred to me that not only is *hakuna matata* a wonderful phrase, it ain't no passing craze. *Hakuna matata*, David, is my problem-free philosophy.

You, on the other hand, think too much. What kind of job is it, exactly, being the deputy editor of *Slate*? Lots of wildlife documentaries, apparently.

I'm sorry to report that I've had nothing but superficial thoughts about this week's episode, including and especially this (recurring) one: Do not make David Simon mad, or he'll get his revenge on HBO. Obviously, he had some sort of traumatic shopping experience at Ikea. I hold no brief for Ikea, but *The Wire* does get its hate on rather obviously, doesn't it? After seven episodes, not only do I want to buy Bill Marimow a drink, I want to buy it at the Ikea cafeteria. Which I guess would limit us to Aquavit, but whatever.

I have to disagree with you—again—this week. I think Marlo made it abundantly clear what he desires, apart from lollipops. Do you remember the look on his face as he watched Chris shoot Prop Joe? It was orgasmic. Marlo craves power—specifically, the power to take away life. Remember that Chris and Snoop are merely his instruments, and remember that Chris actually seems frightened of him. I don't think that Marlo's type is so unusual, in literature or in real life (which is not to say that I know many people outside of journalism who remind me of him), and I don't find him as monochromatic as you do. He's not a machine; he is capable of deriving joy, just not the way you derive it (to the best of my knowledge). Also, he does have a nice car.

I like your McNamee-Randy analogy, by the way. I'm in the Middle East right now and haven't had the chance to watch those hearings (weirdly, al-Jazeera and Israel TV aren't covering the steroid scandal), and I didn't realize that the Republican Party had taken such a hard line against snitching. But here's the thing, in defense of Bunk, though not necessarily in defense of the Republicans who roughed up McNamee: You and I both know that we'd think less of Bunk if he ratted Jimmy out.

Hå det så bra!

Jeff

Roar made me notice something I had overlooked about this season of *The Wire*. It's perfectly obvious what the lions are fighting for: sex, food, and reproductive advantage. The male lion who triumphs gets all the lionesses and as much springbok as he can eat. But it's not at all clear what Marlo is fighting for. He has no appetites. He sucks on lollipops. He's never fooling around with hot women, never spending his money on flashy cars, never taking the slightest bit of pleasure in his achievements or even in his money. The two great capitalist villains of this year's culture are Marlo and Daniel Plainview, the vicious protagonist of *There Will Be Blood*. They are very similar, and somewhat unpersuasive, because they lack any human appetites. Yes, there is an occasional businessman who longs only for money, not the tangible satisfactions that money brings. But most capitalists—even the nastiest, most ruthless of the breed—are in it to get laid, to buy a fancier jet, to own a bigger house, to get the kids into the best school. That's why I continue to find Marlo slightly unsatisfying as a character: He represents an *idea* of pathological capitalism, but because he's an idea, he's not persuasively human. Even Chris Partlow gets a wife and kids.

And since I'm being all ponderous and philosophical, let me mention another perhaps tenuous connection, between *The Wire* and this week's [Roger Clemens-Brian McNamee steroid hearing](#). Republican members of Congress who support Clemens all but called McNamee a rat, accusing him of betraying a friend to protect himself. Their assault on McNamee is an unsettling reminder of how pervasive the "[stop snitchin'](#)" code has become. Stop snitchin' is a pervasive theme of *The Wire*, from D'Angelo in Season 1 to Randy in Season 4. And this season, we're seeing stop snitchin' through Bunk's eyes. He can't get anywhere in his investigation into the murder of Michael's stepfather. We see Bunk desperately trying to bully or cajole or trick his witnesses into revealing something, but they're smart enough protect themselves. What's so clever about Bunk's frustration is that he himself is obeying the stop snitchin' code in his own life, even as he tries to get his witnesses to break it. Bunk knows that Jimmy and Lester have faked the murders and that the bogus investigation is stealing time and money away from real police work, but he won't rat Jimmy out. The *right* thing to do would be to snitch on Jimmy and end his charade. But Bunk, like his silent witnesses, has chosen loyalty over right, and the people of Baltimore must pay the price.

With a roar, not a whimper,
David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 7: David Simon's Traumatic Shopping Experience at Ikea

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 8: Is *The Wire* Back or What?
Posted Monday, February 25, 2008, at 10:42 AM ET

Dear David,

Omar Little, RIP.

But it should have been Templeton.

Man, is *The Wire* back or what? Yes, I actually liked last night's episode. There, I said it. Are you happy?

Omar's death at the hands of an 11-year-old was pitch-perfect. A gay, shotgun-brandishing Robin Hood has no home in a city whose streets throw off boys like Kenard, the miniature killer with the dirty mouth. Kenard is the natural heir to Marlo. He's not yet dead to feeling—witness his fear and shock in the presence of Omar's dropped body—but he's the sort of prodigy that *The Wire* has been warning America about for five mostly excellent seasons. The killing of Omar by a prepubescent street imp rang entirely true, a testament to the reality of the world David Simon has created.

This was an almost entirely great episode. Clay Davis was delightfully venal; Snoop spit like a champion; Lester showed flashes of his old brilliant self—and of his deep sense of right and wrong; even McNulty stirred feelings of pity in me. Bunk, of course, was Bunk—I wish we could convince someone to give him his own show. And that visit to Quantico was comic genius. (For more on the subject of the self-serving flimflammy of FBI profilers, read [this](#) recent Malcolm Gladwell piece.)

The too-many visits to the newsroom were absurd, of course, but I've lowered my expectations to Dead Sea levels, so I half-enjoyed them, particularly the spectacle of Gus telling off the managing editor. Not because it was great drama but because I like to watch people tell off managing editors. As we discussed last week, though, if Gus were an actual editor rather than a cardboard fantasy of an editor, he would have called the Pentagon before running the story on the homeless vet, not after.

One question for you: Did you get the feeling, as I did, that Chris is going to kill Marlo? After all, Marlo did not, in fact, come down to the street to meet Omar's challenge. If Chris sees Marlo for the punk he apparently is, well, it's goodbye, Marlo.

Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 8: Why Marlo Is Safe
Posted Monday, February 25, 2008, at 11:18 AM ET

Dear Jeff,

When *The Wire* ended, I switched right over to the Academy Awards. Now that's a culture shock and a comedown: Clay Davis to Colin Farrell. On the other hand, now they're playing that [great song from *Once*](#), so I'm not going to complain too much.

Much as I would prefer to bicker with you, I totally agree about the episode's excellence and about Omar's murder. Even though Omar's shooting was the [YouTube superspoiler sent to me by a reader](#) a couple of weeks ago, it still came as a heart-rending shock. Didn't you like the way they set it up with that shot of Kenard preparing to set fire to an alley cat? Omar's death also gave us a wonderful newsroom moment: Prop Joe's murder at least rated a brief in the paper, but not Omar's. Even the Dalai Gus—who bought Google at \$70, cooks chicken soup for his shut-in neighbor, and restores the blind to sight with a well-chosen word—doesn't know who Omar is and blows off his killing.

You've been right about an astonishing number of your predictions, but I can't get behind your Chris-killing-Marlo guess. I still don't think Marlo can die: The lesson of *The Wire* has to be that the game never stops and that it always gets worse. Avon could be deposed, because Marlo was there to replace him and make the streets bloodier and crueler. But Marlo, as the embodiment of the remorselessness of capitalism, can't be killed, because there's no one who could replace him. If Marlo died, there would a vacuum: None of his lieutenants or rivals possesses his homicidal entrepreneurship. Marlo's death would leave us with that. As he's shown us time and again, he believes only in individual redemption—Bubbles, or Bunny and Namond. The city itself, and all the institutions that belong to it, can only get worse. So, I think Marlo's safe. Then again, I've been wrong about everything else.

I've been watching the decay of Carcetti with a sickening fascination, and tonight's scene between him and his wife was particularly choice. When we see Carcetti scheming with Norman and his other cronies, his relentless ambition seems natural and acceptable. Transplanted into the home, into sweet domesticity, it's revealed for the cynical sickness that it is. His wife is repulsed and disturbed by his opportunism, reminding us that we have to be, too. As I wrote those sentences, I realized

that the Carcetti/wife moment parallels the McNulty/Beadie face-off at the end of the episode: Jimmy expects forgiveness from Beadie for his professional crime (and personal sins), but she turns her back on him. It is the women, in the sanctity of home—the only safe space on *The Wire*—who can see the ugly truth about their men and their deeds.

Omar-less and rudderless,
David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 8: Could Chris Fill Marlo's Shoes?
Posted Monday, February 25, 2008, at 2:02 PM ET

Dear David,

The second-most implausible character in last night's episode, after walk-on-water-Gus (as you have already noted, he restores sight to the blind, but did you also know that, in his spare time, he invents superefficient biofuels while battling al-Qaida with thought rays?), is Carcetti's wife. I didn't see what you saw: No wife I know, including my own wife, and yours as well, would sit even semidisagreeably by her just-come-home-from-a-long-day-at-the-office husband's side as he surfs cable for images of himself, of all things. And, by the way, Carcetti's fall doesn't seem like such a fall to me; he's always been one of David Simon's most interesting and complicated characters—I don't think you could plausibly argue that he's shed all of his idealism this season in pursuit of the governor's mansion. Witness his press conference performance on the homeless. I think he's actually quite a sympathetic figure. Every successful politician in America kowtows to men like Clay Davis; they couldn't be successful without them. OK, maybe not Clay Davis, exactly, but every Saint Obama has his Rezko. Isn't this what David Simon is telling us? That everybody's dirty?

I have to ask you to reconsider my Chris-kills-Marlo hypothetical. It came to me in a flash when Marlo, obviously relieved that Omar is dead, smiles (which is bad enough) and then promises Chris a trip to Atlantic City, N.J. Chris' look just then was homicidal. Chris is obviously humiliated by the circumstances of Omar's death; a small boy did what he and his whole crew could not. Chris' anger (and, based on the evidence, he has something of a problem with anger) could redirect itself against Marlo, who, this episode proved, is not quite as tough as Chris and Snoop. After all, where was Marlo during the Omar-as-Batman shootout? Nowhere to be found. Omar may get his posthumous revenge on Marlo; keep in mind that Omar dirtied Marlo's name up and down the city before expiring. I agree with you that Marlo is obviously an adept businessman, but there's

nothing to suggest that Chris couldn't fill his shoes; he is, to invert your phrase a bit, an entrepreneur of homicide. He just has to learn Greek.

One more question, suggested to us by our maximum leader: What was the point of seeing Omar laid out in the morgue, victimized one final time, in this instance by a city bureaucrat? If it was to prove the point that the city doesn't work, well, I think the point has been made. Or was it just to allow the audience to mourn? Or get a fleeting glimpse of Omar's groin?

Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 8: I'm Stunned You Still See Idealism in Carcetti
Posted Monday, February 25, 2008, at 3:21 PM ET

Dear Jeff,

Did you know that Gus Haynes is Barack Obama's closest friend? Did you know that a beagle owned by Gus Haynes won this year's Westminster dog show? Did you know that Ralph Lauren bottles Gus Haynes' sweat and sells it as perfume?

I've always liked Carcetti's wife because of her combination of sweetness and brittleness, exactly what you'd expect from a careerless political wife. She didn't give much away in that scene last night, but you really didn't detect her unease with her husband? Also, I'm stunned that you still see idealism in Carcetti. The homeless speechifying is entirely cynical, purpose-built to humiliate the governor: He doesn't have any substantive policy to back up the gasbaggery. Carcetti has betrayed everything he once said about how he would govern: He's clinging to stats, seeking cheap PR victories, casting off allies, all in the service of his own power. What action has he taken this season that was not designed to promote Carcetti?

(Oh, I just thought of a *third* example of woman as conscience: Unlike all the male cops, Kima refuses to play along with the serial-killer sham and rebukes Lester.)

David Simon, mind reader: A few weeks ago, I rapped *The Wire* for ignoring the working world of black men:

The Wire shorts a key and tragic point about American life. The lives of the dealers are grim, but the lives of the working poor may be sadder still. There's little glamour serving chicken on the 4 p.m. to midnight shift at

Popeyes, and it's hard (though perhaps not impossible) to make a career selling sneakers at Foot Locker.

Now Episode 8 shows us Dukie trying to get a legitimate job at a Foot Locker-like store and getting ruefully turned away by [Poot, Bodie's old corner-running buddy](#).

You're right, of course, about the Chris-Marlo tension—that Atlantic City exchange was electric. I agree that the show is setting up some kind of spectacular denouement for Chris: His unease with Marlo, Bunk's DNA evidence against him, the budding conflict between him and Michael, his anxiety about his children—all of these point to some kind of showdown. So from an emotional perspective, your Marlo murder scheme makes sense. But I still don't think the worldview of *The Wire* would permit the kind of void that Marlo's assassination would leave.

The death of Marlo, taken together with the deaths of Prop Joe and Stringer Bell—and the imprisonment of Avon—would suggest that the smartest and most ruthless drug dealers really can be stopped (even if the police don't do it) and that the drug organizations really can be degraded. (You're a journalist who studies Israel: The entire premise of Israel's policy of targeted assassination is that killing the smartest and most capable leaders of Hamas will paralyze the organization because the surviving lieutenants won't be as effective.) But less effective drug gangs would mean progress on an institutional scale, and that is something that *The Wire* refuses to accept as a possibility. So I think the only way Marlo can die is if someone is established as an equally brilliant, equally ruthless heir, and none of the gangsters we've met—not even Chris, who's too pensive and moody and facing airtight DNA murder evidence—has the brains and skill to replace Marlo.

But I've been wrong about everything and you've been right, so Chris will probably pop one in Marlo's skull five minutes into Episode 9.

David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 8: If *The Wire* Doesn't Give Bunk a Victory, I'm Canceling HBO
Posted Monday, February 25, 2008, at 3:50 PM ET

Dear David,

I think what we're learning here is that you are a cynic, whereas I am the candidate of both hope and change. And if you choose

me as your nominee, I will pick Gus Haynes as my running mate.

To be fair, I've had editors, especially early in my career, who mesmerized me the way Gus mesmerizes David Simon. But then I realized that most of them were narcissistic shitbags. But maybe that's just my experience.

You haven't convinced me on Carcetti—I believe the man still wants to do good, which is why he's so interesting as a character, in a way that his predecessor in office wasn't. But you've half-convinced me on Marlo. I see your point—Marlo needs to be left standing in order to make a very important point about the futility of the drug war, among other things. And if *The Wire* doesn't give Bunk a victory, then I'm canceling HBO. Unless *The Wire* has become just irretrievably dark, I can't imagine a situation in which Chris escapes Bunk's DNA evidence, and since there's no escape, there's little chance Chris will overthrow Marlo before Bunk closes in. Of course, Chris could knock off Marlo and then Bunk could knock off Chris, but then it's a happy ending, and I don't imagine we'll be having one of those. Of course, if McNulty is allowed to die in a pool of his own vomit, or if Lester accidentally overdoses on dollhouse glue, or Bubbles becomes a heartless schmuck, then I suppose the show could safely kill off Marlo without anyone accusing David Simon of staging a cheap morality play.

Did you notice, by the way, that I said you might be right about something?

Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 8: Taking Omar Down a Few Notches
Updated Monday, February 25, 2008, at 5:32 PM ET

Dear Jeff,

First, let me respond to a reader question about whether we watch the "next week on *The Wire*" segments at the end of each episode. I *don't* watch those previews, so I may have missed some foreshadowing. Do you watch them?

Second, because I'd rather read smart *Wire* commentary than write it, I'm going to hand over this week's final entry to reader Nate Denny, who sent us a perceptive answer to [your question about the final scene with Omar's corpse](#):

I think the whole point was Simon telling us how much we've missed the point in our five years of Omar-worship. The whole episode serves to take Omar down a few notches. He doesn't get his big, badass face-off with Marlo; he gets got by the same little punk (possibly the show's most obnoxious, least sympathetic character) whose face Michael pounded last season and who has nothing better to do than torture cats. Further, a bunch of kids disrespect Omar by rifling through his pockets for souvenirs, *Sun* writers don't even realize that a legend has passed, and inept city morgue employees almost bag the wrong guy with Omar's name.

No one in the episode realizes how important Omar's passing is, and maybe that's because it's ultimately not that important. Omar is a distraction: entertainment in an otherwise bleak and weighty depiction of the death of a city. Simon puts his finger in our eye and dismisses our favorite character with nary a backward look, and he's probably right to do so.

Talk to you next week,
David

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Bonus Entry: Where "Sheee-it" Comes From
Posted Tuesday, February 26, 2008, at 3:42 PM ET

Dear Jeff,

Special bonus entry today, courtesy of our readers. We're hardly alone in our worship of Isiah Whitlock Jr.'s portrayal of Clay Davis and our delight in his trademark "Sheee-it." Reader Kevin Ray sends us thrilling archival evidence that Whitlock's "Sheee-it" predates *The Wire*. In Spike Lee's 2002 film *The 25th Hour*, Whitlock played DEA agent Amos Flood, who arrests hero Monty Brogan (played by Edward Norton). Twice during the movie—when he raids Monty's apartment and when he interrogates him—Whitlock's Flood utters the barnyard epithet with his signature drawl. Watch [the arrest scene here](#) and [the interrogation scene here](#).

This morning I tried to find a copy of David Benioff's novel *The 25th Hour*—Benioff also wrote the movie screenplay—to see

whether he invented the special "Sheee-it." I couldn't track it down, so for the moment it remains a mystery whether Benioff imagined the pronunciation, whether director Lee dreamed it up, or whether it was purely Whitlock's genius. Can anyone clear up the mystery? Also, if any of the *Wire* brain trust [is still reading us](#), I'd love to hear how Whitlock and his brilliant profanity came to the show. Did you cast Whitlock with the explicit hope of using the "Sheee-it" again, or was it just lucky coincidence that the role you put him in required cursing?

A couple other bits of delightful *Wire*-iana. First, reader Brendon Shank notes an amazing moment of life imitating television: The *Philadelphia Inquirer* is running [a multipart series about Philadelphia's homeless](#), inspired by the gruesome death of a homeless man. This is delicious because the *Inquirer's* editor is none other than Bill Marimow, former *Sun* managing editor, nemesis of David Simon, and Simon's supposed model for managing editor [Thomas Klebanow](#) on *The Wire*. Klebanow, of course, is supervising the *Sun's* special homeless investigation, inspired by the gruesome deaths of homeless men.

And, finally, let me point our readers to [an obituary for Omar Little](#). Writing for *Obit* magazine, my friend Michael Schaffer composed the story the *Sun* should have written. It begins:

Omar Little, the veteran stick-up artist who inspired fear and fascination in drug-plagued neighborhoods across the city, was shot and killed in a west-side convenience store yesterday. Police said the assailant remained at large.

Famed for his brazen robberies of area drug dealers, Mr. Little had retired from what he called "the game" a year ago, moving to the Caribbean with a new romantic partner. But he apparently returned to Baltimore this winter to seek revenge following the brutal murder of a beloved business associate ...

David

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 9: The Saddest Scene *The Wire* Has Ever Given Us
Posted Monday, March 3, 2008, at 6:46 AM ET

How my hair look, Jeff?

Omar. And now Snoop. That's too much for any *Wire*-lover to bear.

But of course her murder made perfect dramatic sense, and I'm embarrassed I didn't see it coming. Omar and Snoop were dark mirrors of each other. They were both street eloquent, but her eloquence sprang from profanity, his from the absence of it. He mesmerized with his soulful criminality; she mesmerized with her soulless murderousness. Omar was gay; I can't remember if Snoop was ever explicitly identified as gay, but she certainly suggested it. He was an independent businessmen; she was a classic organization woman, mindlessly obeying orders. It's also fitting that their young murderers are mirrors too. Kenard, conscienceless and psychopathic, kills thoughtful Omar. And Michael is at war with himself, his sweet soul blackened and hardened by his sick work: He is having exactly the kind of battles with himself that Snoop didn't.

Incidentally, wasn't that final goodbye between Michael and Dukie the saddest scene *The Wire* has ever given us? Michael cannot, or won't let himself, remember their gleeful hijinks of two years ago, because he knows that happiness can never be reclaimed, so there's no use wallowing in it. And then Dukie trudges forward into Boschian hell, his first step on his way to becoming Bubbles.

They threw that word *Dickensian* at us again, but the right literary adjective is *Shakespearean*. This spectacular episode vibrated with brilliant speechifying—Bubbles facing up to Sherrod's death, Snoop musing on how no one "deserves" to die—and Marlo roaring at the discovery that Omar had been calling him out on the street. For much of the past two seasons, Marlo has been a cipher: Snoop and Chris did so much of his dirty work that it was hard to understand why he was in charge, instead of them. The jail scene clears up any doubt. As Marlo rages at the idea that his name was mocked in the street, he reminds us of the violent intensity that brought him to power. "Let them know Marlo step to any motherfucker. ... My name is my name!"

("My name is my name" could, in fact, have been the episode's title, what with the Rumpelstilskin-like excitement when Bubbles reclaims his given name, Reginald, and finally faces up to his sorrow about Sherrod.)

Do you still think Marlo's going down? I'm not cashing in my chips just yet, but I think *The Wire*'s pointing toward exactly the ending I've expected, given the show's neo-Marxist philosophy: The only redemption will be individual. We've seen Namond's salvation; Kima and Bunk will retain their honor; and Bubbles will save himself. But at the institutional level, everything will get worse: Marlo and crew will walk free because of the corrupted investigation, and they will reclaim the streets.

You look good, boy.

David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 9: Reassessing Marlo's Putative Punk-Assedness
Posted Monday, March 3, 2008, at 10:28 AM ET

David,

Your hair look fine. Now can I just shoot you in the head already?

Snoop's death didn't mark the coldest killing in last night's episode. Honors go to Kima, who just committed a multiple homicide—McNulty, Lester, and maybe even Bunk, who knew what was going on but said nothing. Maybe he wriggles out of this, but I'm not so sure. And by the way, I am, generally speaking, pro-snitching in the matter of official police misconduct, but Kima's testing my beliefs.

Snoop's murder didn't make perfect dramatic sense to me, but this may be because I was hoping to see her character spun off to a new, network-television sitcom. Something based on the *Gilmore Girls* model but with more Glocks.

I didn't see her death coming, either, to tell you the truth, and I should take this moment to revise and amend my previous comments concerning Marlo and the potential consequences of his putative punk-assedness. My belief that we would soon see Marlo's demise was predicated on an assumption (and you remember, of course, what Felix Unger said about assuming?) that Marlo *knew* that Omar was calling him out and that, even with said knowledge, he refused to meet Omar in the street. It turns out now that Marlo didn't know he was being called out. This raises questions about his leadership ability (Chris and company have obviously built a Bush-like cocoon around the boss) but not about his, shall we say, manhood.

Clearly—I'm going to regret that *clearly*, I'm sure, come the 10th and final episode—Marlo triumphs in the end, just as you Marxists would have it. Levy will discover the illegal wiretap and the Stanfield crew will be sprung from jail just as Lester is led inside. (McNulty, I assume, throws himself off a bridge.)

I found Michael's plight as moving as you did (I actually thought his parting from his little brother was the saddest thing I saw, sadder than his breakup with Dukie), but I thought the Bubbles-up-Dukie-down pairing a little too neatly TV-ish. Not that I don't root for Bubbles, mind you. I have a heart.

By the way, and I know you hate talking about this, but did you notice that the newspaper subplot has become even more ridiculous, as if that's possible? Gus hands off the investigation of Templeton to a presumably sophisticated, just-returned-home foreign correspondent who promises discretion and then immediately asks the library for everything Templeton has ever written!

It is simply impossible to believe that the reporters and editors of the actual *Baltimore Sun*, today or 13 years ago, when David Simon left journalism, could be so comprehensively stupid.

Best,
Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 9: No Escape

Updated Monday, March 3, 2008, at 11:52 AM ET

Dear Jeff,

You're mad at Kima? She's the one cop who has the courage to blow the whistle—the courage to do what she asks her witnesses to do every single day—and you're Stop Snitchin' her? She didn't push Jimmy off a bridge: He jumped himself, weeks ago. She's just alerting the coroner.

I knew this week's *Sun* scenes would be a red flag in front of the Goldberg horns. The "pull all of Templeton's stories" scene was agonizingly stupid. At least it was over quickly. (And I must confess that I'm excited to see how Simon is going to destroy Gus since it's clear that Gus must fall and Templeton must rise. On the upside, Gus will then have time to write his long-anticipated "[Letter From Baltimoringham Jail](#).")

A few years ago, a brilliant journalist named Adrian Nicole LeBlanc wrote a book called [Random Family](#) about an extended family of drug dealers, wives, girlfriends, and children in the Bronx. My favorite scene in the book is when, for reasons I can't remember, one of the characters gets a windfall or wins a prize, and the reward is a night out in New York in a limousine. (Forgive me if I mess up the details slightly—I don't have the book in front of me.) She and her friends pile into the limo and set out for Manhattan, but they can't think of anything to do. They don't know where to eat or even where to go. They end up driving back to their derelict Bronx neighborhood and hanging out on the same corner where they always hang out. It's an unbelievably powerful and grim scene about the way poverty not

only closes off avenues of escape, but even stops you from being able to imagine those avenues.

It seems to me that this is the essential theme of *The Wire* this season and perhaps in all five seasons. Again and again, *The Wire's* characters are discovering that they have nowhere else to go and also that they can't even imagine how to leave. Home in Baltimore is horrific, but the great world beyond is a mystery. The Season 4 scene of Bunny and the kids in a fancy restaurant was the most memorable depiction of this, but this season, and particularly last night's episode, has given us many more examples. There's Dukie, driven from his home once again. Michael now must strike out alone into the unknown. Omar escaped to island paradise but couldn't stay away. Prop Joe had packed his bags to leave but was murdered before he could walk out the door. Jimmy—soon to be jobless and womanless—can't escape himself. Templeton seeks his fortune at the *Post* but can't get a job. Even Gus is in some sense a prisoner, unwilling or unable to find a more congenial newspaper job because he loves sick old Baltimore too much. Only the schizophrenic, kidnapped homeless guy is allowed to leave.

You know whom I want working security at my next party? Those two guys who accompanied Chris to the drug warehouse. They were the biggest men I've ever seen!

David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 9: Mixed Feelings About Kima
Posted Tuesday, March 4, 2008, at 10:34 AM ET

Dear David,

I guess I'm a glass-half-full kind of guy. Wasn't this last episode also about escape and redemption? Didn't we see Namond on an upward trajectory? I didn't even mind his hectoring, after-school-special speech or his hair; I was just relieved that he is so thoroughly out of his mother's house. Does ABC still broadcast after-school specials, by the way? I fear the reference dates me. Just as references to *Schoolhouse Rock* date me; they make me seem as old as David Simon, for whom *Schoolhouse Rock* was obviously very meaningful, or else he wouldn't have lifted their scripts for Gus' speeches.

Adrian Leblanc's book was, indeed, wonderful. And it was also true. I assume you have seen the [coverage of Love and Consequences](#), the "memoir" of a half-white, half-Native American girl not named Margaret Jones who grew up in South-

Central, except that she didn't? A writer like that belongs in the *Baltimore Sun* newsroom.

And yes, Dr. Snitch, I'll admit to mixed feelings about Kima. McNulty's great sin here was to try to squeeze more policing money from the city; he wasn't manufacturing crimes for money or fame. I know I'm defending the behavior of a character I don't like in a subplot I think is generally ridiculous, but I can't help but notice that your great hero, Bunk (or is your great hero Clay Davis?), didn't snitch.

Maybe it's just that I'm more street than you are. You'll learn more about my background in what we call the "hood" when Riverhead publishes my new memoir, about my life as a gay black stickup artist.

Best,
Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 9: Is Namond's the Only Redemption We'll Get?
Posted Tuesday, March 4, 2008, at 12:56 PM ET

Dear Jeff,

I thought you already wrote that book: Wasn't *Prisoners* the story of Omar Goldberg, a gay, black stickup artist obsessed with Israel's security? (Can you imagine Omar in Israel? That would be a great short film.) Speaking of *Love and Consequences*, excuse me while I pat myself on the back: The minute I read the [Kakutani review in the New York Times last week](#), I sent an e-mail to my *Slate* colleagues with the subject line "I bet this book is not true."

Back to *The Wire*: If you had bothered to read my dialogue entries, you would have noticed that I wrote [a long, agonized paragraph two weeks ago](#) about the Moreland snitching paradox. But I guess you were too busy hobnobbing in the steam room with Richard Holbrooke, or bathing in organic yak milk with Harry Reid, or whatever it is you do over at the *Atlantic*.

You're right about Namond, of course, though I can't help feeling that's a pretty thin reed to cling to. After five seasons of the show, we're allowed *one* escapee (or maybe two, counting Bubbles). A couple of readers reminded me that Marlo has also spent much of this season having trouble leaving Baltimore. He had that wonderful fish-out-of-water moment at his Caribbean bank, and he has repeatedly made plans to go to Atlantic City, N.J., with Chris but never manages to take the trip.

I actually miss Namond's mom, Delonda, who was one of the great maternal monsters in screen history. She made Joan Crawford look like the mother of the year. I have a friend who worked with [Sandi McCree](#), who plays Delonda, and says she's a lovely woman in real life. I guess that's why they call it "acting."

David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 9: Bunk, Kima, and Loyalty
Posted Tuesday, March 4, 2008, at 1:17 PM ET

Dear David,

Yak milk? How did you know about the yak milk? I thought we kept that a secret.

In re: your Bunk post—don't get like that with me. Or I'm going to have to ... I don't know. Post a highly negative review of [The Genius Factory](#) on Amazon? I was going to write that I would "bust a cap in your ass," but only white people talk that way anymore, and, as one of Washington's foremost gay black stickup artists, I can't be heard talking like a white guy from Potomac.

I haven't sufficiently grappled with your previous assertion that Bunk chose "loyalty over right" by keeping silent on McNulty's hijinks because I didn't want to enter a debate I knew I couldn't win, at least not inside the excessively rational, anti-tribal culture fostered at *Slate*. And I won't now, except to say that I don't see the binary you apparently see when you hold up "loyalty" as the opposite of "right." These men are friends and comrades. Like most police partners, they have been in mortal danger together, and they have saved each other's lives. Their connection is profound. You tend to overlook the flaws of people who have actually saved your life; this is true in police work and in any army. Given that McNulty isn't pillaging, robbing, or raping; given that his crime is well-intentioned; and given that Bunk's homicide squad benefits from McNulty's scam, I don't think Bunk made the wrong choice by keeping silent. He should have counseled his partner more strenuously against such stupidity, but I would think less of him if he ran to the bosses to rat out his friend. And, by the way, in real life, I'm not sure a detective in Kima's position would rat Jimmy out, either.

There, now you know my position on loyalty. Which actually should serve you well, as an officially sanctioned friend of Goldberg. I'm even thinking of bringing you along the next time I hit one of Marlo's stash houses.

Best,
Jeff

From: June Thomas
To: Jeffrey Goldberg and David Plotz
Subject: Week 9: Snoop Wasn't Talking About a Domestic Shorthair
Posted Tuesday, March 4, 2008, at 1:41 PM ET

Jeff and David,

I appreciate you letting me stop by the clubhouse. I need the company, because it's been a tough couple of weeks for the gays. First, smoking killed Omar—after all, Kenard wouldn't have had a clean shot if Omar hadn't been so focused on his soft pack—then Michael shot Snoop. After years in which *The Wire* gave us more gay characters than all of the networks combined—and mostly black gay characters at that—Kima is the only homosexual left standing. (I refuse to treat Rawls' preposterous Season 3 gay-bar cameo as anything more than a red herring.)

David, yesterday you [wondered](#) if Snoop had ever been "explicitly identified as gay." Like all Marlo's people, she kept her private life on the down low, but in the final episode of Season 4, when Bunk said he was "thinking about some pussy," she told him, "Me, too." I'm pretty sure she wasn't talking about a domestic shorthair.

Snoop was the first convincing butch lesbian on television—a no-apologies, cross-dressing bull dyke. I wonder if Felicia Pearson will ever work again. I know [an off-Broadway show that could desperately use her butch swagger](#), but her voice is too small for theater, and she's too street even for that last refuge of *Wire* actors, *Law and Order*. (I've spotted Michael, Clay Davis, Daniels, and Bubbles recently.)

There have always been [complaints](#) that *The Wire's* writers don't do well by the women on the show, but for me Kima Greggs has always been a credible—and likable—character. I was sorry when she broke up with Cheryl—no more make-out scenes—but also because the relationship always convinced: Cheryl's annoyance that Kima should go back on the streets in Season 2 after she almost died in Season 1 was understandable, but so was Kima's frustration at being smothered. The tension between them when Cheryl wanted a baby and Kima didn't could happen in any relationship, as could the painful awkwardness of maintaining family ties after a breakup. Kima's boozing and womanizing in Season 3 wasn't as believable, but the show's writers love nothing more than parallelism, and they needed Kima to keep McNulty company on his descent to hell. She

might not be ready for family life yet—she [failed the IKEA test](#)—but she seems to know herself better now: still not ready to settle down but forging "a connect" with Cheryl's son. Snitching on McNulty, as I see it, is just another stop on her path to maturity.

And, of course, there was Omar. He had three gorgeous boyfriends—Brandon, Dante, and Renaldo—whom he loved, body and soul. He even put together his own LGBT version of the James gang. (When Tosha was killed during a robbery in Season 3, her lover Kimmy's grief was, weirdly, a joy to witness.) We homosexuals just don't get to see this stuff on television.

Unlike *The L Word*, *The Wire* never presented a glamorous fantasy of beautiful people in gorgeous clothes. Unlike 'tween shows like [South of Nowhere](#), the characters had more pressing problems than mean moms. And unlike the few shows on network television that manage to include gay characters, there were more than two of them on *The Wire*.

So, thanks, *Wire* writers. Just promise me you'll never mention Rawls' secret gay life again.

June

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Wrapped Up in a Bow
Posted Sunday, March 9, 2008, at 11:07 PM ET

Dear Jeff,

We're doing things slightly differently this week: We're both writing instantaneous responses to the final episode. After our first entries, we'll start reacting to each other's posts. And later, after we've finished up, other *Wire* fanatics on the *Slate* staff may jump into the dialogue for a cathartic farewell.

David Simon really wrapped it up in a bow for us, didn't he? I'm grateful that we learned the fate of all our beloved characters, and grateful that Simon was so kind to them (except Dukie, that is). The three final twists that I enjoyed most:

- The murder of Cheese. Cheese always represented the worst of the street, disloyal to family, stupid, loud, and sadistic. I assumed that Cheese was going to be allowed to get away with his ruthless bullying, and that his monologue would be the last words we heard about the drug dealers: "Ain't no nostalgia to this shit. There is

just the street and the game." So it was pure satisfaction when Slim Charles dropped him, taking vengeance for Prop Joe. (Slim Charles makes the new connect with the Greek, thus ending up as a tall, gangly version of Prop Joe.)

- Marlo's return to the street. It didn't exactly make sense to me—does that mean he's just going to be a low-level dealer again?—but that image of him delighting in his own blood, aquiver at being back on the corner, was haunting.
- Michael turning into Omar. Didn't Omar shoot a guy in the leg during a Season 1 stash house robbery? So it was satisfying, in a grim way, to see him reincarnated as Michael.

I remained cold to the *Sun* plot, and dubious about its premise that newspapers gleefully harbor known liars. The final episode shows us two institutions playing cover-up: The cops/mayor stand by the fake serial-killer story and ride the fake solution to glory. The editors bury evidence of faked news stories and ride their bogus coverage to a Pulitzer. The notion, of course, is that all institutions have the same vices. In its effort to indict all institutions, though, *The Wire* conflates them. Its love of parallelism—which I usually delight in—ill serves it in this case. The vices of a newspaper are not the same as the vices of a police department or a mayor's office. Newspapers do terrible things—Simon is dead right about their prize obsession and their indifference to local expertise—but encouraging liars is not one of them. As we've seen this week with the pair of faked memoirs, fabulists get caught. Newspaper fabulists disgrace their papers. No editor would willfully ignore evidence of a reporter manufacturing stories the way *The Wire's Sun* editors do. It would never be worth it. The *New York Times* and *Washington Post* would trade any number of Pulitzers to wipe the stains of Jayson Blair and Janet Cooke from their histories. (Incidentally, I nearly jumped out my seat this week when I saw a movie preview for a romantic comedy starring Scott Templeton/Tom McCarthy. It really disturbs me to see *Wire* actors out of context, as with that [new Arby's commercial featuring Maury Levy](#). But I digress.)

You know what goodbye I didn't care about? Bubbles. Whoops, I mean, "Reginald." Almost all *Wire*-heads are Bubbles lovers, but there is a small fraternity of us who can't stand him. Except for his great turn as Lear's Fool in Season 3, and his payback against Herc in Season 4, Bubbles has always annoyed me. I have found his redemption this season both preachy and boring. I'm happy he gets to eat in Sis' dining room (especially since his sister is played, wonderfully, by an old college friend of mine, Eisa Davis), but I really could have done with a lot fewer moody stares and cryptic-but-profound conversations with his sponsor.

Did you catch Simon's Hitchcockian cameo? Midway through the episode, he appeared for an instant as a reporter in the

newsroom, chewing on a pen and sitting beneath a sign reading: "Save our Sun."

Bereftly,
David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: It's Time for the Cheese Course!
Posted Monday, March 10, 2008, at 7:19 AM ET

Dear David,

First, a moment of appreciation: *The Wire* is a shockingly good television series, and I'll miss it very much. Maybe more than I currently miss *The Sopranos*. Heresy, I know, but *The Wire* was not merely entertainment, though it was, at times, hugely entertaining. Think about this: HBO, a division of the putatively soulless Time Warner, funded, for several years, a barely watched television series with nonfamous, mostly African-American actors that confronted two interconnected subjects, the collapse of the American city and the predicament of inner-city black people, that most premium-cable subscribers, and most everyone else, ignore with great equanimity. Astonishing, when you think about it.

OK, enough gasbagging: It's time for the Cheese course!

As you know, I called for Cheese's death earlier this season (which is uncharacteristic of me, because I don't go around, generally speaking, calling for the deaths of imaginary or nonimaginary people), and to have the deed done by our hometown hero, Slim Charles, was almost too satisfying to watch. Cheese's demise was sublime, and salvational. He died so that we may live—or, more to the point, that our belief in justice might live. The moral arc of the universe may be long, as Dr. King noted, but, at least with Baltimore drug dealers, it bends toward justice. You noticed, of course, that there was redemption only in gangland—the cops have proved themselves ineradicably corrupt (Valchek up, Cedric Daniels out); City Hall is gruesomely cynical (you were right about Carcetti, David), and the newspaper is populated by prize-whoring hyenas. But Slim Charles saves us. The killing of Cheese was more than an individual act of redemption; every drug dealer on the lot knew that, for balance to be restored to their universe, the braying betrayer of Prop Joe had to go. It was his final speech that killed him, a speech that could have been delivered in City Hall or in the newsroom of the *Baltimore Sun*: "When it was my uncle, I was with Joe; when it was Marlo, I was with Marlo," Cheese said, giving us epigrammatically David Simon's view of our

fallen world, one populated almost entirely by empty men with no fixed beliefs, who crave only power and money. And women, too—Nerese, a Clay Davis without those excellent teeth, is mayor now.

There's too much to discuss here, David—Cedric is a legal-aid attorney, Marlo is a vampire, Bubbles is Jesus (I suppose he's always been Jesus), Michael is the new Omar, Maryland has a gay state-police superintendent, and Maury Levy is Jewish. I had no idea that the shyster drug lawyer with the lascivious lips who secretly controls the drug cartels was Jewish until Maury started talking about mishpoche and brisket. I thought the episode laid that on a bit thick—like *Entourage*-thick.

I haven't said a word about McNulty's new career in homeless-shelter management. I'm leaving it to you to explain to me why McNulty, who is, comparatively speaking, such an uninteresting character, is treated like the dark but redemptive heart of this entire enterprise.

Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 10: Spoiler Alert! Maury Levy is Jewish?
Posted Monday, March 10, 2008, at 11:19 AM ET

Dear Jeff,

My wife, Hanna, and I were laying wagers as we watched about which character the show would end on. I bet on Michael, thinking that his degradation was the most pointless and heartbreaking in the whole five-season arc and that David Simon would want to leave us with a vision of Baltimore's future. Hanna guessed it would finish with Marlo, as the embodiment—and, in a strange way, also the victim—of the enormous, vicious forces of capitalism that are tearing the city apart. Instead, we got Jimmy and crazy Larry. I suppose this particular pairing was meant as grim commentary on the fate of the American city? Jimmy's final "let's go home" was intended to remind us—as if the previous 64 hours and 59 minutes hadn't—that only lunatics and hopeless romantics would want to make their home in Baltimore.

Our editor John Swansburg asked us—well, he asked you, but let me tee it up—to compare the conclusions of *The Wire* and *The Sopranos*. You're the world's living authority on *The Sopranos*, so I'll leave the heavy work to you, but let me offer a few opening thoughts for you to stomp on. The obvious difference in the finales is that *The Wire* told us everything and

The Sopranos refused to. We know the fate of every *Wire* character and practically every extra, too. *The Sopranos*, in what is in my view the greatest final scene in the history of the moving image, left us with pure ambiguity, the fate of its main character unwritten.

Too much has been made of the Dickensian nature of *The Wire*, but in this case the analogy is apt: What makes Dickens so incredibly satisfying—and occasionally so corny, sentimental, and heavy-handed—is his willingness to be explicit. But one side effect of the Dickensian method is that it ultimately values the overarching story more than any individual person. The internal lives of Dickens' characters are never quite as interesting or compelling as the whole shebang of plot, place, and social issue. *The Wire* has exactly the same glories and flaws.

The Sopranos is novelistic, too, but from a different literary tradition. I can't name exactly the right novelist or book—maybe it's Dostoyevsky or George Eliot or Proust (I know you or one of our readers has the right answer up your sleeves)—but it always put character first. *The Wire* was a five-season study of a city. *The Sopranos* was a six-season study of a person, Tony Soprano. It began and ended internally, in the mind of Tony. That's why *The Sopranos* was wise to end ambiguously—because no one's life ever gets all tied up, every stray thread snipped. It's always messy and open-ended. I'm Dickensian by temperament, so I loved *The Wire*'s boxed-up ending, but I recognize that *The Sopranos*' monomaniacal obsession with Tony's character may make it the more enduring show (if not necessarily the better one).

Wait, Maury Levy is Jewish?

I've occasionally wondered whether Levy isn't a *Wire* prank that David Simon is pulling on himself. Simon, who's Jewish, has cast as the show's only identifiably Jewish male an actor who looks rather like himself—middle-aged, bald, stocky, big-headed, full-featured—and then made that character the most repulsive piece of garbage in the city of Baltimore. You have to admit that's pretty funny.

David

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 10: The Major Flaw of the Final Episode
Posted Monday, March 10, 2008, at 1:27 PM ET

Dear David,

In re: the last episode of *The Sopranos*—I missed it. Was it any good? I haven't heard much about it.

I thought you were going to "tee up" the *Sopranos* question for me. Seems like you answered it, and pretty well, too. I think David Chase is Dostoevsky, and David Simon is Dickens (and Larry David is a nitrous oxide Kafka and David Cassidy is Tom Wolfe and David Milch is ... who, exactly?). By framing the question this way, you're forcing a retreat from my earlier contention that *The Sopranos* may be less durable than *The Wire*. Character studies are eternal, and Tony Soprano was the most complicated character ever to appear in a television drama.

The Wire's pedestrian, journalistic (not that the two are necessarily the same) final scene left me a little cold, and not only because it featured Jimmy McNulty, who remained, until the bitter end, exceedingly uninteresting. I don't know that I agree with your statement that the last minutes of *The Sopranos* represent the "the greatest final scene in the history of the moving image"—don't ask me to nominate an alternative, please—but it was absolutely brilliant. The last half-hour of last night's *Wire*—in particular those lingering shots of Baltimore (Look, tall buildings! Over there, container ships!)—brought to mind, more than once, [the montage song](#) from *Team America*:

Show a lot of things, happening at once,
Remind everyone of what's going on, (what's
going on?)

The minor sin of last night's episode was in its over-explication. It's not much of a sin in the scheme of things. The major sin of last night's episode was the major sin of the entire season: the soap-opera brouhahas at the thoroughly unbelievable *Baltimore Sun*. I won't beat this dead horse anymore, though. Unless you want me to.

I'm not sure, by the way, that David Simon modeled the most repulsive character in *The Wire* on himself. I think he modeled the most repulsive character on an ugly stereotype.

Jeff

From: David Plotz
To: Jeffrey Goldberg
Subject: Week 10: Saying Goodbye to My 13 Favorite *Wire* Scenes
Posted Monday, March 10, 2008, at 5:04 PM ET

Dear Jeff,

For my final entry in this dialogue, I don't have anything left to say about last night's episode. So instead let me get misty-eyed for a minute and say goodbye by remembering my all-time favorite *Wire* scenes. I was going to list 10, but I couldn't restrain myself. The only reason I'm stopping at 13 is that I have a meeting:

- 1) Omar [testifying in Season 2](#), and making a fool of Maury Levy. "I got the shotgun; you got the briefcase."
- 2) Bunny Colvin taking Namond and the other kids out to a fancy restaurant, in Season 4.
- 3) Cutty telling Avon he wants out: "[The game ain't in me no more. None of it.](#)"
- 4) Kim's ghetto version of *Goodnight Moon* at the end of Episode 7 a few weeks ago.
- 5) Omar and crew's fabulous heist near the end of Season 4, followed by Omar's selling the drugs back to Prop Joe.
- 6) [Bodie and Jimmy's meet in the garden at the end of Season 4](#), just before Bodie's murder, when Bodie gives his "This game is rigged" speech. Bodie says, "I feel like the little bitches on the chessboard," and Jimmy murmurs, "Pawns."
- 7) [Snoop buying the nail gun](#) in the opening scene of Season 4.
- 8) [Stringer Bell's funeral-home meetings](#) in Season 3, particularly his efforts to enforce Robert's Rules of Order. "Do the chair know we gonna look like some punk-ass bitches out there?"
- 9) Bunny persuading Wee-Bey to let him adopt Namond at the end of Season 4.
- 10) All of Hamsterdam.
- 11) Stringer and Avon looking over the Baltimore skyline, reminiscing about their good old days, each knowing that he just had betrayed the other.
- 12) Carver sitting in his car, punching his steering wheel, after dropping Randy at the group home.
- 13) Bunk and Jimmy [solving a murder with just the word fuck](#).

Jeff, it's been a joy and a revelation to talk about my favorite TV show with you. Let's meet again in 2017, when David Simon and Dominic West, fallen on hard times, team up to make *All Wired Up: The Wire's Hawaiian Holiday Special!*

David

P.S. I'm going to see a Pogues concert tonight. God, I hope they play [Body of an American](#) in tribute to *The Wire*.

From: Jeffrey Goldberg
To: David Plotz
Subject: Week 10: Can You Imagine Lester Listening In to the Spitzer Call?
Posted Monday, March 10, 2008, at 6:22 PM ET

Dear David,

Carcetti for governor! Of New York!

Carcetti's a dirty scalawag but quite possibly no dirtier than the current occupant of the governor's mansion in Albany. By the way, and I'm just saying, why would the governor of New York import a prostitute from New York to Washington? Is this some variant of the "They don't have any good restaurants in D.C." crap we hear from our New York friends? I'll have everyone know that we've got many high-quality whores in Washington, D.C. Some of whom even have sex for money.

But I digress. Though not that much, when you think about. Even though I shouldn't prejudge, let me suggest that the sordid tale emanating now from New York suggests that David Simon understands quite a lot about our public servants and about wiretaps. Can you imagine Lester listening in to the Spitzer call? Can you just picture the smirk?

David, you've cataloged many great moments on *The Wire*. Snoop's visit to the hardware store was just mesmerizing. Let me suggest only that we add Clay Davis' magnificent turn on the witness stand earlier this season. And nearly every scene that has ever featured Bunk. He's quite obviously my favorite. I hope Wendell Pierce never retires this character. And I hope—clear the decks, I'm expressing something sincere here—that we see the entire cast of *The Wire* flourish in the years to come, and not only so we don't have to watch them on *Dancing With the Stars*. The writers will flourish, there's no doubt. But one of David Simon's great achievements is the cast he assembled. They've worked wonders.

David, it's been great fun talking about *The Wire* with you. But now that it's over, we can get back to our real jobs, running hookers out of the Mayflower Hotel.

Best,
Jeff

From: Andy Bowers
To: Jeffrey Goldberg, David Plotz, and *Slate* staff
Subject: Week 10: Listening in on *The Wire*
Updated Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 10:50 AM ET

Dear David and Jeffrey,

OK, so nothing's going to eliminate the *Wire* withdrawal we're all feeling. But here's a way to take the edge off—settle down for several hours with the show's actors and writers.

If there's one institution that comes close to *Slate* in its obsessive *Wire*-philia, it's public radio. The show's cast and creators have become staples on the member-supported airwaves. *Fresh Air* listeners who don't happen to watch *The Wire* must be incredibly bored with all these gushing interviews, chewing over every minute detail of plot and character. To them I say, tough luck: Go rent the damn DVDs, like your [tiresome friend](#) has been nagging you to do since Season 3, and revisit this post when you're as hooked as the rest of us.

For us fans, the public-radio archives hold many must-listen gems. Below is a list of my favorites. Hearing the laconic baritone of Marlo Stanfield on WNYC gave me an icy thrill. (OK, so it's really an interview with Jamie Hector, who plays Marlo, but who cares—that *voice*!) And you truly must hear the fantastic exit interview with series creator David Simon by über-fan Terry Gross from a few days ago. Also below are discussions with Bubbles, Bunk, Chris, Lester, Snoop, co-executive producer Ed Burns, writers George Pelacanos and Richard Price, and the show's music supervisor, Blake Leyh.

You can listen to all the interviews online, and where available I've included a link for downloading an MP3 version:

Series creator [David Simon](#) and co-executive producer Ed Burns take calls about the *Wire* finale on NPR's *Talk of the Nation* (March 10, 2008):
[Online](#)

David Simon on NPR's *Fresh Air With Terry Gross* (March 6, 2008):
[Online](#) | [Download](#)

Gbenga Akinragbe ([Chris Partlow](#)), Jamie Hector ([Marlo Stanfield](#)), Clarke Peters ([Lester Freamon](#)), and music supervisor Blake Leyh on WNYC's *The Leonard Lopate Show* (Jan. 30, 2008):
[Online](#) | [Download](#)

Michael K. Williams (Omar) on Fresh Air With Terry Gross (Jan. 22, 2008):
[Online](#) | [Download](#)

Wendell Pierce ([William "Bunk" Moreland](#)) and Andre Royo ([Bubbles](#)) on PRI's [The Sound of Young America](#) (Jan. 7, 2008):
[Online](#) | [Download](#)

Felicia Pearson ("[Snoop](#)") on WNYC's *The Brian Lehrer Show* (Dec. 14, 2007):
[Online](#) | [Download](#)

[Ed Burns](#) on NPR's *Fresh Air With Terry Gross* (Nov. 22, 2006):
[Online](#)

David Simon and writer [George Pelacanos](#) on *Fresh Air* (Sep. 23, 2004):
[Online](#)

RELATED:

Wire writer Richard Price talks about his new novel, *Lush Life*, (and about writing for the series, starting at 16:25) on *Fresh Air* (March 5, 2008):
[Online](#) | [Download](#)

Video of David Simon speaking at Loyola College on the "End of the American Empire" (2007):
[Part 1](#) | [Part 2](#) | [Part 3](#)

Wire writer George Pelacanos on PRI's *The Sound of Young America* (March 25, 2006—interview begins at 28:37):
[Download](#)

[Print interview](#) with Robert Chew (Proposition Joe) at the *Fader*.

[Print interview](#) with Lester, Bubbles, Daniels, Kima, Marlo, Omar, and Bunk from the *Los Angeles Times* (note to the *Times*: Seriously, you couldn't have posted the audio or video of this amazing gathering?).

Best,
Andy

From: Melinda Henneberger
To: Jeffrey Goldberg, David Plotz, and *Slate* staff
Subject: Week 10: Sometimes It's the Stuff That Actually Happened That's the Least Convincing
Posted Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 11:48 AM ET

David Simon, you crazy romantic, what a tender send-off. And David Plotz, you lucky man, so confident in the notion that our nation's finest news organizations would never harbor any suspected bad guys. They do, though—right up until they don't, just like governments and churches and every other business on earth. Reporters at *USA Today* had been warning the honchos there about [Jack Kelley](#) for years, yet their complaints were written off as jealous backbiting even as he filed wild tales like the one in which multiple heads rolled down the street in Jerusalem with [eyes blinking](#)—a story that helped make him a [Pulitzer finalist](#). So everything Gus said in this last episode rang true to me. And in what universe do all the wrongdoers ever get caught? If the last seven years have proved anything, it's surely that [the bigger the lie](#), the more they really do believe.

Yet on the screen, sometimes it's the stuff that actually happened that's the least convincing. My husband, for instance, thought that "bigger the lie" scene in the first episode, where Bunk fools a first-time suspect into believing in "guilt you can Xerox," was the only false note all season. I argued that, no, back in my cop-shop days, police laughed all the time about fun with polygraphs—and as it turns out, the scene is taken straight out of Simon's book *Homicide*. If there was one thing I personally never heard of, it was anybody being forgiven, ever, after talking to internal affairs. Still, it was satisfying—and even emotionally necessary, in a way—to see McNulty and Lester decline to hold a grudge against Kima.

In the finale, every character reaches his limit and makes his decision: Cedric says no more games with crime stats and leaves the department. Slim Charles cannot hear one more word out of Cheese and blows his head off. Marlo has a panic attack at a fancy cocktail party and is relieved to get back out on the corner where he can bleed in peace. And Gus turns in the newsroom criminal, knowing full well it's Mr. Pants-on-Fire who'll be believed. (True, St. Gus, as you guys call him, is as incorruptible as, oh, Oliver Twist. But the last time I had a moral crush on a TV character who seemed too heroic to be true, it was [Matt Santos](#), and he turns out to have been modeled on Obama—so, hey, *espero que si, se puede!*)

All the characters who make the right call suffer for it but are OK with the consequences—Cedric and Rhonda, Gus and Alma, even Jimmy and Lester, who choose to retire rather than get paid to do some nonjob. Those who make the wrong choice, on the other hand, are rewarded—or, if you prefer, punished with ill-gotten success: The paper takes home the prize but misses the story. Though Scott Templeton will never be caught now, he's going to find the newsroom lonelier than he ever thought possible.

From the opening scene of Carcetti waving his hands around in an incoherent lather after learning there is no serial killer to the sweet parting shots of Baltimore, this finale was so lovingly put together that I actually burst into tears at the sight of David

sitting in the newsroom chewing on his pen. And how could you not love his sentimental "-30-" to "[the life of kings](#)"?

Gratefully,
Melinda

From: Emily Bazelon
To: Jeffrey Goldberg, David Plotz, and **Slate** staff
Subject: Week 10: What About Cutty?
Posted Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at 2:39 PM ET

Hey, everyone,

A few weeks ago, [I elbowed my way](#) into David and Jeff's hugely enjoyable conversation to express my frustration that, earlier this season, David Simon seemed to be messing with the moral universe he'd created. McNulty and Lester's crazy made-up serial killings seemed to suggest that the mavericks were no longer the good guys—instead, they'd gone so far beyond the bounds that they'd become a force of destruction. Which felt to me like Simon eating his young.

Now, at season's end, the world of *The Wire* has righted itself. Bunk, Kima, and Sydnor are left to represent the best of the police department—knowing, disillusioned, but also honorable. McNulty and Lester are partially redeemed, which feels like the right amount. They're making nice to the women who love them again. Lester ensnared Maury Levy, which salvages some of the Stanfield drug case and gave Rhonda that great scene of Levy smack down. McNulty refused to do Rawls' bidding and pin six murders on a crazy guy who'd done two, and then, of course, he went to rescue the poor homeless man he'd shipped out of town. And Lester and McNulty have made their peace with Kima, and she with them. [Melinda, I'm sure you're right](#) that cops rarely forgive other cops who turn them in, but, like you, I loved that scene of mutual forgiveness outside the bar. Especially because McNulty left instead of getting drunk and getting laid. At the same time, I was also with Rhonda when she told Lester that it was on him, not her, that Marlo Stanfield would walk. Who says David Simon doesn't write great women characters?

I also appreciated the last episode for saving the *Sun* plot for me, at least a bit. In moving from St. Gus and Vile Scott to reporter Michael Fletcher (presumably named for [this real and accomplished Washington Post reporter](#)), Simon partially redeemed his and our tribe in the same way he did McNulty and Lester. (Ah, more parallelism.) When Fletcher gives Bubbles the story he's written about him with the promise to pull it if Bubbles doesn't want it to run, my heart embarrassingly swelled. I don't want to hazard a guess about whether there are more

lying slime journalists or more who do their job with Fletcher's compassion, but I was relieved that this good guy (plus Alma) got to make an appearance. Which isn't to say that Fletcher would have given Bubs the out if he'd really thought his source—and three weeks of work—were about to go out the window. That felt real, too.

As a *Sopranos* fan who could only appreciate its ambiguous ending after its brilliance had been explained to me three times, I exit *The Wire* entirely satisfied. With one tiny exception: What happened to Cutty? As the ex-con-turned-neighborhood-dogooder, he deserved a cameo in that montage ending. Since he didn't get it, I'll imagine one for him: He's at his boxing gym, urging on a couple of hoppers, while a nice-looking woman his own age smiles on them all.

Emily

From: John Swansburg
To: Jeffrey Goldberg, David Plotz, and **Slate** staff
Subject: Week 10: How *Sheee-it* Started
Posted Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 11:15 AM ET

Dear All,

I thought I'd offer one final post before *Slate* bids farewell to *The Wire* for good. Editing this dialogue has been a highlight of my career. Not because it afforded me the opportunity to work with the likes of David Plotz and Jeffrey Goldberg, though that has been a special pleasure. They [learned no lessons, acknowledged no mistakes, and brooked no authority](#). They did what they wanted to do and said what they wanted to say. But in the end, they gave me good copy. If I ever were to write a serial drama, I'd want them to do the TV Club.

But, no, editing this dialogue was a highlight for a different reason. Were it not for this assignment, I would never have returned to my office one recent afternoon to find this voicemail waiting for me:

Yes, I got a voicemail from state [Sen. R. Clayton Davis](#). How can I possibly hope to top that?

A few weeks back, David posted a [bonus entry](#) in which he launched an inquiry into the origins of Clay Davis' signature pronouncement—the [now ubiquitous](#) "sheee-it." (Three e's, one i, right Gus?) I had always assumed that David Simon, great lover of [inside jokes](#) that he is, had back in his *Sun* days reported on some real-life state senator who had a penchant for drawing out the vowels of his expletives. But an astute reader had

informed David that Isiah Whitlock Jr., who played Davis, had actually uttered his first *sheee-it* not on *The Wire* but in Spike Lee's 2002 film *The 25th Hour*. This ur-*sheee-it* suggested it was not Simon's invention. So, whose was it?

I endeavored to put the question to Whitlock himself, which is how he ended up on my voicemail. By the time we connected, I knew I wouldn't be [the first to ask](#), but I couldn't resist hearing the answer from the horse's mouth. Here, by way of valediction, is the story as Whitlock graciously told it to me.

He's been saying *sheee-it* for years. He picked up the habit, he said, from an uncle who apparently deployed the word in much the same way Clay Davis did. Whitlock offered an example: "How'd you enjoy your dinner?" someone might ask his uncle. To which he would respond, "Sheee-it, I tore them pork chops up."

So, we have Whitlock's uncle to thank for the inflection, but it was Spike Lee who gave *sheee-it* its big break. Lee, having heard Whitlock toss off a *sheee-it* or two in conversation, encouraged him to [use it](#) in *The 25th Hour*, in which Whitlock played DEA agent Amos Flood (and later in *She Hate Me*, in which he reprised the role). From there, [someone on The Wire writing staff](#) seems to have picked up on *sheee-it*'s unique power. Whitlock says that when he got his first *Wire* script, it was already written into the part, extra e's and everything.

For all the talk of *The Wire*'s critical success far outstripping its ratings, Whitlock says it's not uncommon for him to be accosted in public and serenaded with a *sheee-it* from a fan or well-wisher. I asked him if this gets annoying, but he said it wasn't all that much different from someone coming up and asking for an autograph. He takes it as a compliment. Besides, he said, until recently, he didn't realize he had something of a gift. It was only after people started approaching him with hearty, adulatory *sheee-its* that he discovered there's actually an art to it. "They don't quite do it the way I do it," he said. "They kind of butcher it." *The Wire* itself, I suspect, will prove similarly hard to imitate.

Best,
John

war stories

"Fox" Fallon Wasn't Hounded Out

The Centcom commander brought about his own ouster.

By Fred Kaplan

Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at 12:48 PM ET

It's a shame that Adm. William "Fox" Fallon has [resigned](#), or been ousted, as commander of U.S. forces in the Middle East. But he brought it entirely on himself.

Contrary to the charges of some Democratic [lawmakers](#), this is not another case of an officer's dissent being stifled. Nor does Fallon's departure herald a tilt in U.S. policy toward war with Iran.

To the extent that policy disputes are behind the move, they are much more about Iraq.

Last month, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced that after the five "surge" brigades left Iraq this July, there would be a "pause" before any further withdrawals would commence. In a Feb. 27 [interview](#) with the *New York Times*, Fallon said this pause would be brief, just long enough to allow "all the dust to settle," after which the drawdown would resume. Moreover, he said, U.S. strategy would shift—focusing on "supporting, sustaining, advising, training, and mentoring" the Iraqi army, not so much on fighting or providing security ourselves.

In a [Slate column](#) the next day, I wondered if Fallon was speaking on behalf of Gates, the administration, or anybody besides himself. I have since learned, from a senior Pentagon official and from a high-ranking Army officer, that he was not. I have also learned that many of Fallon's statements on policy matters have been similarly unauthorized.

This is nothing like the case of Gen. Eric Shinseki, the Army chief of staff who had his career cut short by Donald Rumsfeld for telling a Senate committee that a few hundred thousand troops would be needed to impose order in postwar Iraq. Shinseki was offering his professional judgment on a strictly military question—how many troops would be needed to perform a mission—in response to a senator's question. Fallon, by contrast, was challenging the president's policy—and at his own initiative.

Fallon, who is one of the military's finest strategic minds, may well be right. Certainly his views match those of many senior officers. But they are contrary to the president's views, and Fallon knew this. There is [much debate](#) within military circles these days over how far, and in what forums, a general or admiral should take his disagreements with political leaders. By most standards, Fallon probably went too far, too publicly. The U.S. Constitution does call for civilian control of the military, and generally, we should be thankful for that.

It is well-known that Fallon has long been at odds with Gen. David Petraeus, commander of U.S. forces in Iraq (and technically Fallon's subordinate). I do not know whether it's true that Fallon once called Petraeus "[an ass-kissing little](#)

[chickenshit](#)." (Fallon has denied the reports.) I have heard from several sources that the two men dislike each other and that their disagreements have been tense, sometimes fierce. Petraeus is in charge of securing Iraq. Fallon's purview spans the entire Middle East and South Asia; he considers Iraq a dead end and thinks more resources should be devoted to other crises in the region. Fallon's departure does signal that Petraeus has won that contest. Some think it's likely that when Petraeus leaves Iraq at the end of the year, he will take Fallon's old job. (If so, he may also change his views on some matters; as the old adage about bureaucratic politics has it, you stand where you sit.)

Meanwhile, does Fallon's exit mean Bush is free to bomb Iran? [An](#) adoring profile in this month's *Esquire* by Thomas P.M. Barnet, a former professor at the Naval War College, asserts that Fallon is the one man standing between the White House and another Middle East war.* (The *Esquire* article, which freely quotes Fallon boasting about how much "hot water" he's in with the White House, is widely regarded as the "last straw" in Fallon's demise. Secretary Gates, at a press conference Tuesday, called its impact a "cumulative kind of thing.")

Fallon has publicly expressed extreme skepticism toward the wisdom of a war with Iran. [But so have](#) Secretary Gates and Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The option of bombing Iran no longer seems to be on the table. But if President Bush were suddenly to put it back on the table, Fallon—or anyone in his position—would have no power to stop it, unless he simply refused to carry out his orders, and nowhere has Fallon said, or suggested, that he was willing to do that.

[Correction](#), March 13, 2008: *This piece originally and incorrectly called Thomas P.M. Barnet a professor at the Naval War College. He is no longer at the college. ([Return](#) to the corrected sentence.)*

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