**1.**<http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/08/13/grand-strategic-failure/>

[](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/)  
**Grand Strategic Failure**

## Why Charles Hill's new book is as morally suspect as his career.

### BY JIM SLEEPER | AUGUST 13, 2010

3

***\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_***

***Grand Strategies: Literature, Statecraft, and World Order***

by Charles Hill.

Yale University Press, 2010

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

"When I asked [Charles Hill] why he had never written his own big book he only smiled," notes his former student Molly Worthen in her 2007 book about him, *The Man on Whom Nothing Was Lost. "*There was no better way to get people to pay attention to ... your take on history, he explained, than to write ... beneath the byline of Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, and Boutros Boutros-Ghali. After all, who had ever heard of Charlie Hill?" But Hill, a former diplomat and senior advisor to a string of powerful men, wasn't being quite truthful with Worthen, and not only because he would soon publish an ambitious take on history under his own name.

Worthen's title quotes Homer's characterization of the wily Odysseus, whom Hill now presents as a master of the "creative dissembling" that he believes diplomats must undertake beneath the protocols of their profession, sometimes violating the truth and their superiors' trust. Hill's stated aim in *Grand Strategies* is "the restoration of literature as a tutor for statecraft," and he ranges from Homer through Salman Rushdie to argue for literature as a "supreme way of knowing" the world of diplomacy. He also calls the book "a primer" for Yale's richly funded, foreign-policy-oriented "Studies in Grand Strategy" program, which counts him as a "distinguished fellow" and "diplomat in residence."

But these literary and pedagogical claims shade over some highly personal motivations. Reading his own experiences back into a tapestry he weaves from a selection of great books, Hill interprets great literature and historical episodes to show that statesmen such as Albrecht von Wallenstein, Cardinal Richelieu, Charles Talleyrand, Oliver Cromwell -- and their confidential note-takers and informal envoys, Hill's own predecessors, such as Richelieu's Père Joseph and Cromwell's John Milton -- "possess a certain mad, enigmatic quality" and are amoral by conventional standards because they think that they can keep order only by shuttling back and forth across bounds of convention. Hill's own history as one of the Reagan officials whose silence compromised the federal investigation of the Iran-Contra scandal makes his attempt at self-justification clear.

Very occasionally, Hill comes close to tipping his hand. Although he never mentions that he worked for Kissinger, the former secretary of state shows up, bizarrely, in Hill's discussion of Milton's *Paradise Lost* as a contemporary exemplar of the fallen angel Mammon, who exhorted Satan's hosts to, as Hill puts it, "adapt to the conditions of Hell" and "seek to prosper." And Shultz shows up in the book (as he actually did in real life) lecturing a hostile audience of writers at the New York Public Library in 1986 by invoking the literary critic George Steiner -- in words almost surely written by Hill, who was crafting Shultz's public utterances at the time.

Beyond these more obvious connections, the book's long skein of plot summaries and potted histories of more than 20 great novels and plays depict diplomats devising duplicitous and desperate strategies behind thin veils of diplomatic protocol and immunity to restrain the blood-dimmed tide in a Hobbesian world. Inevitably, he writes, the veil-shifters' motives are "mixed, their characters ambiguous, and their drives possibly abnormal. In the end, their achievements may be inexplicable."

Thus Odysseus, sent to persuade Achilles to re-join the fight against Troy, violates "two fundamental rules of diplomacy" by softening Agamemnon's message to Achilles and by not fully reporting back Achilles's response. The reason, Hill explains, is that an emissary, encountering his hosts' circumstances and reactions in ways his superior cannot, must adjust his message, his reports back to headquarters, and perhaps even his own side's strategies and goals in ways his superiors might not fully understand or approve.

Centuries later, the great Hapsburg general Wallenstein's "grand project" of the 1630s -- Hill calls it "a Europe ... unified under the concept of religious tolerance" -- produces his own murder but also the Treaty of Westphalia, Hill's Rock of Gibraltar for world order. Hill finds Wallenstein's greatness in the fact that when "he cannot lead his own side to accept this cause, he secretly conspires with the enemy to do so." His counterpart Richelieu, Louis XIII's "grand strategist," also pursues a course so circuitous that, "once freed from religious and ideological concerns ... [it] prolonged the [bloody Catholic/Protestant Thirty Years' War], ruined the Holy Roman Empire, and enabled France's rise to paramount power." Again, Hill approves, because only the Westphalian state system, however fraudulent, prevents endless carnage.

The book indulges a peculiar attraction to that carnage in what Hill acknowledges is his dark vision of human nature. As a Brown University student in the 1950s, he was mesmerized by Hans Jakob von Grimmelshausen's 1668 picaresque fantasy novel, *Adventures of Simplicissimus*. It was "like finding oneself within the deranged chaos of a painting by Hieronymus Bosch. All is swirl of lusting, murderous, satanic satire," Hill writes in *Grand Strategies*. Hill uses the word "lust" several times in connection with violence, especially "revolutionary" violence; no instance of religious or fascist savagery provokes him as much as progressive efforts to re-make history. He loves Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* because it damns the French Revolution, and he shares Dostoyevsky's horror that partisans of the Enlightenment "did not desire better men.... They would cut off the heads of Shakespeare and Rafael." Better to rely on the leaders of warring states, and the amoral diplomats who enable and sometimes temper their work.

Reading between the lines of this book, it's not hard to understand how Hill's own career as a diplomat was marred, and ended, by too much diplomatic creative dissembling. Iran-Contra Independent Counsel Lawrence Walsh had "heard of Charlie Hill" well before he decided to collaborate with Worthen on her book and then to write this one. As Michael Desch explained in *The American Conservative* in 2008, "Hill was forced to resign from the Foreign Service after it became clear that he had concealed evidence of Shultz's extensive knowledge of the Iran-Contra scandal from federal agents."

Walsh's final report of 1993 -- on how American officials secretly funneled the proceeds of illegal arms sales to Iran to right-wing insurgents in Nicaragua -- establishes that although Hill and Shultz opposed the Iran-Contra scheme, bureaucratic self-interest kept them from trying to stop it. In congressional testimony written by Hill, Shultz lied about what they'd known and when, compromising the public investigation but giving Reagan plausible deniability. By not telling the president or the public the truth about the scandal, Shultz and Hill hoped also to avoid retribution by top Reagan aides. As the [report](http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/walsh/chap_24.htm) goes, "Independent Counsel concluded that Shultz's testimony was incorrect, if not false, in significant respects and misleading, if literally true, in others, and that information had been withheld from investigators by Shultz's executive assistant, M. Charles Hill."

Now Hill wants us to consider their mix of conviction and evasion a strategy worthy of Odysseus. Worse, the approach has become a template for his teaching of the classics to freshmen and Grand Strategy students "by verdict" and as "a priest," according to Worthen. At Yale during the week of 9/11, his apparent certitude reminded many of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's in New York. "This is an act of war," Hill told shaken students the morning of the attacks, "and that requires you go to war." Three days later he put his name on a public letter to President George W. Bush by the neoconservative Project for a New American Century, urging that "even if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the attack ... the eradication of terrorism ... must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein." Two years later, Hill was a strong advocate for the Iraq war, addressing Yale students more as a Foreign Service spokesman or the headmaster of a military academy than as a professor of liberal education.

Now *Grand Strategies* confirms, unintentionally, what I suspected then: that Hill's and Giuliani's public performances were sublime because they'd been rehearsing for 9/11 for most of their lives, Hill since internalizing *Simplicissimus* at Brown and Giuliani since founding his high school's first opera club. On 9/11, Manhattan became as operatic as the inside of Giuliani's and Hill's minds, a stage fit for a dark, nationalist epic by Verdi or Puccini, with bodies strewn about and the noble hero grieving for his people in a new dawn. These two adepts of classical culture rose to the occasion separately, but they bonded in 2008, when Giuliani named Hill the chief foreign-policy advisor of his presidential campaign, which hammered away at what they dubbed "the terrorists' war on us."

Here, though, as in Iran-Contra, our wily Odysseus would keep on dissembling. In an interview in 2008 with the *Yale Daily News*, Hill [said](http://www.yaledailynews.com/news/university-news/2008/02/06/hill-looks-back-on-giulianis-campaign/) that he'd didn't know how his name had gotten on the letter to Bush and that he'd tried to get it removed. A [response](http://www.yaledailynews.com/news/university-news/2008/02/06/hill-looks-back-on-giulianis-campaign/comments/) posted on the newspaper's website by PNAC executive director Gary Schmitt refuted him decisively, closing with, "Sorry, Charlie."

"Only literature, Hill claims, is "methodologically unbounded" enough to show "how the world really works." But Hill has stacked the deck by starting with a highly specific notion of "how the world works" and interpreting literature to suit his paradigm. A more serious literary survey might show how writers such as Reinhold Niebuhr or Jurgen Habermas and their counterparts in fiction address recent shifts in popular beliefs about power and legitimacy that have brought down armed regimes -- the British in India, Afrikaners in South Africa, segregationists in the American South, and the Soviets in Eastern Europe -- with very little carnage. Jonathan Schell's *The Unconquerable World*, published in 2004, shows how world literature and history can help explain such shifts.

Early in *Grand Strategies,* Hill offers a chilling metaphor for his vision. He writes that he was transfixed by the gaze of the ancient Greek priest and emissary Laocoon as he and his sons are strangled by serpents in [sculpted marble](http://static2.bigstockphoto.com/thumbs/1/8/8/large2/881713.jpg), "the first artistic depiction of the anguished reaction of a body to painful defeat.... For me it is a look that can be seen across the ages,.... whether the face is contorted in pain or in calm contemplation, of one who can... see clearly into the [tragic] essence of things." The classical tragic hero's gaze into the abyss is, "rightly understood ... a matter of Grand Strategy."

But the man on whom nothing was lost has missed liberal education's responsibility -- and its unmatched capacity -- to inspire an ethic richer than grand-strategic amorality amid perpetual conflict and mistrust. Instead, he has written *Grand Strategies* and is teaching the classics at Yale to show young Americans how to wield power and risk destruction with Laocoon's pitiless, gnomic gaze.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**2.** THE FOLLOWING IS PRESENTED HERE AS ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED ON MY WEBSITE IN 2012. I preserve this here exactly as it was published then, when it was read by Charles Hill and many others at Yale, when he or anyone else could have flagged any inaccuracies or otherwise posted criticisms of the essay. No one did so, although many people passed it to colleagues, increasing the numbers of knowledgeable people who read it.

To read this essay updated on May 8, on the occasion of Hill’s memorial conference in 2021, go to: [**What "politics" does to history: The saga of Henry Kissinger and George Shultz's right-hand man | Salon.com**](https://www.salon.com/2021/05/08/what-politics-does-to-history-the-saga-of-henry-kissinger-and-george-shultzs-right-hand-man/)

**And to:** [**http://www.jimsleeper.com/?p=724**](http://www.jimsleeper.com/?p=724)

# What Politics Does to History, via George Shultz and Charles Hill

# By [Jim Sleeper](http://tpmcafe.talkingpointsmemo.com/profile/jim_sleeper) –

In 2010 [Foreign Policy](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/08/13/grand_strategic_failure?print=yes&hidecomments=yes&page=full) published one of the more difficult and damning reviews I've ever written, of [Grand Strategies: Literature, Statecraft, and World Order](http://www.amazon.com/Grand-Strategies-Literature-Statecraft-World/dp/030016386X/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1281719814&sr=1-1), by Charles Hill, the former executive assistant and speechwriter to Reagan Secretary of State George Shultz. As I was reading Hill's book that year in Frankfurt and Istanbul, PBS was broadcasting a documentary based on Shultz's 1993 memoir, [Turmoil and Triumph](http://www.turmoilandtriumph.org/), which was written mainly by... Charles Hill.

Liberal critics and PBS' own ombudsman [criticized](http://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/07/20/pbs-ombudsman-criticizes-shultz-series/) the film's hagiographical, conservative slant and its heavy funding from donors close to the Hoover Institution, where both Shultz and Hill are fellows. But the deeper problem is Hill's crafting of Shultz's memoir, which reveals, unintentionally, what can happen when former statesmen try to write or teach history.

We are not talking here about Winston Churchill's magisterial A History of the English-Speaking Peoples but about two wily old duffers trying to cover their butts. Hill is also trying to puff himself up to overawe undergraduates and college administrators, with implications for liberal education that would be amusing if they weren't so sad -- and, we can at least hope, instructive.

In his own Grand Strategies, Hill, an energetic autodidact, interprets great literature to justify his mottled Foreign Service record and his paleo-conservative convictions, which are really more pagan and Vulcan than liberal or civic-republican. That might suit the schoolmaster of a high-school military academy better than a teacher of liberal arts, yet Hill teaches classics to freshmen and "Grand Strategy" to seniors at Yale, where he's "Diplomat in Residence" and, although lacking a PhD, holds more honorific titles than the Emperor Franz Josef. That's partly the Yale administration's way of thanking him for helping so sinuously to put out some fires set by bashers of "liberal Yale" who have been his own confederates in conservative policymaking and Wall Street Journal punditry.

When Hill's former student Molly Worthen [asked him a few years](http://www.amazon.com/Man-Whom-Nothing-Was-Lost/dp/0618872671) ago why he'd never written a book of his own, he only smiled and said there was no better way to get people to pay attention to one's ideas than to write them beneath the bylines of great men such as Kissinger, Shultz, and Boutros Boutros Ghali, for all of whom he has ghosted.

Grand Strategies shows that he wasn't telling Worthen the whole truth, and it sidesteps the question of what happens to the ideas of the great men themselves when those who virtually write their memoirs, as Hill did Shultz's, twist the record to help themselves and their principals evade the judgment of History and of the Iran-Contra Independent Counsel.

Because Hill's book elucidates his worldview by proposing literary precedents for his own foreign-service modus without ever elucidating the latter, it hides as much as it reveals about his mishandlings of both diplomacy and liberal education. In real life, as I show in Foreign Policy, [his dissembling compromised Shultz](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/08/13/grand_strategic_failure?print=yes&hidecomments=yes&page=full) and foreign policy making. And now it's compromising an old college's three-century long struggle to balance humanist truth-seeking with training for republican power-wielding.

Here's how Hill miscarries that struggle, let alone his pretensions to scholarship, in ways I couldn't cover in reviewing his book:

• In 1993 The New York Review of Books published [a damning review](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1993/jun/10/iran-contra-the-mystery-solved/) of Shultz's Turmoil and Triumph by Theodore H. Draper, the grand historian of Communism and of the Cold War (which had been sputtering toward its close in the Reagan-Shultz years). Draper faulted Shultz's facts and his methodology in presenting them.

That prompted [a letter from Hill to the Review](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1993/jul/15/what-shultz-knew/) contesting Draper's judgment but, ultimately, discrediting his own. The letter contends that the factual errors Draper flagged in the memoir reflect Shultz's sound decision to confine his narrative "to what he knew or was told at the time" and, so doing, to exclude "information and evidence which came to light after a decision or event occurred."  
  
In defending this strange methodology, Hill unintentionally reveals what's untrustworthy in his own and many statesmen's methods. He claims that Shultz's decision to report only what he knew of past events as they were unfolding (or only what Shultz and Hill want readers to think he knew) "makes Turmoil and Triumph a unique, irreplaceable and unchallengeable historical document, as it reveals a reality that 'memoirs' invariably obscure: decisions of statecraft must be taken on the basis of partial and sometimes erroneous reports."

Parrying one of Draper's factual corrections, Hill acknowledges that "it may be true that [Iranian-born arms merchant Albert] Hakim, not [CIA official George] Cave, was the... drafter [of a memo on the Iran-Contra deal], but Shultz at the time was told it was Cave, and to be true to how things actually were, Shultz's narrative must say 'Cave.'"

But mustn't Shultz's narrative also add what he learned to the contrary soon after? Shultz isn't Simon Schama, after all, and Hill's casuistry is all-too common in memoirs written by or for statesmen seeking to sanitize bad decisions they made on the basis of their own blunders and lies, as well as those of others. Don't such memoirs "invariably obscure" that, too?

Hill concludes his justification of that hoary practice with a try at literary grace: "In this review... Draper reads every note, but never seems to be able to hear the music." But Hill's own music is meant to distract attention from his flimsy rationale for Shultz's presenting as factual the many suppositions that he and Hill knew - but never tell their readers - had already been discredited by the time they were writing the memoir.

Such gyrations would offend Thucydides, and they open a Pandora's box or Orwellian Memory Hole in the writing of History: Hill's is a very "peculiar interpretation of 'how things actually were,'" [Draper replies,](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1993/jul/15/what-shultz-knew/) since the truth, as he and Shultz knew when they were writing the book, was that "Hakim was the [memo's] drafter, so that is how 'things actually were,'" while "Shultz was told at the time that it was Cave, so that was how things actually were not. But even if we accept [Hill's] strange premise that Shultz had to put in his book only what he was told at the time, however erroneous, a question arises: Was not Shultz obliged to tell the reader what the truth was? As for notes and music," Draper concludes, tweaking Hill, "the music cannot be right if the notes are wrong."

• This is no trivial exchange. It bares something wrong not only in Hill's writing but also in the slippery historiographical and pedagogical modus he imparts to Yale students in lecture halls, seminar rooms, and campus publications. This should disqualify him from teaching at a liberal-arts college, but, as Worthen reports and his former students have told me, and as I've sometimes witnessed firsthand, he uses his position as a supposed guide to the great humanist conversation across the ages not to deepen students' encounters with the humanities' lasting challenges to politics and the spirit but to advance his Vulcan logic or his superiors' strategic interests.

In campus forums and the Yale Daily News, Hill speaks about world events as a Foreign Service press officer would, his brisk assertions cowing inexperienced undergraduates, impressed by his firmness and intimacy with the great and powerful. Too many Yale students already spend too much time learning how not to say that an emperor has no clothes -- and how to step forward to supply the necessary drapery if someone less clued-in is incautious enough to say it. Both Hill and a student reporter seemed disposed to find such drapery in a Yale Daily News interview a month after 9/11:

YDN: [M]any have noted a change in President Bush's behavior in the last month, the New York Times going so far as to say that he has achieved a certain degree of "gravitas." Do you agree?

CH: I think that people with basically sound leadership instincts... will find them growing stronger over time. So it seems to me that what we have seen in the president's behavior is a string of more and more able performances, more and more firm and definitive performances. And this is what you want to see. It's a growing process, and I don't see any limitation to this growth. It seems to me that he's able to take on what comes at him."

Hill is not participating here in a humanist "great conversation" or teaching his student readers how to conduct an inquiry in the spirit of liberal education. He is not promoting honest communication in an open society such as John Dewey envisioned. He is engaged in a calculated - for him, almost instinctive - misrepresentation of what is actually going on in order to reinforce political instincts and premises he believes the young reporter and his readers already share, or should.   
  
Hill does this every time he speaks to the Yale student press. The Foreign Policy review [reprises one of his worst howlers](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/08/13/grand_strategic_failure?print=yes&hidecomments=yes&page=full), concerning his role in working with neo-conservatives on and before Rudy Giuliani's 2008 presidential campaign.

• Hill particularly loathes Rousseau, whose understandings of equality and the General Will threaten the Lockean liberalism and Anglo-American hegemony Hill claims to defend. Never mind that the real threats to Lockean liberalism and American hegemony now come not from the revolutionary left but from casino-finance capital and corporate welfare -- which would have horrified Locke and Adam Smith -- parading under the banners of "free markets;" a few years ago Hill made the students from his freshman class in Yale's classics-oriented Directed Studies program recite in unison, from wherever each was seated within a large assembly of the program's other freshmen and faculty, a Rousseauian Creed, in order "to depict Rousseauianism as proto-totalitarian (itself a rather dubious move,)" as one of the participants later wrote me.

"We went in feeling rather excited about it," the student added, "but as soon as it happened, I felt rather uncomfortable... There was something disturbingly authoritarian in Hill's getting students to recite certain words at his prompting. In trying to combat a particular sort of group-think, Hill actually wound up emulating what he claims to oppose." A faculty member who was present confirms that impression and more. "People were at each other's throats over it afterward. 'This isn't liberal education,' some of us felt."

•In 1998 Hill wrote [another duplicitous, doomed letter to the New York Review](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1998/mar/05/the-lion-king-an-exchange/), this one charging that Joan Didion's review of Lion King, Dinesh D'Souza's hagiography of Ronald Reagan, recycled an "erroneous story" that Reagan claimed falsely to have seen the Nazi death camps in person during World War II. (Actually, Reagan never left the U.S. and saw only footage from military cameramen, which he edited into briefing films.)

Hill, eager to protect Reagan (as the Iran-Contra Independent Counsel had found him equally eager to do when that scandal broke), cites Shultz's claim in Turmoil and Triumph that Reagan had showed the footage of camps to the visiting Israeli President Yitzhak Shamir, who then told this to "the Hebrew language" press, whose reports of the meeting were garbled in translation back to English, giving the mistaken impression that Reagan had claimed to have been in the camps.

[Didion's reply](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1998/mar/05/the-lion-king-an-exchange/) showed that Hill's effort to deny Reagan's blurring of romance and fact was itself wishful, at best. She cited Washington Post correspondent Lou Cannon's report that both Shamir and Elie Wiesel told friends that Reagan, in separate, unrelated meetings with them, had given them the impression he'd visited the camps himself, and that both men had sincerely believed and been moved by what they understood to have been his experience.

Perhaps what we have here is four "statesmen" embellishing the past as they wander through the fog of Reagan's mind, but more likely Hill has only compounded Reagan's dissimulations. Scholars are reluctant to do such things. Foreign Service officers are supposed to do it.

• Hill shouldn't be doing it at Yale, but, there, too, his footwork is so fancy that it sometimes compounds the suspicions he's trying to allay. In April, 2006 the Yale Daily News noted that "An article published in the Yale Israel Journal by Charles Hill... has become the center of a debate over alleged plagiarism in a lecture delivered by... George Shultz at the Library of Congress. The controversy arose when a group of Stanford students revealed last week that they had come across 22 sentences in Shultz's 2004 Kissinger Lecture that had previously appeared in Hill's article, published the prior year."

It was really a non-story, given the two men's long relationship, but with colleges struggling to prevent plagiarism as opportunities for it proliferate, students are concerned and confused about what it really entails. In this case Hill need only have explained that he'd been Shultz's speechwriter and confidante for many years and that the mix-up that led both to publish the same words under separate bylines didn't really involve one person wrongly claiming credit for another's work.

But Hill couldn't leave well enough alone, because, as a teacher at Yale, he had to defend his scholarly integrity as well as that of Shultz, by then a "professor" at Stanford. Hill's first feint was to fall nobly on his sword for his superior, as a Foreign Service officer would: "It was my doing, and [Shultz] is being blamed for it. He is blameless," he told the Yale Daily News before explaining that he, too, is really blameless because he and Shultz meet every summer "to discuss and debate current world issues, usually while taking notes and writing throughout."

Hill told the paper "he believes that after one such trip a few years ago, when Shultz was preparing for a lecture, they both took notes on their discussions, and then each returned home and wrote something up. Although Hill did not intend to publish his paper, he submitted it to the Yale Israel Journal when he was approached for an article on a short deadline. While he and Shultz later corresponded about the latter's upcoming Library of Congress Lecture, Hill said, he found a copy of the paper he had written and recommended that Schultz take a look at it, forgetting that the paper had been published.

"[Shultz] got blindsided and it was my fault because I just didn't recall any of this," Hill said. "I guess I plagiarized something in reverse by using my own thing and gave him something he had contributed to without knowing it, so the whole thing is kind of upside down."

The image of Shultz and Hill scribbling madly as they "discuss and debate current world issues" in the California sun and then writing up their notes in their rooms soon afterward seems too clever by half - an effort to spare Shultz some embarrassment over what shouldn't be embarrassing to a former public official with a life-long amanuensis and few scholarly pretensions.

But Hill was also still trying to live down what his voluminous note-taking for Shultz had done: It had proved to federal investigators, who wrested the notes from Hill only with difficulty, that Senate testimony he'd prepared for Shultz on Iran-Contra was false. The report of the Independent Counsel called Hill's efforts to blame others "unworthy" in ways you can read about in the [Foreign Policy](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/08/13/grand_strategic_failure?print=yes&hidecomments=yes&page=full) review. He is "Diplomat in Residence" at Yale because he is a diplomat in exile from Washington who tried to return as the chief foreign-policy adviser Rudy Giuliani's 2008 presidential campaign -- as, again, you learn from the Foreign Policy review.

• The last telling instance of Hill's prevarications that I'll present here highlights the dangers of entangling a state's corruption of public discourse with a university's teaching of the liberal arts. This time it was the late Tony Judt, not Theodore Draper, who did the unmasking.

Reviewing a book by Hill's Grand Strategy colleague John Lewis Gaddis in The New York Review in 2006, [Judt noted sardonically](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2006/mar/23/a-story-still-to-be-told/) that "Gaddis' account of [Mikhail Gorbachev] gives the Reagan administration full credit for many of Gorbachev's own opinions, ideas, and achievements--as well it might, since in this section of the book Gaddis is paraphrasing and citing Secretary of State George Shultz's memoir, Turmoil and Triumph."

Not only did Hill ghostwrite Shultz's claim; he made the same claim in his own voice, in the Hoover Digest in 2001, writing that "through the quiet pressure of Secretary of State George Shultz," the United States had become in the 1980s "a guide for [the Soviet Union's] ridding itself of much of its socialistic economic system." Judt counters that "what changed [Gorbachev's] perspective" on Communism and capitalism" was not... Shultz's private lectures on the virtues of capitalism (as both Shultz and, less, forgivably, Gaddis appears to believe) but the catastrophe of Chernobyl and its aftermath."

Chernobyl isn't mentioned by Shultz, Hill, or Gaddis or by Hill's and Gaddis' former student Worthen in her five-page account of Hill's role in this stage of the U.S.-Soviet endgame. Her account -- in her book about Hill - is Hill's account, polished by Gaddis, with whom Worthen took a course in biography before writing the book and whom she thanks in her acknowledgments for having "read every chapter" in manuscript.

So Gaddis, in his own book The Cold War, credits Schultz's account in Turmoil and Triumph, which was really written by Gaddis' own Grand Strategy partner Hill; and all three men also use a 24-year-old, prepped by Gaddis and Hill, to tell the story as they want it told.

What I've been sketching here are eerie and highly subjective, self-indulgent claims to omniscience by certain people who think themselves entitled to frame a republic's grand strategies. It's not enough to answer that since the American people elected the President who appoints the strategists, they can be trusted. A lot depends on how they've been trained.

Ivy graduates whom the late David Halberstam dubbed, with leaden irony, The Best and the Brightest helped to mastermind the Bay of Pigs and Vietnam debacles, and their successors our misadventures in Iraq and Afghanistan. Their training had reinforced an arrogant ignorance of how the world really works. A republic has to determine its most vital interests and its greatest strengths by taking its innermost bearings through teaching and public discourse quite unlike Hill's.

A republic does need a trained but open elite - an "aristocracy of talent and virtue," as Jefferson called it, not of breeding or wealth. Hill pays lip service to this goal, and he is quite right to charge, as he often does, that some academic liberals and leftists have abandoned it in the name of a specious and facile "equality" and cultural relativism. But strategists who are drawn inexorably to top-down crisis definition and management can easily corrupt both the republican ethos and the liberal education they say they want to rescue from liberals.

A fuller, richer accounting of that sad tendency would go far beyond this post and my Foreign Policy review, and only time will tell who really wants that whole story told. But it's time even now to stop applauding old frauds and their funders who induct the young into networks that mistake presumed omniscience for clear-eyed assessment, maximum surveillance for genuine security, and chronic public lying for appropriate discretion. Whose vital interests do they really serve?

**3.**<http://www.jimsleeper.com/?attachment_id=1445>

**Our Stories**

**50 YEARS LATER**

*Published by the Yale College Class of 1969*

*on the occasion of its 50th Reunion*

**Yale and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy, Then and Now**

By Jim Sleeper

Even if most of us weren’t thinking of getting into foreign-policy as we entered Yale in September, 1965, foreign policy would get *into us*, and the consequences would rattle Yalies not only on campus but also in State, Defense, the CIA, and the White House. Now that the word “foreign” eclipses more than it catches about the United States’ increasingly fluid, precarious position in a global economy amid unprecedented migrations, cultural upheavals, and nationalist reactions here and abroad, our youthful assumptions and experiences have been superseded at Yale, as well as in Washington.

Three braided but conflicting strains in Yale’s influence on “foreign policy” inflected our understandings of the world in the 1960s: They were a secretive, “spook” strain; a public “statesmanship” strain; and a dissenting, remonstrative strain that stems from Yale’s very origins. As we approached graduation and the Vietnam War raged, with no end in sight, the dissenting strain seemed to have risen to challenge the intelligence agencies and the State Department, as well as Yale itself, which had spawned and sustained them.

Even if you haven’t read David Halberstam’s *The Best and Brightest,* Evan Thomas’ *The Very Best Men,* Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas’ *The Wise Men,* Geoffrey Kabaservice’s *The Guardians,* or Timothy Weiner’s *Legacy of Ashes,* you know that a lot went wrong in the ventures of Yale’s spooks and statesmen after World War II – in Eastern Europe, Guatemala, Iran, the Bay of Pigs, and Vietnam – a lot more than many of us knew in 1969, though, and than most of the public knows even now.

But isn’t there something worth rescuing from the “legacy of ashes”? Two of Yale’s recent projects hope that there is: The Brady-Johnson Program in Grand Strategy, begun shortly before 9/11, and Yale College’s more recent joint venture with the National University of Singapore to establish the liberal arts Yale-NUS College are trying, in different ways, to reconcile Yale’s spook and statesmanship strains with its dissenting strain; to marry Yale’s training for republican stewardship, power-wielding, and capitalist wealth-making with the dissenting strain’s mission to interrogate and sometimes oppose established aims and arrangements, not just facilitate them. The dissenting strain runs back to Socrates, who was forced to drink fatal hemlock for challenging the powers that were, and to the Old Testament prophets who loomed large in the imaginations of the men who put the Hebrew on the seal of Yale and called it a “school of prophets.”

The spook or Intelligence strain (or, if you like caricature, the “Good Shepherd”/Skull & Bones strain) began during World War II, when James J. Angleton (’41) conceived the CIA in New Haven as the Office of Strategic Services. For a quick if somewhat grand refresher, look up “Yale—A Great Nursery of Spooks,” the 1987 *New York Times* review of Robin Winks’ *Cloak and Gown.* [https://www.nytimes.com/1987/ 08/16/books/yale-a-great- nursery-of-spooks.html](https://www.nytimes.com/1987/08/16/books/yale-a-great-nursery-of-spooks.html) Scores of Yale men died abroad on OSS and CIA missions. An exact replica of the statue of Nathan Hale that we all encountered as freshmen on Old Campus stands before CIA headquarters in Langley, VA. Hale (Class of 1773) qualifies as the first “spy” of the nascent American republic, but it was Yale’s post-World War II spooks who resurrected him in bronze when we were still children.

The Grand Strategy program also addresses the second, more public strain, that of statesmanship, embodied by the Cold War Secretary of State Dean Acheson (Class of 1915), Secretary of Defense Robert Abercrombie Lovett (1918), and U.S. ambassadors to the USSR William C. Bullitt (1912) and Averell Harriman (1913). Closer to our own time, John Kerry (‘66) was Secretary of State from 2013 to 2017, and Strobe Talbott (‘68) was a Deputy Secretary of State from 1994 -2001. Countless other Yale College graduates have served in such posts and in the White House, where, during our own undergraduate years, McGeorge Bundy (‘1940) and Walt Rostow (’40) were point men for the Vietnam War. George H. W. Bush (‘48) was both statesman and spook, serving as ambassador to the UN and China before leading the CIA and, later, the country. But when we were in college he was a Texas congressman, and some of us knew more about his father, Prescott Bush (1917) who’d retired in 1963 as a U.S. Senator from Connecticut, and of course, about George W. (‘68)

In 2003, the Iraq war seemed a Yale undertaking from top to bottom, from Bush and Dick Cheney (Yale drop-out, ‘61) and Bush’s classmate, R. James Woolsey, who directed the CIA, followed by John Negroponte (‘60) as Director of National Intelligence in 2005, to countless others: Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz had been a Yale political science professor for I. Scooter Libby (‘72), who’d become Cheney’s chief of staff. Other Yale alums in the Iraq mission were David Frum (‘82), Bush’s “axis of evil” speechwriter; L. Paul Bremer III (‘63), the Iraq Provisional Coalition Administrator; and Robert Kagan (‘80), the Reagan State Department veteran, neoconservative writer, and fervent booster of the Iraq War. (Kagan’s father, the Yale classicist Donald Kagan, was also a fervent booster.) Some of my Yale students from 1999 to 2003 served in the war or were public advocates for it. Donald Trump’s National Security Advisor John Bolton (‘70, Yale Law ‘74), was another fervent advocate.

Think, too, of the almost “all-Yale” 2004 presidential race among our own generation’s graduates, Bush and Kerry -- after Kerry had defeated Joe Lieberman (‘64) and Howard Dean (’71) in the Democratic primaries.

For the third, dissenting strain, think of Howard Dean and of Dwight Macdonald (‘28), the World War II and Cold War literary and political critic (and descendant of two of the Yale “school of prophets’” Puritan presidents, grandfather and grandson, both named Timothy Dwight). No one needs to ask us to think of William Sloane Coffin, Jr. (‘49, Div. ‘66), who was in the OSS in Eastern Europe as World War II ended, two decades before we encountered him as a dissenter. There were also Staughton Lynd, the historian whose trip to Hanoi we remember, and the anti-Vietnam War activist and radical pacifist Dave Dellinger (’36).

The dissenting strain was ascendant during our college years, and by 1975 it seemed to have routed spooks and statesmen everywhere as Saigon fell and a “Vietnam Syndrome” rose, resisting such ventures. Two decades later, though, the other strains rebounded with the fall of the Berlin Wall and “Desert Storm” under George H.W. Bush. As late as 2004, the military triumph in Baghdad seemed to boost the Washington consensus that free trade and democracy reinforce one another.

For the next ten years, in fact, Yale’s old conduits to the power centers of the Washington consensus were refurbished and strengthened by the Grand Strategy seminar, directed by John Gaddis, Yale’s Lovett Professor of Military and Naval History, and by the historian Paul Kennedy and “Diplomat in Residence” Charles Hill, a former executive assistant to Secretary of State George Shultz. "We're training the next generation of world leaders," Gaddis told the Yale Alumni Magazine in 2003, “and Washington has taken notice.”

Funded at first by the conservative Olin and Smith-Richardson Foundations, and after 2006 by Nicholas F. Brady (’52), Treasury Secretary under presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush, and securities analyst Charles B. Johnson (’54), the seminar became the flagship of the fleet of courses in the Brady-Johnson Program in Grand Strategy. It attracted wide media attention and emulation, with variations, at Columbia, Duke, Temple and the state universities of Wisconsin and Texas.

Striving to bring “the best of what has been thought and written about grand strategy over the past 2,500 years” to bear on preparing students for leadership in all sectors of society, the seminar admits graduate and undergraduate students from among more than two-hundred applicants each year. It follows readings in classic texts on grand strategy with summer internships abroad and high-pressure exercises in policy design and crisis simulation. Eminences of statecraft, scholarship, and journalism, including Kissinger, deliver guest lectures and dine with the students at Mory’s.

One of the program’s abiding goals has been to regenerate a team spirit worthy of Edmund Burke’s “little platoons” of public stewards and Platonic republican guardians of foreign policymaking. I got a taste of how that works as I and a few hundred other alumni at our 2004 reunion listened to Gaddis tell us, “We hauled the entire [Yale] Grand Strategy class down to New York to meet Henry Kissinger and hear about his sense of the great deficit that exists in grand-strategic thinking.” Gaddis added that “One of the students was outraged by Christopher Hitchens’s book accusing Henry of war crimes, so I said, ‘Why not do a senior essay on Kissinger’s ethics?’ I saw a draft of it and called Henry, and he said ‘Bring him in,’ and he hired him on the spot—to fact-check Christopher Hitchens!”

Many old Blues in the audience swooned. This was how things had been done at Yale in their time, and, by God, Grand Strategy was bringing back the old *élan*! But when we’d been seniors sweating the draft, Kissinger had been Richard Nixon’s new national security advisor, helping to prolong the war that Nixon had vowed to end.

Disillusionment with the old ways would turn with a vengeance decades later with the intelligence failures of 9/11 and the Iraq War and the financial and economic near-meltdown of 2008, all on the presidential watch of a guy whom many of us knew from DKE, political science, intramural rugby, or the Davenport dining hall.

Grand Strategy’s instructors sought to counter that disillusionment by sprinkling some of the “Good Shepherd” mystique into the program’s trappings and rites of passage to spooksmanship and statesmanship. They made no secret of their disdain for the dissenting strain’s influence on the social sciences, which they charged had become visionless and nit-picking, and the humanities, which they charged had become “politically correct.”

The accused sometimes answered that a liberal education *should* challenge established premises and practices, not merely serve them. The Grand Strategy instructors weren’t wrong to question what some of that “questioning” was becoming, but global economic, climatic, demographic, and political sea changes were exposing deficits in “grand-strategic” premises about American hegemony, the viability of nation-states, and the benefits of the Washington Consensus. Such premises may have inclined John Gaddis in 2005 to help write George W. Bush’s second Inaugural address, for which he was rewarded with a National Medal of the Humanities at a White House ceremony that year.

As global and domestic upheavals have continued to rattle assumptions about American leadership, Gaddis has retired from directing Grand Strategy, whose directorship has passed to the American labor historian Beverly Gage (‘94). She is renewing the program’s broader claim to enhance decision-making in all sectors, not just in Washington. That shift raises new questions about what the program’s goals should be. But it also suggests that grand-strategic pedagogy has been hitched a little too tightly to foreign policy premises that, even as we were graduating, were lagging behind the swift undercurrents that have now transformed Yale College as well as America. Today, nearly 15 percent of Yale undergraduates are international students, at the behest not of the politically correct but of the powerful, including Richard Levin, who, as Yale’s president, emphasized its identity as an international university.

In 2011, reinforcing a shift from Yale’s civic-republican, American nationalism to a global-capitalist cosmopolitanism, Levin and the Yale Corporation announced a second big “foreign-policy” project: a joint venture with Singapore to establish the liberal-arts Yale-National University of Singapore College, which graduated its first class in 2017. But long before Yale’s trustees thought of co-founding Yale-NUS, several had come to Singapore as investors, not educators. As a world-capitalist *entrepot* andtightly run, relatively safe port in the storms of global capitalist exploit, the tiny (population, 6 million) island city-state welcomed them to its sovereign wealth funds — the Government Investment Corporation, chaired by the prime minister, and Temasek Holdings, which designated Yale trustee, Charles Goodyear IV (‘80) as its CEO for two years, beginning in 2009. Another Yale Corporation member, Fareed Zakaria (‘86) praised Singapore’s authoritarian state capitalism in *The Future of Freedom* as a model for societies that must liberalize economically before they can liberalize politically. At Davos he interviewed Singapore’s autocratic founder Lee Kuan Yew and his son, Lee Hsien Loong, the current prime minister.

It was almost inevitable that the trustees would establish Yale-NUS College to enhance their collaboration with Singapore in market and political terms. But they knew, too, that a liberal arts college is more than a career training and networking center or cultural galleria for future global investors and managers. Its deeper purpose, and liberal education’s, is to strengthen young citizens’ capacities for free inquiry and expression by equipping them to question and sometimes challenge their societies’ arrangements and premises. Arguably, that strengthens those societies’ and humanity’s prospects in the long run.

But how strongly committed to that purpose were Singapore’s political leaders and Yale’s investors? You could have heard a pin drop among the 150 professors -- three times more than usual -- at a closed-door, March 1, 2012, meeting of the Yale College Faculty in New Haven as one of them – Seyla Benhabib, Yale’s Eugene Meyer Professor of Political Science and Philosophy (and my wife) – told President Levin that his administration shouldn't have collaborated with an authoritarian, corporate city-state to establish a new college bearing Yale’ name without most of the Yale faculty knowing about it. (The full terms of the contract remain secret.)

"We're grateful for what you and the Yale Corporation do," Benhabib said. "But in political philosophy there's a living, unwritten constitution: Yale is really what we do --our research, teaching, and conferences. Without that, there is no Yale to take abroad or anywhere else. The faculty are the *collegium*" - a company of scholars that, to do its work well, has to stand somewhat apart from both markets and states.

A month later, in Levin’s presence, the faculty voted, 160 to 69, to rebuke the administration for doing too little to “protect and further principles of non-discrimination for all, including sexual minorities and migrant workers; to uphold civil liberty and political freedom on campus and in the broader society. These ideals lie at the heart of liberal arts education as well as of our civic sense as citizens, and they ought not to be compromised in any dealings or negotiations with the Singaporean authorities.”

The faculty was worried less about Singapore than about the “corporatization” of universities and civil societies in both countries. It sensed danger not in an open clash of values between Yale and Singapore but in an all-too-smooth convergence between American business-corporate encroachments on universities here and the authoritarian state capitalism that governs Singapore to the satisfaction of investors but not of its million-plus migrant workers and many of its tightly monitored citizens.

The danger in such a convergence returns us to the broader challenges facing Grand Strategy. “Superpowers Don’t Get to Retire,” warned Robert Kagan in a powerful 2013 essay in The New Republic, urging Americans to acknowledge that only willpower and force can sustain the liberal order that Americans take for granted. Quoting Michael Ignatieff, Kagan acknowledged that liberal civilization itself “runs deeply against the human grain and is achieved and sustained only by the most unremitting struggle against human nature.” Perhaps, he added, “this fragile democratic garden requires the protection of a liberal world order, with constant feeding, watering, weeding, and the fencing off of an ever-encroaching jungle.”

But those encroachments come not only from abroad but also from within our own garden, from rich American hands as often as from poor ones, from white hands far more often than from black ones. Even with the best of intentions, some of Yale’s own postwar strategists have been carriers, casualties, and apologists for the encroachments that Kagan rightly resists. They’ve been more than a little too eager to supply missing drapery for emperors without clothes.

No one anticipated such dangers more clearly than Yale’s own founders. They crossed an ocean into “a howling wilderness” to escape a corrupt regime and build their college and society on moral and civic foundations stronger than armies and wealth. Soon enough, though, they had to seek material support from Elihu Yale, a governor of one of the world’s first multinational corporations, the East India Company (which would acquire the island of “Singapura” for the British Crown in 1812). Soon enough, too, Yale would send Christian missionaries to Asia, among them the parents of Henry Luce and John Hersey, both of whom were born in China.

But most Yale “missionaries” nurtured American civil society itself: Yale graduates were the founders or first presidents of nearly 100 new colleges in the 19th century and of even more YMCA’s and similar associations, as well as of the “muscular Christian,” character-building football that captured young America’s imagination and heart a century ago. Our Class of 1969’s own “class notes” and essays suggest that that building continues. Although the Truth-seeking we encountered in college was less avowedly religious than “liberal” in the classical sense that a liberal education requires, it nurtured in many of us enough independence of spirit and habits of the heart to stand apart at times from established premises and practices. Grand-strategic ventures abroad ultimately depend on such intellectual independence and compassion at home, because the civic-republican strengths that good foreign policymaking requires can always be drained more decisively from within than from without.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**4.**<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2010/aug/12/usforeignpolicy-us-politics>

**theguardian**

**Power and appeasement**

*Paul Kennedy articulates an alternative to the Kagans' neocon war on terror, but they all underestimate popular change*



'Republican power-wielder' and 'humanist truth-seeker': George Bush and Tony Blair meeting at Camp David in February 2001. Photograph: Luke Frazza/EPA

**Jim Sleeper**

Thursday 12 August 2010 21.14 BST

"'Appeasement!' What a powerful term it has become… It is much stronger a form of opprobrium than even the loaded 'L' word," writes Paul Kennedy, the distinguished assessor of empires at Yale who is also a Commander of the Order of the British Empire, in "Time to Appease", [for the American journal The National Interest](http://www.nationalinterest.org/Article.aspx?id=23542).

"It's risky," he acknowledges, "to ask, in a scholarly way, whether acts of appeasing a rival might not sometimes be a good thing. You wanted to continue negotiations with Saddam Hussein? Appeaser… To wriggle out of Afghanistan? Appeaser… Before such abuse of the term gets worse, perhaps we should all take a small history lesson."

Kennedy's history lesson is magisterial in its specificity and range, but it's indeed as "risky" as its purpose: to commend appeasement to those who hurl the "A" word at American strategists they consider insufficiently aggressive.

He knows what it's like to be on the receiving end of that projectile, and he acknowledges that statesmen who accommodated fascism in the 1920s and 30s merit condemnation. But "this great [American] hegemon… cannot escape the constraints of history and geography. Its culture, ideology and domestic politics mean that it can never become Alexandrian, Roman or Napoleonic," and Washington must "make a cold-blooded assessment of how many overseas commitments it could sustain over the long haul".

Ever since Kennedy published [The Rise and Fall of Great Powers](http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=poh3UOfAtjkC&dq=The+Rise+and+Fall+of+Great+Powers&source=bl&ots=j5x56y1Aba&sig=UocDw6Iis3UV1PMtg8hsSVQ3DH4&hl=en&ei=wlNkTOKfGIuRjAekg9mQCQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CEUQ6AEwBg) in 1987, he's been called a "declinist", who reads the British Empire's descent onto America's future. The neoconservative historian Robert Kagan's *Dangerous Nation*, a bellicose celebration of expansionist America, is virtually a rebuttal of Kennedy. And it was Kagan's father, Donald Kagan, a scholar of Thucydides and colleague of Kennedy's at Yale, who actually hurled the "A" word at him in 2001.

Seven days after the attacks of 11 September, the elder Kagan published a column in the Yale Daily News – [republished immediately by the neoconservative Weekly Standard](http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/000/018qtwpw.asp) – assailing Kennedy for reckoning not with the threat of terrorism posed by the attacks but with "our need to understand and sympathise with… the terrorists". Reminding readers that many intellectuals of the 1930s had accepted Hitler's rise as a consequence of Germany's humiliation by the first world war's victors, Kagan added that "Kennedy's comments… seem to suggest we react by appeasing the terrorists by a measured retreat."

Noting that Kennedy, on a recent panel discussing the 11 September attacks, had said that the United States "doth bestride the world like a colossus", Kagan retorted that when Shakespeare's Cassius said that about Julius Caesar, "he hated him and would soon plot to assassinate him" and that his words "probably reflect the feelings of the terrorists toward the United States and, apparently, those of Kennedy".

Such a public breach of collegial decorum between professors is all but unthinkable at Yale, where faculty communication is often conducted with arched eyebrows and significant silences. But Kagan had reason to feel aggrieved. In 2000, he and his other son, Fred, a West Point professor and future champion of "the surge" in Iraq, had published *While America Sleeps*, its title an echo of Churchill's *While England Slept.* They warned that "the collapse of an international system… will bring attacks on the American homeland" and that "the United States must begin to gird itself for the next round of conflict."

Liberals responded that, much as a stopped clock is right twice a day, obsessives like the Kagans do sometimes mark dangers that others miss – but that they seem to *live* for those dangers: it's always 1938, but never 1914, when war fever spurred nationalists like the Kagans into the [*Götterdämmerung*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G%C3%B6tterd%C3%A4mmerung) that would seed Hitler's rise.

September 11 seemed to confirm the Kagans' dark warnings and strategic doctrines. Days later, Donald and Robert Kagan signed a public letter to President George W Bush from the neoconservative [Project for the New American Century](http://www.newamericancentury.org/), urging that "even if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the attack… the eradication of terrorism… must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein."

History hasn't taken long to judge the wisdom of that presumption, but in 2001, the Kagans, Bush and Tony Blair seemed to incarnate an injunction leaping right out of the West's great epics: Sometimes, humanist truth-seekers and republican power-wielders must unite to fight common enemies. The attackers had been willing to die for their convoluted convictions and rage; were *we* willing to die for anything worth defending against them?

"Yes," Kennedy acknowledges, "there comes a time when you have to stand and fight," but he notes that anti-appeasers seldom rue Britain's 19th-century "appeasements" of the United States with territorial and other concessions, and they don't belabour American eagerness to keep trading with Hitler's Reich and floating loans for Mussolini.  
  
I'm not wholly on board with Kennedy here. Britain's "appeasement" of Americans made more sense than Chamberlain's appeasement of fascists. And liberal democracy has more of a stake in some form of American "hegemony", albeit one less swashbuckling and corrupt, than in anything that’s likely to replace it. Kennedy's benign omniscience is a relief from neoconservative bombast, but it sounds a bit weary, too.  
  
There's an alternative that neither Kennedy nor the Kagans address. Since 1947, vast, armed regimes – the British in India, segregationists in the American South, Afrikaners in South Africa, the Soviets in Eastern Europe – have been brought down without carnage thanks to big shifts in popular understandings of power and legitimacy, sped partly by changes in communications and other technologies.  
  
With a depth and breadth worthy of Kennedy, the writer [Jonathan Schell](http://www.ycsg.yale.edu/activities/schell_bio.html) has traced this unprecedented emergence of bottom-up power in societies, not fringe movements. His [*The Unconquerable World*](http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=sXHtCehjDCUC&dq=Jonathan+Schell&source=bl&ots=qah19b8Hkb&sig=w01juTo6RSvETk6Rb_90OYwQW34&hl=en&ei=OFJkTNesD9y4jAewkZCZCQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CCkQ6AEwAg) shows why power resides less often now with those who give orders than with those who know how to obey or disobey them creatively with enough good faith, courage and discipline to avoid the anarchy the Kagans claim always awaits them. If the Kennedy-Kagan controversy continues, Schell, author of one of this century's neglected great books, ought to be on stage with them.

Also, in a longer version, at Talking Points Memo Café, <http://tpmcafe.talkingpointsmemo.com/2010/08/13/a_foreign-policy_confab_yale_should_host/>

**5.**

<http://www.npr.org/news/specials/americatransformed/essays/010913.sleepercommentary.html>

<http://www.yaledailynews.com/news/2011/sep/09/911-reflection-jim-sleeper/>

**YALE DAILY NEWS**

Friday, September 9, 2011

## 9/11 Reflection: Jim Sleeper

*(This was published on the tenth anniversary of 9/11, adapted from a column that had been published just after 9/11 itself that I delivered orally at that time on NPR’s All Things Considered:* )

By [Jim Sleeper](http://www.yaledailynews.com/staff/jim-sleeperuse/)

Under the aspect of eternity, the attack on Pearl Harbor 60 years ago was eclipsed on 9/11 by a darkness more fateful, frightening and — if we can keep clear about it — instructive. *—September 12, 2001*

When four American civilian planes brought low the world’s only superpower and greatest nerve center 10 years ago, they made a mockery of the dollar-driven premise that our massive defense establishments can still defend an open society.

Yet instead of re-thinking our defense and foreign policies since then, we’ve become less open and, in a way, weaker — nowhere more so than at the Yale that has honored George W. Bush ’68, John Negroponte ’60, Stanley McChrystal, Tony Blair, and other “practitioners” of grand strategies that have brought us to where we are now.

The question we haven’t answered since 9/11 is whether a society such as ours has the will and moral resources to defend itself. Not as a global directorate, police force or profit center, but as a republic: a wellspring of civic disciplines that sustain a politics of reasonable hope against a politics of fear and misdirected resentment.

But the attacks also mocked claims by the powerless that terrorism is morally or spiritually redemptive. It certainly wasn’t on 9/11. This wasn’t John Brown’s anti-slavery raid on Harper’s Ferry, or guerrilla warfare against Latin American juntas, much less a Velvet Revolution or our own civil rights movement. It was an implosion of anything that anyone who believes in politics can endorse.

The bloody paradox we’ve been ducking shows that our global technologies and investments can’t by themselves dissolve the oldest of errant human impulses — the religious and tribal fanaticism carried by suicide bombers.

It’s too early now to say whether the Arab Spring shows that millions of the aggrieved have learned that hard lesson any better than we’ve learned ours — whether they’ve sidelined terrorism any more than we’ve sidelined the crackpot “realism” of our national-security system and the casino-finance, corporate-welfare, consumer-defrauding tsunami system that drives it.

Places like Yale won’t do better unless we nurture fewer brilliant tsunami surfers and more pearl divers — civic patriots who plumb the undercurrents and unearth the buried treasures of the powerless in our midst. That is 9/11’s hardest lesson. In 2008, Barack Obama seemed to embody and testify to the fact that we’d learned it. But now we’re still discovering how hard that lesson really is.

Jim Sleeper is a lecturer in the Political Science Department. The above was also published on AlterNet, HuffingtonPost, and openDemocracy.net [http://www.alternet.org/newsandviews/article/663567/in\_post-9\_11\_america%2C\_can\_reasonable\_hope\_win\_out\_against\_fear\_and\_misdirected\_resentment http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-sleeper/what-911-can-still-teach-\_b\_955138.html](http://www.alternet.org/newsandviews/article/663567/in_post-9_11_america%2C_can_reasonable_hope_win_out_against_fear_and_misdirected_resentment%20%20%20%20%20%20%20http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-sleeper/what-911-can-still-teach-_b_955138.html) <http://www.opendemocracy.net/jim-sleeper/pearl-divers-still-needed-10-years-after-9-11> <http://www.npr.org/news/specials/americatransformed/essays/010913.sleepercommentary.html> <http://www.tnr.com/blog/92038/rupert-murdoch-leader-news-world-journal>

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 6.**<http://www.dissentmagazine.org/blog/kissingers-diplomatic-review> **DISSENT**  
Kissinger's Diplomatic Review  


**Jim Sleeper - November 14, 2011**

**“The reader should know,”** writes Henry Kissinger in his [lengthy coronation](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/13/books/review/george-f-kennan-an-american-life-by-john-lewis-gaddis-book-review.html?_r=1&hpw) of John Lewis Gaddis’s “magisterial” biography of the American foreign-policy seer and remonstrant George Kennan in the November 13 *New York Times Book Review*, “that for the past decade, I have occasionally met with the students of the Grand Strategy seminar John Gaddis conducts at Yale and that we encounter each other on social occasions from time to time.”

What the reader should also know (and what *Times* editors should have considered before assigning Kissinger this review) is that this disclosure is roughly the equivalent of George W. Bush’s informing the public that he and Tony Blair have had “a full and frank exchange of views about matters of mutual concern.” A full disclosure by Kissinger would have acknowledged that no one has worked harder than Gaddis since 2001 to help Kissinger justify and polish his controversial legacy.

Kissinger’s review offers useful insight and information about Kennan—Kissinger's own, more than Gaddis’s. And Kennan himself, [in my view](http://tpmcafe.talkingpointsmemo.com/2009/09/19/this_book_might_change_the_conversation/index.php) and that of others who’ve written about him, certainly deserves the respect both men are showing him. What rankles here is that, without being told, we’re watching the latest *pas de deux* in a long ballet between the once-powerful Kissinger and the power-groping Gaddis:

• The same Kissinger who writes that Gaddis’s *George F. Kennan: An American Life* is “as close to the final word as possible on one of the most important, complex, moving, challenging, and exasperating American public servants” once asked Gaddis to write his own biography.

• The same Kissinger who finds Gaddis’s book “seminal and beyond personal relationships” found reason to [announce, last June](http://news.yale.edu/2011/06/14/yale-receive-kissinger-papers-and-establish-johnson-center-study-american-diplomacy), that he will donate his papers to Yale’s Johnson Center for the Study of American Diplomacy, established with a gift, celebrated by Gaddis, from investor Charles Johnson, Yale Class of 1954, a mainstay (with former Reagan Secretary of the Treasury Nicholas Brady) of the Brady-Johnson Program in Grand Strategy that Gaddis conducts. The new center “will bring prominent statesmen to campus as Kissinger Senior Fellows as well as host Kissinger Visiting Scholars who are researching and writing about the history of American diplomacy,” according to the university’s press release, in which Gaddis enthuses that “Yale students have long studied Henry Kissinger as a distinguished historian and practitioner of grand strategy.”

• Indeed, the same Kissinger who writes that he has “occasionally met” with Gaddis’s students has been a regular visitor to his seminar, and no wonder. “We’re training the next generation of world leaders,” Gaddis told the *Yale Alumni Magazine* in 2003, “and Washington has taken notice.” By now more than two hundred Grand Strategy graduates who’ve sat at Kissinger’s feet are out in the world, more than a few of them in Washington.

“We hauled the entire Grand Strategy class down to New York to meet Henry Kissinger and hear about his sense of the great deficit that exists in grand-strategic thinking,” Gaddis told me and several hundred other Yale alumni in 2004. “One of the students was outraged by Christopher Hitchens’s book accusing Henry of war crimes, so I said, ‘Why not do a senior essay on Kissinger’s ethics?’ I saw a draft of it and called Henry, and he said ‘Bring him in,’ and he hired him on the spot—to fact-check Christopher Hitchens!”

Many in the audience swooned. This was how things had been done at Yale in their time, and, by God, Gaddis was restoring the old élan! But just as important to Kissinger as reducing “the great deficit” in grand-strategic thinking was reducing a deficit in his reputation that had been deepened not only by Hitchens but by indictments from abroad for crimes against humanity and by the declassification of State Department documents such as a November 1975 “[Memorandum of Conversation](http://www.gwu.edu/%7Ensarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB193/HAK-11-26-75.pdf)” in which he counsels Thailand’s foreign minister to “tell the Cambodians that we will be friends with them. They are murderous thugs, but we won’t let that stand in our way. We are prepared to improve relations with them.”

The Grand Strategy program shows students, quite rightly, why such utterances by diplomats aren’t shocking or even necessarily wrong. But it has also showed inadvertently that Kissinger has been playing Gaddis and Yale for all they’re worth, even without sharing the political and ideological predilections of Gaddis, a former Naval War College professor and, after 9/11, a prominent defender and apologist for the Bush Administration’s 2002 National Security Strategy and the war in Iraq.

That became clear on one of Kissinger’s visits to the Grand Strategy seminar during the Bush years, when Gaddis said that “Washington has taken notice” of his work. Gaddis’ quasi-triumphalist 2004 book *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience*, written when the U.S. military victory in Iraq was fresh, trolled American history for precedents for preemptive war, winning him an invitation to the White House, where Bush met him holding a marked-up copy of the book. Gaddis huddled with historian Victor Davis Hanson and others to help draft Bush’s second inaugural address.

According to Peter Baker in the [*Washington Post*](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/conte...7081901720.html), http://www.columbia.edu/itc/journalism/stille/Politics%20Fall%202007/readings%20weeks%206-7/As%20Democracy%20Push%20Falters,%20Bush%20Feels%20Like%20a%20'Dissident'.htm

“Gaddis suggested that Bush promise to work toward ‘ending tyranny’ by a date certain in 20 or 25 years. Some scoffed, but [presidential speechwriter Michael] Gerson liked the idea [and] married Natan Sharansky’s idea of promoting democracy and Gaddis’s idea of ending tyranny, although they set no date and described it as the task of generations.”

Later in 2005 Gaddis would be back at the White House to receive a National Humanities Medal from Bush. But on Inauguration Day itself, he was in New Haven hosting one of Kissinger’s visits to the Grand Strategy seminar, which watched Bush’s address on television and solicited his comments.

According to a former student who was present,

Kissinger teased Gaddis about there being nothing worse than an historian who wants to get involved in policy making. Of course Kissinger, a historian himself, has done just that, and he was tweaking Gaddis for trying. He gave the Inaugural address a hand-waving endorsement: “I thought the speech was fine,” he said, but what he was really saying was, “Don’t ask me to say what I really think.”

“It was a case of the elder statesman being gracious,” said a student of Kissinger. “He clearly disdains any policy suffused with ideology,” and Gaddis, despite a few caveats in *Surprise, Security*, “had gone hook, line, and sinker with the Bush doctrine in Iraq. So it was all in what Kissinger didn’t say. It was clear he wasn’t enthusiastic when he said, flatly, ‘I supported the invasion of Iraq.’” That’s clear now, too, in Kissinger’s review, which reminds us that “Kennan served a country that had not yet learned the distinction between the [abrupt, military] conversion and the evolution of an adversary—if indeed it ever will.”

Gaddis seems to have anticipated Kissinger’s mild disfavor in a sometimes-arch [appreciation of Kissinger’s *Years of Renewal*](http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/03/21/reviews/990321.21gaddist.html?_r=2&scp=1&sq=%22years%20of%20renewal%22%20and%20%22john%20lewis%20gaddis%22&st=cse) (which Gaddis, too, wrote for the *New York Times*) in 1999, before the Grand Strategy seminar existed. Then he noted deftly, if not backhandedly, that “Kissinger has produced the memoirist’s equivalent of a battleship, intimidating in appearance, heavy with armor and bristling with armaments, equipped to fire salvos at past critics while launching pre-emptive strikes against histories as yet unwritten.”

“The historians....will not be satisfied,” Gaddis continued. “Irritated by their inability to check his sources, knowing Kissinger’s reputation (partly self-cultivated) for covering his tracks, they are likely to regard this book as they have its predecessors: as an elaborate smokescreen designed to conceal what really happened.”

But then Gaddis quickly added: “There is irony here, because this most secretive of tacticians was surprisingly open about his strategy. Kissinger’s annual reports as national security adviser under Nixon, together with his speeches as Secretary of State under Nixon and Ford, set out his objectives with extraordinary candor and clarity.”

Gaddis also explained why diplomats must dissimulate and are therefore not only frustrating to historians but misunderstood by all sides in politics:

It is often said of Kissinger that his view of the world was amoral, but this seems less than fair. He acknowledges here, more clearly than in the past, the influence of his upbringing in Nazi Germany, the examples set by his parents and the consequent impossibility, for him, of operating outside a moral framework. He calls for the United States “to remain the principal force for freedom and progress” even as it relies “on its head as well as its heart in defining its duty to the world.”

Small wonder, then, that in a review almost 4,500 words long, Kissinger, covering his tracks, mentions Gaddis and the book itself only briefly, in the introduction and conclusion, devoting more than 4,000 words entirely to his own rendering of Kennan. It’s no judgment against *George F. Kennan: An American Life* to suggest that, after years of dancing around each other, its author and its reviewer have learned to make use of each other, as they are doing here now.

“Gaddis is intoxicated about power,” a former student who has since worked in the State Department told me in 2006. “His intellectual standards have eroded a bit because he’s so eager to tell the Bush administration what it wants to hear. It’s a little unseemly. He always contrives to seem no more than one and a half inches away from whatever is the conventional wisdom.”

While that cannot fairly be said of what, by all accounts so far, is an impressive biography of Kennan, it should have been said much more clearly about the orchestration of Kissinger’s diplomatic tribute to it.

**This is also posted at History News Network:**  <http://hnn.us/articles/kissingers-diplomatic-review-john-gaddiss-latest-book>

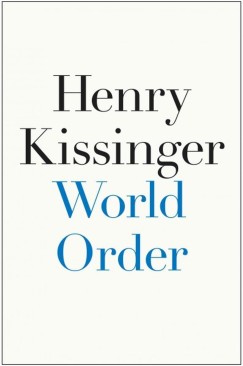
Cutting Edge News: <http://www.thecuttingedgenews.com/index.php?article=53224>

Huffington Post: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-sleeper/henry-kissingers_b_1093835.html>

<http://lareviewofbooks.org/review/henry-kissinger-coming-imbalance-power>

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| |  | | --- | | Los Angeles Review of Books: This Week | |

OCTOBER 8, 2014



## [Jim Sleeper](http://lareviewofbooks.org/contributor/jim-sleeper) on *World Order*

### Henry Kissinger and the Coming Imbalance of Power

RUSSIA’S ENCROACHMENTS on Ukraine have prompted some Americans to reenact, even yearn for, what New Republic literary editor Leon Wieseltier characterized as the Cold War’s “mottled tale of glory” through staging confrontations, at least rhetorically:

…Putin’s imperialism beyond his borders and fascism within his borders,… reminded me of my…. regret at having been born too late to participate in the struggle of Western intellectuals… against the Stalinist assault on democracy in Europe. And all of a sudden…, I realized that I had exaggerated my belatedness…. Our time is not lacking for fundamental historical challenges and the obligation to choose sides. …. As our predecessors went to Berlin, so we would go to Kiev.

Even a seasoned foreign policymaker such as the former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, a Pole by birth, wary of détente with Russia, “clarified” the Ukraine conflict this way in The Washington Post on March 3: “Much depends on how clearly the West conveys to the dictator in the Kremlin — a partially comical imitation of Mussolini and a more menacing reminder of Hitler — that NATO cannot be passive if war erupts in Europe […]” “This does not mean that the West, or the United States, should threaten war,” Brzezinski added diplomatically, proposing in his column that the West do precisely that:

There should be no doubt left in Putin’s mind that an attack on Ukraine would precipitate a prolonged and costly engagement…. NATO forces…should be put on alert…. If the West wants to avoid a conflict, there should be no ambiguity in the Kremlin as to what might be precipitated by further adventurist use of force…

Enter Henry Kissinger — 91 years old, 37 years out of public office as Richard Nixon’s and Gerald Ford’s Secretary of State from 1973–’77 (and, before that, Nixon’s National Security Advisor from 1969) — to calm the roiling waters. In a Washington Post column published two days after Brzezinski’s, Kissinger, the veteran practitioner and now valedictorian of the “realist” school in foreign affairs, warned Americans against indulging any inclination to attach missionary passion to force in order to solve crises abroad:

Public discussion on Ukraine is all about confrontation. But do we know where we are going? In my life, I have seen four wars begun with great enthusiasm and public support, all of which we did not know how to end and from three of which we withdrew unilaterally. The test of policy is how it ends, not how it begins.

He rebuffed romantic visions of resistance to the Kremlin’s fascist clown:

For the West, the demonization of Vladimir Putin is not a policy; it is an alibi for the absence of one. […] Far too often the Ukrainian issue is posed as a showdown: whether Ukraine joins the East or the West. But if Ukraine is to survive and thrive, it must not be either side’s outpost against the other — it should function as a bridge between them.

Reminding the West’s would-be Cold Warriors that “Ukraine has been independent for only 23 years” since the 14th century and that “even such famed [Soviet-era] dissidents as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Joseph Brodsky insisted that Ukraine was an integral part of Russian history,” Kissinger might as well have said that Ukraine matters more to Russia than Texas did to the United States, which seized it from Mexico with the help of “Anglo” separatists in 1846. “These are principles, not prescriptions,” he said of his proposals. “People familiar with the region will know that not all of them will be palatable to all parties. The test is not absolute satisfaction but balanced dissatisfaction.”

Neither Western Cold Warriors nor Russians have accepted Kissinger’s “principles.” Does he himself truly believe in them? Has the statesman who’s been reviled at home and indicted abroad for plotting war crimes, brutal coups, and intra-state massacres in the 1970s become, once again, an apostle of détente, as neoconservatives and isolationists have charged? Or is he the cold-blooded, brutal Machiavellian loathed by leftists and liberal humanitarians?

Kissinger sometimes makes it hard to tell. His new book World Order, like the eight that precede it, defends a way of balancing power among sovereign states that he claims has given the world whatever order it’s had since the 17th century. Consistent though he has been in justifying the premises and protocols of this so-called Westphalian system, he worries that this time they’re really coming apart. He wants to persuade Americans to take the new threats seriously, and to uphold the power-balancing he and earlier Western foreign ministers — Richelieu, Wallenstein, Talleyrand, Palmerston, Metternich — strove for three centuries to sustain, instead of championing conservative crusades and leftist insurgencies.

Kissinger also wants to vindicate his own statesmanship — although aside from mentioning his exploratory visit to China in 1971, he doesn’t openly assess any of his own successes and failures in power-balancing. Adopting instead an “area studies” approach to several states’ incompatible understandings of world order, Professor Kissinger conducts a world tour of nations and regional governments that are shattering the state-based Westphalian consensus. What he doesn’t do in this book is examine the swift, dark undercurrents that are driving these disruptive new visions of world order.

¤

He begins by recounting at length Europe’s invention of international balance-of-power principles that have framed modern history. Those conventions and protocols — hammered out by exhausted combatants in Westphalia in 1648 after 30 years of bloody religious war — rely on the constitutive fiction that all nations’ sovereignty is equally legitimate and inviolable. Westphalian rules prohibit states from intervening in one another’s domestic affairs; mandate diplomatic immunity that facilitates communication to reduce conflict; and require “ideological neutrality and adjustment to evolving circumstances.” The balance of power is “not an exaltation of power but an attempt to balance and limit its use.”

This approach to power-balancing has gone in and out of favor over time, often serving not as the structuring principle of foreign policymaking that Kissinger makes it out to be but rather as a convenient political tool for imperialists. Kissinger lauds Europe’s monarchies for reimposing Westphalian rules at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 after crushing Napoleon’s effort to universalize what he, like other conservatives, condemns as the brutal, proto-totalitarian doctrines of Rousseau, Montesquieu, French Revolutionary leaders, and other misguided apostles of democracy. But he doesn’t much ponder those same rulers’ colonial conquest and exploitation outside Europe itself. This extension of state-centric, balance-of-power politics to the world owed a lot to Europe’s capitalist techno-military superiority, but Kissinger says little about it and the colonial exploitation that figured importantly in sustaining Westphalian power balancing for a century after the Congress of Vienna.

Instead, Kissinger attributes Westphalianism’s resilience to Theodore Roosevelt’s statesmanship at the dawn of the 20th century, when he mobilized the unlikely convergence in America of geographical security, the hitherto unexploited resources of a continent, and largely voluntary demographic and cultural pluralism. In Roosevelt’s hands, as Kissinger tells it, the consequent American exceptionalism inclined and empowered the United States to rescue the international state system.

Unfortunately, as he acknowledges, America’s first really big rescue effort after Roosevelt’s foundered on Woodrow Wilson’s pious determination to make the world safe for democracy by joining a “war to end all wars.” Kissinger barely mentions the destructive role that Europe’s own Westphalian statesmen played by fomenting the war in the first place and punishing the defeated Germany counterproductively. If diplomacy is “war by other means,” diplomacy can be as destructive as war itself. Yet Kissinger seems more troubled by Wilson’s myopic universalism than by the treacheries of European diplomats who not only betrayed balance-of-power principles at home but also drew “national” borders for Syria and Iraq — and, later, for India and Pakistan — and plotted their ways into those nations’ affairs.

America’s effort to restore an international balance of power after World War II was more successful. The United States was flush with power, and its statesmen had learned enough from the blunders of 1919 to lift the defeated Germany and Japan back into the international system on relatively equal terms — somewhat, he tell us, as statesmen at the Congress of Vienna had invited the defeated France of Napoleon back into their world order instead of prostrating it.

Kissinger says little about destructive tendencies in the global capital of 1914 and 1939, including profit-hungry state-capitalist military machines that drove the world so close to Armageddon. He worries more about Western Europeans’ present virtual disarmament behind the shield of American power and about what he considers their unsustainable hope that Enlightenment humanitarianism and liberal democracy can prevent horrors like those of the last century. Kissinger, a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany in 1938 at age 15, indulges little such hope.

Noting that rising regions’ understandings of world order can’t be reconciled with the liberal West’s, he dismisses Western interventionists as deluded by a naive hope that democracy can achieve progress in history. Foreign policy isn’t a fable of progress with a happy ending, he counsels, but an endless balancing of dissatisfactions. Only a dark, intuitive statesmanship can keep order, “tempering ever-recurring challenges” to sustain the balance of power that brings the only hope of securing any liberty and justice.

¤

Is Westphalian balancing itself working? Is it sustainable? World Order depicts emerging national, post-national, and regional entities — in Russia, China, Iran, and Arab lands — that reject its premises and protocols and are returning to the “fracturing certainties” of imperialism, autocratic nationalism, and religious fanaticism — the very follies that Kissinger thinks only his kind of diplomacy managed to restrain.

He casts Russia, with “its absolutism, its size, its globe-spanning ambitions and insecurities,” as destined to swing back and forth between the “domineering certainty of a superior power” and, when vulnerable, “brooding invocations of vast inner reserves of strength.” Thus, Putin seeks both domination and spiritual depths in Ukraine, where 9th-century Slavic tribes formed a confederation around Kiev, a birthplace of Russian Orthodoxy that is “perceived almost universally by Russians as […] an inextricable part of their own history.”

Kissinger recounts Islam’s history in the Middle East to explain why the European state system imposed upon it after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire is taken as an affront:

To many of the faithful, especially in a period of resurgent Islamism — the modern ideology seeking to apply Muslim scripture as the central arbiter of personal, political, and international life — the Islamic world remains in a condition of inescapable confrontation with the outside world.

Like the Ottoman Caliphate, the Persian Empire had no use for pluralism in a balance of power; Kissinger dismisses Iran’s liberal-republican “Green” demonstrations of 2009, writing that “the unchanged rhetoric of a generation [of theocrats] is based on conviction rather than posturing and will have had an impact on a significant number of the Iranian people.”

He offers little hope of preventing nuclear proliferation through negotiation with Iran, but neither does he see any better hope in Western bellicose threats to Iran than he sees in such threats to Russia. He judges their rulers incorrigible because they are beholden to their nations’ darkest myths and cultural depths.

He ends his discussion of Iran on a bizarrely ambivalent note by reminding us that when Egypt’s Anwar Sadat and Israel’s Yitzhak Rabin tried to transcend their own nations’ fears and resentments, both were assassinated. “But their achievements and inspiration are inextinguishable,” he adds, hoping that when “doctrines of violent intimidation […] are thwarted — and nothing less will do — there may come a moment similar to what led to the breakthroughs recounted here, when vision overcame reality.” Maybe. But I sense considerable pain behind the diplomatic eloquence here.

Kissinger is more optimistic about rising nations in southern and southeast Asia such as India and the Asian Tigers — proud but prickly states that seem amenable to Westphalian balances of power. China is sui generis; indeed, Kissinger’s previous book is entitled On China, and in this one he reminds us that China’s size and exceptionalist view of itself as the center of the universe make it a counterpart as well as a rival to the United States at a time when neither nation can be “the” hegemon that the US was after World War II.

He seems not to notice that Russia’s, Iran’s, the Arab world’s, even perhaps China’s defections from state-based world order are eclipsing not only his cherished Westphalian presumptions but also the Enlightenment prophecies of Reason’s advance that he and other conservatives love to loathe. He keeps arguing with 17th- and 18th-century philosophes, asking, again rhetorically and testily:

Is there a single concept and mechanism logically uniting all things, in a way that can be discovered and explicated (as d’Alembert and Montesquieu argued), or is the world too complicated and humanity too diverse […] requiring a kind of intuition and an almost esoteric element of statecraft?

And he keeps inveighing against would-be revolutionaries “vesting sovereignty in an abstraction — not individuals but entire peoples as indivisible entities requiring uniformity of thought and action — and then designating themselves the people’s spokesmen and indeed embodiment.” Isn’t that pretty similar to what Westphalian statesmen themselves have done? He dismisses almost every instance of democratic upheaval, from Europe’s revolutions of 1848 through India’s “socialist infatuations” in the 1950s and protests in Tiananmen or Tahrir squares or Tehran. That’s remarkable, coming from one who has seen huge, oppressive national-security states brought down by their own truly sovereign peoples at times in India, Eastern Europe, and South Africa.

He asks Americans, in effect, to transfer their own democratic idealism from the crusading, missionary, democracy-promoting, “Mission Accomplished” gambits of Woodrow Wilson and George W. Bush to a modest balance-of-power-sharing that neoconservative and liberal interventionists reject, but that Kissinger believes is more effective and more moral in the end.

¤

What would it take for most Americans to accept such counsel? For one thing, the counselor ought to have practiced what he preaches, but it’s far from clear that Kissinger did so as the Vietnam War raged on through the six years he worked with Richard Nixon. And while he urges Americans to use force only to shore up a value-neutral pluralism in world affairs, that’s not what he did when he helped Chile’s Pinochet crush an elected, leftist government. The historian John Lewis Gaddis suggested [in The New York Times](http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/03/21/reviews/990321.21gaddist.html?_r=2&scp=1&sq=%22years%20of%20renewal%22%20and%20%22john%20lewis%20gaddis%22&st=cse) that “Kissinger’s preoccupation with keeping Marxism out of places like Chile and Angola reflects this inability to see that time was on the side of the West, that a more relaxed attitude might have yielded less violence and greater benefits.”

Famously thin-skinned about such criticisms of his record as a maestro of power-balancing, he bypasses most of them in this book. He doesn’t acknowledge, much less rebut, voluminous evidence (some of it tape-recorded by Nixon, some of it presented in Christopher Hitchens’s The Trial of Henry Kissinger, Gary Bass’s The Blood Telegram, and other books) that he was heartlessly, perhaps criminally complicit in American carpet bombing in Cambodia, General Augusto Pinochet’s bloody dictatorship in Chile, and Pakistan’s massacre of hundreds of thousands of Bengalis.

He does acknowledge that effective statesmen sometimes ignore their own rulers’ and peoples’ convictions and instructions in order to forge gambles that they consider justified, even at the cost of thousands of lives, to defend national interests and prevent humanity’s ever-imminent descent into wars of all against all that, next time around, may really end us all.

In this Kissinger is joined by Charles Hill, his former speechwriter and State Department Policy Planning Staff member, whom he credits lavishly with helping to draft and edit this book. (Hill [did the same](http://www.jimsleeper.com/?p=724) for one of Kissinger’s successors, Secretary of State George Shultz.)

In Hill’s own book, Grand Strategies, he observes that statesmen and their confidants and informal envoys — such as Cardinal Richelieu’s Père Joseph and Oliver Cromwell’s John Milton (not to mention Kissinger’s and Shultz’s Charles Hill) — “possess a certain mad, enigmatic quality” because they keep order only by slipping back and forth across borders and “red lines” to hold secret conversations with rivals and assist in interventions that cannot be publicly acknowledged, much less publicly justified. This conceit is as dear to diplomats as the conceit of certain intellectuals that their own moral witness at the barricades can turn history’s tides. But surely both kinds of actor surf tides of hubris accelerated by their “mad, enigmatic” qualities.

Hill’s book mentions Kissinger only once, and bizarrely, as an earthly exemplar of the fallen angel Mammon, who exhorted Satan’s hosts to, as Hill puts it, “adapt to the conditions of Hell” and “seek to prosper.” This is gallows humor among diplomats who can’t tell the whole truth; there’s an almost impish, “honor among thieves” quality to Kissinger’s collaboration with Hill.

Both also know how to dial up enough charm and humility to reassure superiors and publics that they share nationalist dispositions they actually disdain, and sometimes subvert. For example, when John Lewis Gaddis, the Cold War historian — who has helped bring Kissinger and his papers to Yale, along with new Kissinger Visiting Scholars and Kissinger Senior Fellows programs — was invited to work on George W. Bush’s Second Inaugural Address of 2005, he inserted into it a very un-Kissingerian vow to work toward “ending tyranny in the world.” Kissinger, visiting Gaddis’s “Grand Strategy” seminar at Yale on Inauguration Day, teased him good-naturedly about the danger in a historian’s trying to make history (as he himself, of course, had done) and gave the Inaugural Address an off-hand endorsement: A student recalls that Kissinger said, “‘I thought the speech was fine,’ he said, but what he was really saying was, ‘Don’t ask me to say what I really think.’”

In World Order, Kissinger and Hill have softened his bitterness toward fools to the right of him (reactionary, romantic nationalist isolationists and bombastic, crusading neoconservatives) and to the left (moralistic humanitarian interventionists, from Woodrow Wilson to Jane Fonda) — not to mention fools who worked under him (Kissinger was notorious for raging at assistants, and as he left the State Department in 1977, he got a big laugh out hundreds of staffers at a farewell reception by telling them, “I will remember you with affection — tinged with exasperation.”)

Humor aside, there’s often something by turns presumptuous and desperate in these collaborators’ self-presentations. If there’s hubris in revolutionaries’ prophecies of human liberation, there’s more than a little of it also in Kissinger’s rationale for arrogating so much decision-making about raisons d’état to operators such as himself:

The statesman undertakes multiple tasks, many of them shaped by his society’s history and culture. He must first of all make an analysis of where his society finds itself, past and future, then try to understand where that trajectory will take him and his society […] To undertake a journey on a road never before traveled requires character and courage… And the statesman must then inspire his people to persist in the endeavor […]

Kissinger has been repeating this for 60 years: His doctoral dissertation of 1954 claims that a statesman is

one of the heroes in classical drama who has a vision of the future but who cannot transmit it directly to his fellow-men and who cannot validate its “truth” […] It is for this reason that statesmen often share the fate of prophets, that they are without honor in their own country, that they always have a difficult task in legitimizing their programs domestically, and that their greatness is usually apparent only in retrospect when their intuition has become experience.

Prescient though this passage was about its author’s own career, it was plaintive, too, as if Kissinger foresaw his own imprisonment in diplomacy’s lonely duplicities and would crave recognition for his accomplishments, even if “only in retrospect,” and that he’d need public understanding of the bloody deeds that he would sometimes abet or even direct. Reviewing Kissinger’s Years of Renewal in 1999, Gaddis noted the poignancy of statesmen’s craving to leave a self-justifying record of their oft-disguised exertions:

It was Richard Nixon’s “permanent nightmare,” Kissinger recalls, in words that might apply to himself, to Churchill or to any formidable figure in history, “that, in the end, all his efforts … would vanish into thin air, defeated by the hostility of contemporaries and the indifference of historians.”

Kissinger is telling us, without quite saying it, that the world has needed him more than it’s likely to admit.

¤

Also without quite saying so, Kissinger suggests repeatedly that justice and morality should be indulged just enough to impart legitimacy to nation-based power-wielding, but not enough to shape or guide it. Foreign policy realism doesn’t foreclose aggressive, even brutal tactics, but it claims to undertake them only in national self-defense or to strengthen critical balances of power and legitimacy among states. What matters is the balance itself. It dampens insecurities and excitements that would otherwise foment crusades into places like Ukraine.

For reasons foreign and domestic, Kissinger didn’t make this very clear during the Vietnam War, even though he has claimed since then that Nixon and he were intent on shedding the Cold War assumptions that drove the United States into that conflict. Even now, a foreign policy based on realism and gradualism remains a tough sell to Americans, many of whom believe that their country has a mission to extend Jefferson’s “empire of liberty” to people everywhere. Kissinger himself has recited that catechism to reassure its true believers, as any secretary of state must do to stay in office. Even now, in World Order, he lauds American idealism but subtly contextualizes it by giving it a historical spin:

The prevalent American view considered people inherently reasonable and inclined toward peaceful compromise and common sense; the spread of democracy was therefore the overarching goal for international order. Free markets would uplift individuals, enrich societies, and substitute economic interdependence for traditional international rivalries […][This] effort to establish world order has in many ways come to fruition […] The spread of democracy and participatory governance has become a shared aspiration […] The years from perhaps 1948 to the turn of the century marked a brief moment in human history when one could speak of an incipient global world order composed of an amalgam of American idealism and traditional European concepts of statehood and balance of power.

Notice that — a bit like Brzezinski, who voiced caution against threatening Russia with war in order to raise precisely that possibility, and indeed to threaten it — Kissinger indulges what sounds like American triumphalism, but only to prepare readers to understand that “its very success made it inevitable that the entire enterprise would eventually be challenged.” Similarly, he couples “my continuing respect and personal affection for President George W. Bush, who guided America with courage, dignity, and conviction in an unsteady time […]” with his own “serious doubts, frequently expressed in public and governmental forums at high levels, about expanding [regime-change in Iraq] to national building and giving it such universal scope.”

In the new world, he notes in his chapter on China,

The United States is not so much a balancer as an integral part of that balance […]

In the Cold War, the dividing lines were defined by military forces. In the contemporary world […] [c]oncepts of partnership are becoming, paradoxically, elements of the modern balance of power […] Wise statesmanship must try to find that balance. For, outside it, chaos beckons.

Almost approvingly, he characterizes the United States as an “ambivalent superpower,” torn between its exceptionalism and its oft-miscarried messianism: “The quest for that balance, between the uniqueness of the American experience and the idealistic confidence in its universality, between the poles of overconfidence and introspection, is unending. What it does not permit is withdrawal.”

Not surprisingly, neoconservatives and other would-be Cold Warriors have accused Kissinger of accepting American decline and wanting only to manage it. In World Order, he dismisses them, between the lines. Neoconservatives such as Max Boot and David Brooks, who traveled to Afghanistan a few years ago and wrote glowing columns touting American-directed nation-building there, won’t be happy with Kissinger’s reminder that “[u]nification of Afghanistan has been achieved by foreigners only unintentionally, when the tribes and sects coalesce in opposition to an invader.”

He even rubs the point in by noting that what American and NATO forces met in Afghanistan in the early 21st century was exactly what the neocons’ great hero, Winston Churchill, described in 1897 as that country’s eternal division by tribes, clans, and feuds, puncturing facile expectations that the British would bring order to Afghanistan: “In this context,” Kissinger concludes concerning that country today, “the proclaimed coalition and UN goals of a transparent, democratic Afghanistan central government operating in a secure environment amounted to a radical reinvention of Afghan history.”

He also gently dispatches the neoconservative warrior Robert Kagan — who worked in the Reagan State Department at Charles Hill’s behest — in a footnote that credits Kagan with an “eloquent” exposition of the very American messianism that Kissinger proceeds to discredit by contextualizing it as a moment in history now best transcended.

In an uncharacteristically undiplomatic outburst on NPR on September fifth, Kissinger deflected a question about charges that he’d been wrong to endorse the carpet bombing of Cambodia and Laos during the Vietnam War: “I think we would find, if you study the conduct of [the military], that the Obama administration has hit more targets on a broader scale than the Nixon administration ever did […]” Yet in World Order he suggests that Obama clings to a naive faith in Reason’s power to move history. Asked in the NPR interview if Obama’s former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton would make a good president, he replied that “as a personal friend, I would say yes […] But she’d put me under a great conflict of interest if she were a candidate, because I tend to support the Republicans.”

He keeps making himself difficult to understand. But perhaps what he believes is difficult for most Americans to understand, whether they’re on the crusading or the isolationist right or on the universalist liberal left.

¤

There are three gaps, or blind spots, in Kissinger’s account, if not, indeed, in his worldview.

First, for one who wishes that Americans could alter their messianic sense of their country, he seems unwilling to shed his own presumptions of diplomatic omniscience. He clings to top-down, Congress of Vienna–type notions of how to organize and wield power, trying to vindicate a Westphalian past we’re lucky to have survived. With global economic and technological upheavals now mooting many of his basic assumptions, he offers more questions than answers. A worried, even despairing, tone haunts these pages. Kissinger can’t be faulted entirely for that. We’re all at sea. But neither can he be credited with oracular wisdom.

A second blind spot in World Power is its almost studious avoidance of capitalism, which is no longer an “internal” matter that can be bracketed by statesmen, if it ever was. Kissinger has been deeply hostile to leftist assaults on capital, often with good reason, even when his tactical moves against them have been inexcusable. But today’s algorithmically driven, casino-financed, consumer-bamboozling economy would horrify even John Locke and Adam Smith; it has released the genie of power from the Westphalian bottles in which state power had at least fictive legitimacy.

Diplomacy, once a velvet glove on the iron fist of state power, often now finds itself covering only the algorithmically driven nothingness of mercurial “shareholder value.” Yet the closest Kissinger comes to acknowledging this in World Order is in a brief warning that the economic globalization that promises prosperity also “produces a political dialectic that often works counter to its aspirations.” Economic managers of globalization don’t talk often enough to managers of political processes about “economic or financial problems whose complexity eludes the understanding of all but the expertly trained.”

This is little more than an invitation to Davos, but Kissinger should know that the “expertly trained,” too, can be blind to the ways that the swift, dark undercurrents they’re riding can rattle not only his balance-of-power premises in Ukraine and the Middle East, but also American political culture’s own core values and strengths.

He does devote one whole chapter to the digital riptides, thanking Google CEO Eric Schmidt for introducing him to a world he knew little about. But he judges cyber-optimism politically facile and dangerous because it short-circuits diplomatic decision-making and turns statesmen into puppets of instant polls: “The pursuit of transparency and connectivity in all aspects of existence by destroying privacy inhibits the development of personalities with the strength to take lonely decisions.” You’d never know that Kissinger and other pre-Google statesmen were ever driven by raging, populist demands before the internet exploded into foreign policymaking.

Still, Julian Assange and Edward Snowden have shown us that the digital explosion is eviscerating Westphalian assumptions about sovereignty and its military defenses. “The Commander of U.S. Cyber Command has predicted that ‘the next war will begin in cyberspace,’” Kissinger notes, adding that it may be highly asymmetrical and acknowledging that his own doctrines face challenges never contemplated by his predecessors — or really even by him in this book.

Third, Westphalian diplomats’ silence about the dissolution of state power and the ascent of anarchic investment often reflects not intelligent realism, but self-censorship prompted by power’s allure: people who yearn to be close to power often censor themselves almost enthusiastically to prove they can be relied on never to mention that an emperor has no clothes.

That kind of self-restraint — call it self-censorship by seduction, instead of by fear — hastens the decay of trust and freedom, inside but also outside the counsels of established power. It has a long, embarrassing record in American foreign policy, whose “yes men” perpetrated blunder after blunder, from installing the Shah of Iran and stage-managing the Bay of Pigs fiasco to promoting the Vietnam War and its sad successors.

Kissinger’s effort to coax American readers and leaders away from grandiose adventures abroad does suggest a yearning to bequeath something better than cold “realism”: “The sharp distinction drawn between realism and idealism rejects the experience of history. Idealists did not have a monopoly on moral values; realists must recognize that ideals are also a part of reality.”

Here, I think, he comes closest to admonishing his fellow realists, and even himself, against the hubris that diplomacy invites and engenders. The challenge for the rest of us is to sift the wisdom in his formidable oeuvre from its diplomatic double-talk, self-justification, and despair.

¤

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | <https://democracyjournal.org/magazine/18/martial-flaw/>  Also on History News Network, <http://hnn.us/roundup/entries/131406.html>  https://democracyjournal.org/magazine/18/martial-flaw/  **DEMOCRACY**  **A JOURNAL OF IDEAS**  **Issue #18, Fall 2010**  **Martial Flaw**  ***How to spin ancient history to justify modern-day orchestrations of military power.***  **By Jim Sleeper**  [**Makers of Ancient Strategy: From the Persian Wars to the Fall of Rome**](http://www.amazon.com/Makers-Ancient-Strategy-Persian-Wars/dp/0691137900/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1284050394&sr=1-1) **Edited and Introduced by Victor Davis Hanson •** Princeton University Press • 2010 • 278 pages • $27.95 |  | http://democracyjournal.org/images/space_trans.gif |

**A** ffluent Western democracies have “difficulty maintaining popular support for costly counterinsurgency wars,” laments Victor Davis Hanson, the accomplished historian of ancient Greek wars and fanatical insurgent in his own right against what he considers the beleaguered American imperium’s fickle liberal elites. He means to restore the legitimacy of the unilateralist U.S. hegemony envisioned in George W. Bush’s National Security Strategy of 2002; writing in *The American Enterprise Magazine* in 2006, he attributed a dearth of popular support for that project to “ignorance of military history.” Now, in *Makers of Ancient Strategy*, he assembles ten military historians of classical Greece and Rome (including himself) to rectify that ignorance by showing how Athenians, Romans, and, even before them, Persians extended their sway and coped with challenges to it in ways that American grand strategists can learn from.

At the same time, though, Hanson is a geyser of vituperations in *National Review*, the conservative Pajamas Media website, and beyond, against challenges to America’s missions abroad from our liberal governing and cultural cliques, “the mindset of the faculty lounge,” and, naturally, the media. As Iraqi casualties rose in 2006, he accused journalists of sensationalizing setbacks in Iraq thusly: “I deeply love [California], but . . . imagine what the reaction would be if the world awoke each morning to be told that once again there were six more murders, 27 rapes . . . and 360 instances of assault in California. . . . I wonder if the headlines would scream about ‘Nearly 200 poor Californians butchered again this month!’ ” Here he’s blaming the messenger instead of reckoning with different kinds of carnage and their causes, but Hanson writes like this day and night – indeed, several times a day.

Even in *Makers*, a scholarly anthology, he claims grandly that today’s “problems of unification, civil war, expansion abroad, colonization, nation-building, and counterinsurgency all have clear and well-documented precedents in both Greek and Roman culture.” But many of the book’s precedents point in directions Hanson doesn’t want to go, and he ends his introduction by advising cagily that “[r]ather than offering political assessments of modern military leaders’ policies, we instead hope that knowledge of the ancient world will remind us of all of the parameters of available choices–and their consequences.” This, after years spent invoking ancient precedents for decisive American action:

“People wonder how Rome could conquer all of northwest Europe with . . . four or five legions. The answer is the Romans had a very similar policy to our own: They looked at the most retrograde, bloodthirsty, nationalist leaders–the bin Ladens of the ancient world–and took them out, but with precision and with a lesson.”

Ancient histories, epics, tragedies, and disputations do make clear that at some point in public deliberations, there’s no substitute for decisive action driven mainly by what the nineteenth-century military strategist Karl von Clausewitz, a student of the classics himself, called “the silken thread of imagination.” Before all facts can be known, leaders must act decisively on intuitions about the interplay of their own and others’ traditions, moral structures, and economic practices. The study of classical history and literature revivifies the inevitability of that silken thread, even if also its elusiveness.

But some conservatives seem to go further. Feeling trapped in neoliberal post-modernity, they think that emulating the ancients opens opportunities to shed the mincing Christian moralism, political correctness, and secular revolutionary fantasies of our time. In their view, ancient Greeks and Romans, unburdened by otherworldly preoccupations or the secular nostrums of today’s reigning but empty neoliberal relativism, were more realistic, brave, and exultant in breasting the terrors and felicities of the human condition than are technocrats and bottom-liners or the apostles of progressive groupthink who react against them. The ancients expected not to escape the human condition through science, personal salvation, or historically redemptive Hebraic or Protestant missions, but to bear it nobly through character nourished in a civic culture far stronger than a slippery web of contracts and rights.

“The Greeks accepted the idea that we all get old, there’s certain things that we can’t change, human nature is constant throughout the ages and therefore certain things will always be with us – war, pestilence, the fact that individuals are capable of pretty awful things without civilization and culture,” Hanson told *The Boston Globe* in 2003, when he was becoming infamous for turning folksy insights into bludgeons against critics of the Iraq War. A fifth-generation California raisin farmer, self-styled Jeffersonian republican, and best-selling historian of ancient wars, Hanson pleased Bush and Dick Cheney with his *Carnage and Culture*, which cited nine historic battles to attribute the supposed superiority of Western war-making to its rooting in Greek and Roman values. Hanson reserves his deepest scorn for leftist academics, who he claims prefer a politics of moral (or amoral) posturing to taking real responsibility, and for progressive activists who think they can improve the world rather than affirm some dignity amid deprivation, moral depravity, and capricious fate.

**T**he irony – dare one call it the Greek tragedy? – in Hanson’s mission begins with the unlikely truth that anyone who cares about the republic will find much to like in him. He isn’t a red-tooth-and-claw decisionist like Friedrich Nietzsche or Carl Schmitt; he’s an angry civic republican who doesn’t know where to turn. Sitting in his nineteenth-century San Joaquin Valley family farmhouse for the 2003 *Globe* interview, Hanson impressed interviewer Laura Secor with his rustic, self-deprecating charm: “Every dime I ever lost was in farming in the wealthiest agricultural area in the world,” he told her. “And every money I ever made was in classics, in the most culturally desolate area in the world.” Secor recounts how he “got a job in town,” establishing a classics program at California State University at Fresno in 1984 and teaching there for 20 years, assiduously cultivating minority and working-class students. Hanson, she notes, likes “ ‘keen-eyed,’ egalitarian, hard-working, and largely self-governing” small land-owners, whether they’re American or ancient Greek. “So if we now object to the view of Plato and Aristotle,” he wrote in his book *The Other Greeks*, “it may be because we have lost empathy with the horny-handed farmer himself and his cargo of self-reliance, hard work, and a peculiar distrust of rich and poor alike.”

Hanson seems to be channeling Christopher Lasch here, and while he voted for Bush in 2000 and 2004, he remains a registered Democrat who claims that he disdains “golf club” conservatives and even think-tank and academic ones. Of the conservative political theorist Leo Strauss’s followers, he says, “I don’t think they understand the brutality of life that I grew up with. I don’t think any of them’s gone out and pruned vines for 30 days on end . . . and nobody’s been in a fight, or nobody’s had to run a business.”

This staging of Hanson’s rusticity has been going on for some time, but his mother was a judge and his father a college administrator. And his affinity for civic republicans, ancient and current, is hard to square with his role as a favorite of those horny-handed sons of the soil George W. Bush and Dick Cheney, or with his $250,000 award from the conservative Bradley Foundation, or with his fellowship at the conservative Hoover Institution (so much for disdaining think-tank conservatives).

Hanson was in the White House in January 2005, working with the Cold War historian and would-be grand strategist John Lewis Gaddis to help craft Bush’s second inaugural address (both men received National Humanities Medals from Bush). The ideologue in him keeps tugging at his scholarly sleeve: In an interview in 2008, he insisted that our Iraq blunders are minor compared to those of other wars, and in *Makers*, he writes that “the more things change, the more they remain the same.”

But the truth in that chestnut owes more to the ancient world’s own historians, such as Thucydides, than it does to those like Hanson who now imagine that studying that world will make us more like Pericles or Epaminondas. Thucydides, who fought the Peloponnesian War of the fifth century B.C. on the side of Athens, wrote the great history of that long conflict not as a cheerleader or lesson-giver but as a bearer of his society’s collective experience. A keen observer of conflict, he recounted how demagogues such as Cleon, an Athenian leader of that time, subtly altered cherished words’ meanings in public discourse to try to dispel Athenians’ ambivalence about their imperialism. Reading Hanson on the Greeks feels more like reading Cleon on Thucydides – in other words, like rewriting history, not because any new facts have come to light but because Hanson, unlike Thucydides (and unlike some of the contributors to his anthology), is willing to compromise the writing of history in order to make it.

Our distance from the buzz and hum of ordinary ancient people who aren’t featured in the great classical narratives makes it easy to cast such stories as precedents for today’s ideological projections. Hanson sighs copiously about the limits to our knowledge and the inevitability of loose interpretations, but that doesn’t keep him from making ancient history a Trojan Horse for his certitudes, stretching what we little know of the past to serve what he wants us to think about the present.

Citing the book’s first chapter by Thomas Holland, the British historian of ancient Persia, Hanson tells us: “Imperial powers . . . create an entire mythology about the morality, necessity, or inevitability of conquest. Their narratives are every bit as important to military planning as men and matériel in the field.” Fair enough, but one can’t help ruing Hanson’s own efforts to help Bush craft a grand narrative. Holland seems to tweak Hanson about this when he contrasts the sixth century B.C. Persian emperor Cyrus’s supple, tolerant handling of conquered populations–by encouraging Jews who’d been exiled to Babylon to return to Jerusalem, Cyrus got himself written into the Old Testament as a great servant of Yahweh–with his successor Darius’s conviction “that there was no stronghold of [falsehood] so remote that it might not ultimately be purged and redeemed. . . . After all, if it was the destiny of the King of Kings [here, Darius] to bring peace to a bleeding world, then what were those who defied him to be ranked as if not the agents of anarchy and darkness, of an axis of evil?”

Hanson wouldn’t get such tweaking from the Yale classicist and fellow Iraq War zealot Donald Kagan, another contributor to the volume. “Today, we assume that empire is an entirely negative notion,” Hanson advises us. “But as Donald Kagan shows . . . rare individuals [in this case, the fifth century Athenian statesman Pericles] occasionally do make a difference. Empire . . . was not doomed to failure, if moderate and sober leaders like Pericles understood its function and utility.” Kagan claims that “the Greeks were free from the modern prejudice against power and the security and glory it could bring” not because they were “a free, autonomous polis,” but because they had a strong leader, Pericles, to rouse them to their imperial obligations. Kagan’s non-academic, political pronouncements have made clear his wish that someone similar would convince Americans that their hegemony is good for everyone and for their own historical glory. His account of Athens reads like an advisory on American hegemony from the Cold War through Vietnam and up to the present. One need only substitute contemporary cases for his ancient ones to sense this chapter’s didactic intent.

**H**anson’s own chapter examines a preventive war waged by the Boeotian leader Epaminondas against Sparta in the fourth century B.C. in a way that supposedly clarifies the plausibility if not the wisdom of our venture in Iraq. Commenting on this chapter in the book’s introduction, he notes:

“Preemption, coercive democratization, and unilateralism in the post-Iraq world are felt recently to be either singularly American notions or by their very nature pernicious concepts. . . . In fact, these ideas have been around since the beginning of Western civilization and have proven both effective and of dubious utility.”

Hanson’s account of Epaminondas’s doughty assault on the mighty Sparta, which had occupied his own country but whose subordinate city-states he liberated from slavery, bears a dubious relation to America’s “preventive” war with a comparatively much weaker, distant Iraq. He nevertheless insists that just as the Spartan Peloponnese emerged from a long and expensive war “largely democratic . . . and the Greek city-states to the north . . . free from Spartan attack,” so the Iraq War, although it “had tragically cost more than 4,200 American dead, along with hundreds of allied casualties, nearly a trillion dollars, and thousands more wounded,” had by 2008 led to a “relatively quiet and democratic” Iraq.

This is such a stretch that even Hanson has to conclude that “history alone will judge, in the modern instance, as it has in the ancient, whether such an expensive preemptive gamble ever justified the cost.” But deferring to history’s judgment doesn’t square with lambasting the media for reporting the plight of Iraqis who’ve been not liberated but murdered, or with ignoring the 2.5 million Iraqis who’ve left their “relatively quiet and democratic” country, thanks to misjudgments that any serious study of ancient strategy might have foreseen.

In an interesting chapter, “Counterinsurgency and the Enemies of Rome,” Susan Mattern, an associate professor of history at the University of Georgia and author of *Galen and the Rhetoric of Healing*, describes how the empire kept order in many provinces only through “a variety of insidious ‘hearts and minds’ mechanisms,” including “social aid, citizenship grants, a uniform law code, and the indigenous integration and assimilation into Roman life that won over or co-opted local populations.” She portrays the fragility and fluidity of what many assume was a stable civil society but notes:

“[W]hen I am asked to comment on the practical lessons of Roman history, my response . . . focuses on the critical role of social institutions. . . . The nearest modern parallel may be the ‘global village’ created by telecommunications technology, financial institutions, free trade, and the consumer tastes and interests that link international communities today. A focus on shared economic and cultural interests rather than on ideology is a promising direction for foreign policy in the future.”

Maybe Mattern has our dim prospects in Afghanistan on her mind, but whatever the reason, she declines to do what I suspect Hanson hoped she would–and what Barry Strauss, a neoconservative professor of classics at Cornell, does in his chapter on slave rebellions. He likens these ancient revolts to Afghan tribal insurgencies, and he cites Rome’s overdetermined victories to assure us that “successful insurgencies are the exception” and that “states usually hold all the cards.” The analogies seem too flimsy to invite serious comment.

Adrian Goldsworthy, a biographer of Julius Caesar, shows that grand strategy involves not only what imperial leaders think and do but what “barbarians” do. He analogizes competition among tribes in Caesar’s time, and their bargaining with Caesar himself, to Afghan inter-tribal competition and bargaining with Americans. But Goldsworthy notes that while we are trying to create a democracy and build a nation, Caesar was not: “Personal interest more than anything else dictated whether leaders supported Rome or resisted Caesar.” Caesar’s personal diplomacy, not Roman messianism, made the difference, and Goldsworthy may well endorse Americans’ talking to Taliban leaders without pretending to uplift them.

In Rome’s declining years, notes Peter Heather, who has studied the frontiers of the declining Roman Empire, its grand strategists forgot they weren’t the only deciders. Barbarians were reacting “with intelligence and determination to the opportunities and dangers that imperial policies presented,” including the negative factor of aggressive exploitation. Heather has the last sentence of the book, and he uses it to posit a kind of Newton’s third law of empires: “The exercise of imperial political dominance and economic exploitation will in the long run stimulate a series of reactions that turns initially weaker neighbors into societies much more capable of resisting or even overturning the aggressive imperialism that set those reactions in train.”

**T**his collection makes Hanson look good partly because it transcends him, and it would be pleasant to think that its best contributors have summoned the better angels of his nature. But he keeps on raging at liberals–“America is now a campus, and Obama is our dean,” reads the sardonic title on one of his many recent blog posts in Pajamas Media. In *Makers*, he warns that today’s radically evolving technology “fools many into thinking that war itself is reinvented with the novel tools of each age.” Why didn’t he tell that to Donald Rumsfeld, a hero of his, when it mattered?

“Since war is and will always be conducted by men and women, who reason–or react emotionally–in somewhat expected ways, there is a certain predictability to war,” Hanson writes in the introduction. But when the conservative online magazine *FrontPage* asked him in 2008 what lessons Iraq would teach future historians, he answered, “It’s a reminder that . . . no war turns out as one predicts.” Well, sure, and, a few decades ago, he mightn’t have predicted that women would conduct wars or that seismic technological changes would enable lone suicide bombers to destroy thousands of non-combatants in attacks with murky “return addresses.” He seems not to have noticed one of the most “unpredictable” consequences of our time’s immense shifts in communications and in public moral awareness: Huge, armed regimes–of the British in India, segregationists in the American South, Afrikaners in South Africa, and Communists in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe–have been brought down by acts of moral witness backed by unarmed, non-violent, disciplined mass movements. Nothing like this happened to regimes in ancient Greece and Rome; only the early Christians come close, and, by then, the Roman Empire was already in trouble.

Hanson might counter that the British and Soviet empires were exhausted when these new kinds of dissidence challenged them and that segregation had become problematic for Washington with Africa’s decolonization during the Cold War. But Hannah Arendt, a historian of classical philosophy in her own right, and Jonathan Schell, who reported on the Vietnam War and integrates Arendt’s insights into his *The Unconquerable World*, show that immense changes in technology and in beliefs about power, legitimacy, and non-violent disobedience are altering the relationship between states’ use of force to assert their authority and others’ capacity to challenge their legitimacy.

No, human nature hasn’t changed. Historians of the ancients perform an important service when they remind liberals of that by making vivid the endurance of force, fraud, fate, and humans’ noble if doomed attempts to defy them. But that doesn’t license historians like Hanson to use the classics as a cudgel to denigrate liberalism as a carrier of unprecedented options. Liberalism has fractured “organic” Aristotelian and medieval Christian understandings of social order irreversibly by separating church and state and by elevating personal autonomy. It has also made possible, though not inevitable, the politics of moral witness and disciplined, non-violent coercion that brought down the vast, national-security states just mentioned, virtually without firing a shot.

Another “liberal” irony that only Susan Mattern seems to anticipate is a darker one: The capitalism of John Locke and Adam Smith that arrived with liberalism and modernity has metastasized into a casino-finance and corporate-welfare regime that is dissolving the imperial assumptions about war-making emphasized in *Makers* and in Hanson’s polemics. Liberalism’s prospects can’t be charted by the conservative minority of classicists who spin ancient history to justify imperial orchestrations of power and to scourge their sometimes feckless critics. Historians who do that will have plenty of “friends” and tactical rewards, but little of the prescience or moral dignity that Thucydides recognized and achieved. http://democracyjournal.org/images/DEM_endslug.gif

(Allso at <http://www.thecuttingedgenews.com/index.php?article=21675>)

<http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/ten-miles-square/2014/03/a_commentator_lost_in_a_house049412.php> **The Washington Monthly**



**Photo/Mike Lovett   
Leon Wieseltier (center) at Brandeis University, where he gave a commencement address**

(Also at *The Washington Spectator*: <http://washsp.ec/1oNlHNs#.UyDRc5FjzUA.gmail> and at *HuffingtonPost:* <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-sleeper/house-of-columns_b_4928369.html> )

March 10, 2014

**Lost in a House of Columns**

**By Jim Sleeper**

“There is the question of how to respond practically to Putin’s aggression and there is the question of how to respond intellectually,” writes Leon Wieseltier, literary editor of *The New Republic*, in his most recent “Washington Diarist” [column](http://www.newrepublic.com/article/116892/what-obama-needs-learn-putins-invasion-ukraine). “The latter is no less important than the former, because the Ukrainian crisis is not a transient event but a lasting circumstance with which we will be wrestling for a long time.”

Already I’m swaying gently in anticipation of this week’s rendering of the liturgy. Wieseltier, a celebrant of other people’s courage in Baghdad, Teheran, Hamza, Beijing, and Kiev, rocks himself regularly into supplications for strong American leadership, with rhythmic incantations that aren’t practical or even intellectual but are clearly self-pleasuring. Sometimes they even arouse readers like me:

“Having deceived the country into believing that almost everything may be accomplished, [Obama] is deceiving it into believing that almost nothing may be accomplished. He is not raising the country up, he is tutoring it in ruefulness and futility. In our foreign policy, we are abandoning the world to its chaos and its cruelty, and disqualifying ourselves from acting on behalf of the largest and the most liberating ideals.”

That was Wieseltier two weeks ago, [admonishing the President](http://www.newrepublic.com/article/116402/xu-zhiyongs-brave-human-rights-activism-china) to respond somehow to Xi Jinping’s vicious crackdown on brave Chinese dissenters such as Xu Zhiyong, who is now a political prisoner following a trial at which he was stopped from reading a statement of liberal-democratic aspirations as eloquent as any that might have come from Wieseltier himself.

But what would Wieseltier have Obama do? “We must mentally arm ourselves against a reality about which we only recently disarmed ourselves: the reality of protracted conflict,” he advises, this time apropos of Russia’s encroachment upon Ukraine. “The lack of preparedness at the White House was not merely a weakness of policy but also a weakness of worldview,” he explains. “The president is too often caught off guard by enmity, and by the nastiness of things. There really is no excuse for being surprised by evil.”

So we must get better at recognizing evil when we see it. Wieseltier anticipated and applauded the preparedness and strong worldview of George W. Bush who, although surprised on 9/11, was never again caught off guard by enmity or evil.

In fact, even as Ground Zero lay smoking only days after 9/11, Wieseltier joined 42 other armchair warriors in delivering prescient strategic and moral advice to Bush in a letter sent Sept. 20, 2001 on [the letterhead](http://zfacts.com/node/307) of William Kristol’s neoconservative Project for the New American Century (PNAC): “[E]ven if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the attack, any strategy aiming at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. Failure to undertake such an effort will constitute an early and perhaps decisive surrender in the war on international terrorism.”

That’s preparedness for you! As I noted several years ago in [a longer assessment](http://www.jimsleeper.com/?p=791) of Wieseltier’s literary and political modus, this formidable editor and closet neoconservative foreign-policy activist had even prepared himself for preparedness by joining the advisory board of [The Committee for the Liberation of Iraq](http://www.rightweb.irc-online.org/profile/Committee_for_the_Liberation_of_Iraq), a spawn of Kristol’s PNAC and the American Enterprise Institute.

Like all neoconservative committees, this one passed into history after the glorious liberation of Iraq. But Wieseltier has continued to redeploy his foreign-policy prescience, cautioning Obama now against “projecting one’s good intentions, one’s commitment to reason, one’s optimism about history, upon other individuals and other societies and other countries: narcissism is the enemy of empiricism, and we must perceive differences and threats empirically, lucidly, not with disbelief but with resolve.”

In other words, Obama must resolve to re-set us and re-arm us against harsh realities from which he only recently disarmed us. Perhaps he should emulate Bush, who perceived the threats in Iraq as empirically and lucidly as Wieseltier urged him to do.

But didn’t Bush also project a little too much optimism about history into that venture and into a meeting with Vladimir Putin, after which he announced, “I looked the man in the eye. I found him to be very straightforward and trustworthy….I was able to get a sense of his soul.”?

I can’t find any evidence of Wieseltier rebuking such Bushian narcissism, but I do find him writing that Obama should have seen danger in Putin’s comment that “Our opinions do not coincide” after their meeting last year. “The sentence reverberates and is now a fact of enormous geopolitical significance,” Wieseltier advises. He notes that Angela Merkel found Putin to be living “in another world,” and he responds, “But the world is composed of all the worlds, and reality of all the realities. Our minds must make room for them all, not least for purposes of resistance.”

Resistance! Yes, for “The economic notion of rationality should sometimes yield to the anthropological notion of rationality,” and “Putin is acting on the basis of a belief system” borne of “traditions of Great Russian nationalism,… and of the civilizational difference between Russia and the West: those are Putin’s Slavophile reasons, along with the ‘logic’ of power that all tyrants enact.” Not only that: “The wild homophobia of Putin’s regime is his shorthand for his civilizational war. He gives masculinity a bad name.”

Apparently George Bush gave masculinity a good name, and Wieseltier is leaving no button un-pressed in his effort to teach the feckless Obama to become a strong Decider:

“Rather like Jimmy Carter in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, it is time for Barack Obama to consider revisions and corrections—a reset—of some of his assumptions about history and human behavior, insofar as any assumptions can be clearly imputed to him after these years of lurching from idealism to realism and back.”

Never mind how our support for the Afghan mujahideen against Russia’s occupation came back to bite us. When Cold War assumptions that the world is harsh, dark, and often evil reigned in the Reagan and Bush White Houses, Wieseltier sat tall in his columnist’s chair. And now he insists that Russia’s intimidation and likely invasion of Ukraine revive similar Cold War assumptions.

I can think of a few reasons why it hasn’t - we’re not fighting world Communism anymore, for one. Wieseltier acknowledges that “[a]ll historical analogies are imprecise,” but he frets that the historical analogy “that most rattles Obama is with the cold war. ‘Our approach…’ [Obama] said last month, ‘is not to see this as some cold war chessboard in which we’re in competition with Russia.’

To which Wieseltier retorts, “I leave aside the glory of the cold war, the courage and the justice of the struggle against the Soviet Union. I note only that the borderlands of Russia, and some places beyond, are looking increasingly like black squares and white squares to me.”

But no matter what liturgy or game Wieseltier is humming or playing while rocking in his chair, the true glory, courage, and justice of struggle against the Soviet Union was nowhere nearly as evident in the United States of my youth as it was in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. Far more evident here were the dynamism of the military-industrial complex and of McCarthyite hysteria, to which even presidents kowtowed with gratuitous folly, installing the Shah of Iran, invading the Bay of Pigs, waging the Vietnam War, propping up the Argentine junta, and, under Reagan, allowing the Iran-Contra scandal to fund counterinsurgencies in Central America.

All this to try brutally — and at irreversible costs in lives, wealth, and public trust, — what economic sanctions and market forces themselves have done far more effectively. Noticing the other day that the label inside a T-shirt reads “Made in Vietnam,” I wondered again what 50,000 American deaths and countless Vietnamese deaths had accomplished if, despite our losing the war, Vietnam has been absorbed into *le doux commerce* — a problem in itself, if you ask me, but that’s another story for another time.

Outside the Union League Club on Park Avenue in Manhattan two summers ago I saw 40 or 50 otherwise-fit young men who lacked only legs or arms wheeling or peddling themselves around on a tour of New York City arranged for them by the Veterans Administration and philanthropists. They’re not Vietnam War veterans but children of the Project for the New American Century and the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq. So, too, are rising numbers of military suicides and veterans whose disorientation I read about most recently in *New York Times* war correspondent Dexter Filkins’ [review](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/09/books/review/redeployment-by-phil-klay.html?ref=review&gwh=DC5CA241DBC4DED972B0BA5C3D1CFE81&gwt=pay) of a book by one of them, Phil Klay.

It must be easier not to think about this if, like Wieseltier, you’re living “in another world,” Putin’s world, that of Munich in 1938 or of the Cold War in, say, 1957. “The past is not dead, it is merely forgotten,” warns Wieseltier, a child of Holocaust survivors, “and this forgetfulness… poorly equips us to confront challenges that have been experienced before, and not too long ago. The Russian outrage in Ukraine is a state-of-the-art twentieth-century crisis.”

Yet not too long ago, in the 1980s, Wieseltier cautioned, practically and thoughtfully, against remembering too much:

“The memory of oppression is a pillar and strut of the identity of every people oppressed…. [It] imparts an isolating sense of apartness…. Don’t be fooled, it teaches, there is only repetition…. In the memory of oppression, oppression outlives itself. The scar does the work of the wound. That is the real tragedy: that injustice retains the power to distort long after it has ceased to be real. …. This is the unfairly difficult dilemma of the newly emancipated…: an honorable life is not possible if they remember too little and an honorable life is not possible if they remember too much.”

You might hope that Wieseltier would return to this truth now. Instead, his columns seem driven by an almost-incapacitating pain that, remembering too much, keeps him ever on guard against eruptions of other people’s suppressed or misdirected pain and against still others’ (such as Obama’s) efforts to forestall, deflect, or relieve such eruptions.

“History is playing another trick on [Obama], he warns. “It is testing, and hopefully thwarting, his centripetal inclinations. He may yet have to lead an alliance, I mean strongly. He may yet have to talk about freedom, I mean ringingly.” The Coalition of the Willing, perhaps, followed by a “Mission Accomplished” speech on an aircraft carrier at sea.

There are indeed times when liberals must fight to defend liberalism, to defeat enemies who’ve arisen, as did fascism and much of Communism, from within the interstices and contradictions of liberal capitalism itself. But Wieseltier lives for those times. Somewhat like Robert Kagan, who exulted, “The world has become normal again” in 2007 when the neoliberal global village started to resemble a painting by Hieronymus Bosch, Wieseltier finds his most reliable coordinates in imagining American face-offs with Iraq, with Iran, with Syria, with Russia — anything to dispel the specters of Munich, 1938 and Yalta, 1945.

Fortunately, not much is at stake in Wieseltier’s contributions to the House of Columns that passes for commentary in Washington. Singing of scars still doing the work of wounds, he might as well be intoning an epitaph for himself:

I am so wise,  
That my wisdom makes me weary.  
It’s all I can do  
To share my wisdom with you.

[*Jim Sleeper*](http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/ten-miles-square/2014/03/editors%20%5bat%5d%20washingtonmonthly.com) *is a lecturer at Yale. He teaches a seminar on journalism, liberalism, and democracy.*

<http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/ten-miles-square/2014/03/a_commentator_lost_in_a_house049412.php>

**Author’s additional comment on the column:**

We should acknowledge that the U.S. and other Western nations did obligate themselves to defend Ukraine's sovereignty in exchange for its giving up the nuclear weapons the Russians had deposited there -- an important step toward nuclear non-proliferation.

But we should also realize, as others here have commented, that this is a "gut," existential conflict for Putin & Co. as much as it is for Ukrainians, not only because of Putin's nostalgia for Soviet power but because Russia and Ukraine's’ religious and ethnic histories are far more intertwined than, say, ours with Cuba, a country we were as defensive about, when it was joining the Soviet bloc, as Putin is about the prospect of Ukraine's joining the EU.

World Communism was one thing, the EU is something very different. Yet this only partly a "sphere of influence" calculation on Putin's part. Russia has felt encircled, and humiliated, after its failures in Afghanistan, Chechneya, and the Middle East. Under such conditions, any nation-state would be prone to lash out.

Putin & Co. are presiding over an almost-failed state that could give way to its warlords and other interests and then to the kind of Tsar that Putin would surely like to become. But George W. Bush and the Wieseltier-William Kristol chorus have done such grave damage to American credibility and power that we will be a long time repairing it. I doubt we can do so by showing an especially strong hand in this unusual case. Perhaps it’s best to let Angela Merkel, who grew up under the Soviet boot in East Germany, lead the opposition, if indeed Germans, who would bear a lot of the burden, are willing to lead it.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**REACTIONS TO THE COLUMN**:

**The Atlantic:** **James Fallows on Strategic Calm as a Virtue.**

*www.theatlantic.com/.../****ukraine****.../284338/*‎

Mar 10, 2014 - With **Ukraine** and Crimea suddenly looming as potential [WW I-style] **...** an item about **Leon Wieseltier** for The Washington Monthly, **Jim Sleeper** **...**

Also: http://americanreviewmag.com/blogs/On-strategic-calm-as-a-virtue

**FALLOWS: Jim Sleeper on the New Cold War**. In an item about Leon Wieseltier [for The Washington Monthly,](http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/ten-miles-square/2014/03/a_commentator_lost_in_a_house049412.php) Jim Sleeper gives another instance of what I'm suggesting is a larger point: that rushing, quickly, to larger self-confident, self-righteous stands is usually a source of error. He reminds us of what a group of "strategists" [told the public](http://zfacts.com/node/307) a few days after the 9/11 attacks:

*[E]ven if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the attack, any strategy aiming at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. Failure to undertake such an effort will constitute an early and perhaps decisive surrender in the war on international terrorism.*

People who react this way have the right temperament for cable talk shows but the wrong one for decisions about the national interest. Cable pundits are in business to say, "The evidence is not yet in, but we know this means [xxx]." Give us leaders (and accident investigators) willing to say, Calm down. Breathe. Let's wait a minute, and think.

[**On Strategic Calm, as a Virtue - James Fallows - *The Atlantic***](http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/03/on-strategic-calm-as-a-virtue/284338/)

*www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/03/.../284338/*‎

http://americanreviewmag.com/blogs/On-strategic-calm-as-a-virtue

1 hour ago - 3) **Jim Sleeper** on the New Cold War. In an item about **Leon Wieseltier** for The Washington Monthly, **Jim Sleeper** gives another instance of what I'm suggesting is**...**

**The American Conservative: Push for a New Cold War Seems to Stall, by Scott McConnell**

*www.theamericanconservative.com/.../comm...*‎

The American Conservative

We have seen windy laments about American lack of moral backbone from Leon Weiseltier (**Jim Sleeper** provides a delicious takedown of the closeted neocon **...**

***Digby blog* Their wisdom makes them weary** –<http://digbysblog.blogspot.com/2014/03/their-wisdom-makes-them-weary.html>

Also: <http://www.malacandra.me/index.php/site/page/their_wisdom_makes_them_weary>

*www.opinionsarenotfacts.com/digby-feed*‎

**There are a whole lot of people to whom we could apply this headline, no?**

[**Leon Wieseltier’s Moral Posturing on Crimea Suggests He Learned Nothing From his Moral Posturing on Iraq**](http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/ten-miles-square/2014/03/a_commentator_lost_in_a_house049412.php)

**I can think of quite a few right off the top of my head. But this piece by Jim Sleeper is so good, so right, that I won't belabor that point:**

“...Already I’m swaying gently in anticipation of this week’s rendering of the liturgy. Wieseltier, a celebrant of other people’s courage in Baghdad, Teheran, Hamza, Beijing, and Kiev, rocks himself regularly into supplications for strong American leadership, with rhythmic incantations that aren’t practical or even intellectual but are clearly self-pleasuring. Sometimes they even arouse readers like me…”

**The Moderate Voice** <http://themoderatevoice.com/192371/ukraine-condoleezza-rice-joins-the-cabal/> The New Republic published [a column](http://www.newrepublic.com/article/116892/what-obama-needs-learn-putins-invasion-ukraine) by Leon Wieseltier that, in its attacks on Obama’s Ukraine policy specifically and his foreign policy in general, is similar to Condoleezza Rice’s column discussed below. Jim Sleeper, at the Washington Monthly Magazine, [reacts](http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/ten-miles-square/2014/03/a_commentator_lost_in_a_house049412.php) to Wieseltier’s remarks in a unique and effective way. A must read, [here](http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/ten-miles-square/2014/03/a_commentator_lost_in_a_house049412.php).

[**bookforum.com** / omnivore](http://www.bookforum.com/blog/)

*www.bookforum.com/blog/*‎

**Jim Sleeper** on how **Leon Wieseltier's** moral posturing on Crimea

**Tikkun Magazine:** [**Neocons Now Pushing For War With Russia** – by](http://www.tikkun.org/tikkundaily/2014/03/10/neocons-now-pushing-for-war-with-russia/) **M.J. Rosenberg**

*www.tikkun.org/.../neocons-now-pushing-for-war-with-russia/*‎

Mar 10, 2014 - **Ukraine** is on the Russian border. **...** These thoughts were triggered by an article written by **Jim Sleeper**, who I knew from**...**

[**memeorandum: Leon Wieseltier's Moral Posturing on Crimea Recalls His Posturing on Iraq...**](http://www.memeorandum.com/140310/p60)

***www.memeorandum.com/140310/p60*‎**

Mar 10, 2014 - **Jim Sleeper** / Washington Monthly: **....** Bill Clinton slams 'crazy' moves on **Ukraine** — Former President Bill Clinton on Monday jabbed Russian **...**

[**Washington Monthly: Political Animal | SplitNation**](http://www.splitnation.org/aggregator/sources/61)**, by Ed Kilgore “Sleeper Responds to Wieseltier”**

<http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/political-animal-a/2014_03/sleeper_responds_to_wieseltier049419.php?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+washingtonmonthly%2Frss+%28Political+Animal+at+Washington+Monthly%29>

By Ed Kilgore: One of those has been The New Republic's Leon Wieseltier, and in a ... distinguished journalist and Yale lecturer Jim Sleeper responds to Wieseltier, whose ...

**The Washington Monthly:** [**Leon Wieseltier's Moral Posturing on Crimea Suggests He Learned Nothing from His Moral Posturing on Iraq...**](http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/ten-miles-square/2014/03/a_commentator_lost_in_a_house049412.php)**by Jim Sleeper**

*www.washingtonmonthly.com/.../a\_commentator\_l...*‎

March 10, 2014 12:03 PM **Leon Wieseltier's** Moral Posturing on Crimea Suggests He Learned Nothing From his Moral Posturing on Iraq. By **Jim Sleeper** **...** less important than the former, because the **Ukrainian** crisis is not a transient event but **..**

**The Washington Spectator. The Moral Amnesia of Leon Wieseltier, by Jim Sleeper**

*washingtonspectator.org/.../****Jim-Sleeper****.html*‎

**Jim Sleeper**. **...** Wednesday, 12 March 2014 | **Jim Sleeper** **...** to respond intellectually,” writes **Leon Wieseltier**, of The New Republic, in his most recent column. **...** intimidation and likely invasion of **Ukraine** revive similar Cold War assumptions.

[**Huffington Post**](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tag/leon-wieseltier)**: A Commentator Lost in Washington’s House of Columns, by Jim Sleeper**

*www.huffingtonpost.com/tag/****leon-wieseltier***‎

**Jim Sleeper** | Posted 03.10.2014 | Politics **...** **Leon Wieseltier** has written his own Tractatus. **....** Russia: We Reserve Right To Protect Compatriots In **Ukraine**.

*themoderatevoice.com ›* [*International*](http://themoderatevoice.com/category/international/)‎

[**Neocons Now Pushing For War With Russia - *Tikkun* Magazine**](http://www.tikkun.org/tikkundaily/2014/03/10/neocons-now-pushing-for-war-with-russia/)

*www.tikkun.org/.../neocons-now-pushing-for-war-with-russia/*‎

54 mins ago - **...** **Jim Sleeper**, who I knew from Israel activism days back in the 1960′s. He focuses his ire on one of these neo types in particular,

[**Push For New Cold War Seems to Stall | *The American Conservative***](http://www.theamericanconservative.com/push-for-new-cold-war-seems-to-stall/comment-page-1/)

*www.theamericanconservative.com/.../comm...*‎

The American Conservative

We have seen windy laments about American lack of moral backbone from Leon Weiseltier (**Jim Sleeper** provides a delicious takedown of the closeted neocon **...**

**The Moderate Voice** <http://themoderatevoice.com/192371/ukraine-condoleezza-rice-joins-the-cabal/>

The New Republic published [a column](http://www.newrepublic.com/article/116892/what-obama-needs-learn-putins-invasion-ukraine) by Leon Wieseltier that, in its attacks on Obama’s Ukraine policy specifically and his foreign policy in general, is similar to Condoleezza Rice’s column discussed below. Jim Sleeper, at the Washington Monthly Magazine, [reacts](http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/ten-miles-square/2014/03/a_commentator_lost_in_a_house049412.php) to Wieseltier’s remarks in a unique and effective way: “Leon Wieseltier’s Moral Posturing on Crimea Suggests He Learned Nothing From his Moral Posturing on Iraq.” A must read, [here](http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/ten-miles-square/2014/03/a_commentator_lost_in_a_house049412.php).

[*Washington Monthly: Political Animal |* SplitNation](http://www.splitnation.org/aggregator/sources/61)

<http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/political-animal-a/2014_03/sleeper_responds_to_wieseltier049419.php?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+washingtonmonthly%2Frss+%28Political+Animal+at+Washington+Monthly%29>

By Ed Kilgore: One of those has been The New Republic's Leon Wieseltier, and in a **...** distinguished journalist and Yale lecturer Jim Sleeper responds to Wieseltier, whose **...**

<http://www.latooscuro-trading.com/2014/03/gli-americani-sono-contrari.html>

[Gli americani sono contrari all'interventismo degli Usa in Ucraina | L **...**](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=17&ved=0CFIQFjAGOAo&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.lindipendenza.com%2Fmcconnell-americani-contrari-interventismo-anti-russo-stati-uniti-ucraina%2F&ei=3QQqU6OZB5HGkQfut4GwBw&usg=AFQjCNFvh8gWi4cnHBfPuEtQqcDRuOnJqg)

*www.lindipendenza.com/mcconnell-americani-contrar...*‎

[Translate this page](http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://www.lindipendenza.com/mcconnell-americani-contrari-interventismo-anti-russo-stati-uniti-ucraina/&prev=/search%3Fq%3D%2522jim%2Bsleeper%2522%26start%3D10%26newwindow%3D1%26sa%3DN%26biw%3D1298%26bih%3D661%26tbs%3Dqdr:d)

15 hours ago - Abbiamo visto lamenti circa la mancanza di spina dorsale morale degli americani da parte di Leon Weiseltier (**Jim Sleeper** offre qui un delizioso affossamento **...**.

**Their wisdom makes them weary – *Digby blog*** <http://digbysblog.blogspot.com/2014/03/their-wisdom-makes-them-weary.html>

<http://www.malacandra.me/index.php/site/page/their_wisdom_makes_them_weary>

**Rightweb (Institute for Policy Studies): Profile of Charles Hill**

<http://rightweb.irc-online.org/profile/Hill_Charles>

Hill laid out his views on "grand strategy" in his 2010 book, Grand Strategies: Literature, Statecraft, and World Order. "The book's long skein of plot summaries and potted histories of more than 20 great novels and plays depict diplomats devising duplicitous and desperate strategies behind thin veils of diplomatic protocol and immunity to restrain the blood-dimmed tide in a Hobbesian world," noted Sleeper in a review for Foreign Policy. "Reading between the lines of this book, it's not hard to understand how Hill's own career as a diplomat was marred, and ended, by too much diplomatic creative dissembling."[11] - See more at: http://rightweb.irc-online.org/profile/Hill\_Charles#sthash.v5P8koFV.dpuf

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

<http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/ten-miles-square/2014/05/if_america_is_weak_who_made_it050193.php>

**The Washington Monthly**

**Sunday, May 4, 2014**

**If America is Weak, Who Made it Weak?**

**By Jim Sleeper**

Cries for American military preparedness are growing louder and louder by the day, rising, circling, and echoing one another in a frenzy that even the awfulness of events in Ukraine and many other places doesn’t quite explain. The reason, according to Leon Wieseltier, David Brooks, and other prophets of American Destiny, is that (as I quoted Wieseltier [here](http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/ten-miles-square/2014/03/a_commentator_lost_in_a_house049412.php) on March 10) President Obama “is not raising the country up, he is tutoring it in ruefulness and futility…”

You might think there’d be other, better explanations for the foreign-policy disappointments of a behemoth such as the United States, and the conservative outcry has prompted a long [*New York Times* editorial](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/04/opinion/sunday/president-obama-and-the-world.html?hp&rref=opinion&_r=0) mentioning some of the reasons and a column by [Tom Friedman](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/04/opinion/sunday/president-obama-and-the-world.html?hp&rref=opinion&_r=0) reminding us that Obama had predecessors who really, truly damaged American credibility and power.

But there’s another dimension of our foreign-policy problems that almost everyone but me has been too polite to mention: A small chorus of critics who are themselves damaged - gnarled, frightened, and waving Salome-like veils of erudition and idealism to disguise their obsession with a world they seem driven to remind us is colder, darker, and harder than Obama and feckless liberals ever imagined.

Wieseltier and Brooks are members of this “blame the feckless liberals” chorus, and they put themselves on display last week in a manner so predictable and annoying that it begs a little deconstruction.

Because of Obama, [Wieseltier explained](http://www.newrepublic.com/article/117491/obama-and-inconvenience-history-abandoning-ukraine) then and again last week, we are “abandoning the world to its chaos and its cruelty, and disqualifying ourselves from acting on behalf of the largest and the most liberating ideals.”

What none of the prophets has noticed is that we no longer have an army with a large pool of fit recruits, or an adequate budget, or even a national will, owing partly and inescapably to stances that these blowhards of American Destiny have urged us to take since before 9/11 and owing to the associations and compromises they’ve made.

“The weakness with any democratic foreign policy is the problem of motivation,” Brooks frets. “How do you get the electorate to support the constant burden of defending the liberal system?”

How, indeed, when ”Americans Want to Pull Back From World Stage,” as the *Wall Street Journal* [reports](http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304163604579532050055966782?mg=reno64-wsj&url=http%3A%2F%2Fonline.wsj.com%2Farticle%2FSB10001424052702304163604579532050055966782.html), citing a WSJ/NBC poll showing that 47% of Americans “called for a less-active role in world affairs,… a much larger share than in similar polling in 2001, 1997, and 1995.”  How, indeed, to motivate the electorate when, as the poll also reports, Americans are “disenchanted with a U.S. economic system that many believe is stacked against them.”?

How can Brooks and Wieseltier motivate anyone after spending years serving a movement and powerful interests that can’t reconcile their supposed commitment to republican-ordered liberty with their knee-jerk service to a casino-financed, predatory-marketing juggernaut that’s dissolving republican virtues, morale, and even sovereignty? Nationalist nostalgia and scapegoating are their timeless resorts.

It was bad enough that Wieseltier’s March 7 column recalled “the glory of the cold war, the courage and the justice of the struggle against the Soviet Union” and added that now, too “the borderlands of Russia, and some places beyond, are looking increasingly like black squares and white squares to me.” But his latest supplications for aggressive American leadership reach a new crescendo in a [threnody](http://www.newrepublic.com/article/117491/obama-and-inconvenience-history-abandoning-ukraine) for history’s - and, in effect, America’s — new victims:

“The Ukrainians, the Syrians, the Iranians, the Israelis, the Palestinians, the Egyptians, the Saudis, the Moldovans, the Poles, the Czechs, the Japanese, the Taiwanese, the Baltic populations; they are all living with the jitters, and some of them on the cusp of despair, because the United States seems no longer reliable n emergencies.”

I can only try to imagine what must have been Wieseltier’s contempt for Dwight Eisenhower, who abandoned Hungarians revolting against Moscow in 1956; for Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, who abandoned Czechoslovakia in 1968; for Ronald Reagan, who sat on his hands throughout the long travails of Polish Solidarity in 1981, leaving them to the Pope; and for George H. W. Bush, who aroused and then betrayed the Kurds in 1992.

I can’t find any of Wieseltier’s remonstrances against these American betrayals of peoples on the cusp of despair. Perhaps he was too busy hymning the glories of Eisenhower’s installation of the Shah of Iran, Kennedy’s invasion of the Bay of Pigs, Johnson’s waging of the Vietnam War, Reagan’s propping up the Argentine junta and empowering the Afghan mujahideen and Nicaraguan and Salvadorean “freedom fighters.”

Only now has Wieseltier decided that, under Obama, “the United States… responds to oppressed and threatened people by making them more lonely and afraid.” Apparently he wants us to respond to them as we did those just mentioned.

Assessing Obama’s turn to what seems to him a limp-wristed containment, Wieseltier advises that “The grim fact is that Obama’s containment is not containing Putin, whose ‘green men’ and people’s republics and Big Lies and Russophilic incitement and covert operations and military deployments are undeterred by it.”

Oh, for the days when evil abroad was stopped cold by our military social workers and Green Zone republics and reports of Weapons of Mass Destruction and nationalist excitements (as in the run-up to the Iraq War) and Special Forces and military deployments!

Need one be some kind of Marxist to question this? How about just a civic republican, heartbroken at seeing the millions of Americans thrown out of their homes (and blamed by Brooks for their indiscipline), and the many thousands gunned down or wounded for life, not only abroad but, increasingly, in their own hometowns?

Wieseltier and Brooks imagine that they have clean hands at home and that they have grand-strategic omniscience abroad and that other Americans need to listen to them. “All around, the fabric of peace and order is fraying,” [Brooks warns us](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/29/opinion/when-wolves-attack.html), as if he’d had nothing to do with it. “The leaders of Russia and Ukraine escalate their apocalyptic rhetoric. The Sunni-Shiite split worsens as Syria and Iraq slide into chaos. China pushes its weight around in the Pacific.”

Luckily for Brooks’ readers:

“I help teach a grand strategy course at Yale, and I asked my colleagues to make sense of what’s going on. Charles Hill, who was a legendary State Department officer before going to Yale, wrote back: ….‘when an established international system enters its phase of deterioration, many leaders nonetheless respond with insouciance, obliviousness, and self-congratulation. When the wolves of the world sense this, they, of course, will begin to make their moves to probe the ambiguities of the aging system and pick off choice pieces to devour at their leisure.”

“This is what Putin is doing [Hill continues]; “this is what China has been moving toward doing in the maritime waters of Asia; this is what in the largest sense the upheavals of the Middle East are all about: i.e., who and what politico-ideological force will emerge as hegemon over the region in the new order to come. The old order, once known as ‘the American Century,’ has been situated within ‘the modern era,’ an era which appears to be stalling out after some 300-plus years. The replacement era will not be modern and will not be a nice one.”

Brooks called Charles Hill a “legendary foreign service office” ten years ago, too, in his *Times* column of April 10, 2004, and there he joined Hill in trying to deflect growing American doubts about the Iraq War. Brooks told the wavering to “Get a grip” and stop being “Chicken Littles like Ted Kennedy,” who Brooks said were “ranting that Iraq is another Vietnam.” He revealed then that “leadership in the U.S. is for once cool and resolved” and that “We’re going to wait for the holy period to end and crush Sadr…. As Charles Hill… observed, ‘I’ve been pleasantly surprised by the boldness and resolve.’”

A quick study of the pronouncements of Hill — who left the Reagan State Department, where he had been the top aide to Secretary of State George Shultz, after the Iran-Contra special prosecutor caught them dissimulating about what they’d known about that scandal and when — shows that Hill has dictated more than a few of Brooks’ columns since 1993.

In *Foreign Policy* [magazine](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/08/13/grand_strategic_failure?print=yes&hidecomments=yes&page=full) and in a longer column that ran originally in TPM and is on [my website](http://www.jimsleeper.com/?p=724), I’ve shown that Hill is indeed legendary for serving whomever employs him exactly as a Foreign Service officer serves whatever administration is in power. He subtly insinuates his own Vulcan, Cromwellian worldview into the policy line of the moment. For his prevarications, the Iran-Contra special counsel’s report called him “unworthy.” I hope that anyone tempted to credit him will read these two essays.

Before Hill became Brooks’ “legendary” foreign-policy sage of the past decade, he joined Wieseltier and other armchair warriors on Sept. 20, 2001, as Ground Zero lay smoking, to send President Bush strategic and moral advice on the letterhead of William Kristol’s neoconservative Project for the New American Century (PNAC):

“[E]ven if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the attack, any strategy aiming at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. Failure to undertake such an effort will constitute an early and perhaps decisive surrender in the war on international terrorism.”

Days later, Hill assessed President Bush’s leadership for the *Yale Daily News*, which asked him if he’d seen a change in Bush’s leadership since 9/11:

“[W]hat we have seen in the president’s behavior is a string of more and more able performances, more and more firm and definitive performances,” Hill told the student reporter. “And this is what you want to see. It’s a growing process, and I don’t see any limitation to this growth.”

Years later, when the PNAC letter to Bush urging war on Iraq became widely known, Hill would tell the student paper that he didn’t know how his name had gotten on the document and that he’d tried to get it removed. A response posted on the newspaper’s website by PNAC executive director Gary Schmitt discredited him decisively, closing with, “Sorry, Charlie.”

In 2003, on the eve of the Iraq War, Hill told the *PBS News Hour*: “It will be a war that will not do great damage to Iraq, to its installations, to its infrastructure, or to its people.” Asked if the war would be worth an estimated cost of $2 trillion, he replied, “I think that’s nothing in terms of what we’re going to see in 15 years… The benefits will be the restoration of American credibility and decisiveness. We’ll see an Iraq that is freed from oppression. This situation will also do a lot to transform the Israeli-Palestinian situation.”

Brooks’ foreign-policy mentor once described his own early and abiding understanding of “world order” as resembling a painting by Hieronymus Bosch in its perversity and precariousness. That’s pretty much how Brooks and Wieseltier see it, and Hill urges future grand strategists to become omniscient about it by taking “a 360-degree perspective.” Your approach can’t be just military and diplomatic, it also has to involve such things as economics, personnel, rhetoric, and morale. And you can’t just look outward, because somewhere in some basement something is going wrong. You can’t neglect anything.”

Who is Hill’s all-seeing, decisive “You,” if not the American administration of his, Brooks’, and Wieseltier’s dreams? What if there are 359 other players and perspectives? What if economics, personnel, rhetoric, and morale can’t be harnessed and driven by Hill’s “You” toward determined ends? What if, instead, such things have been set loose, degraded and dissolved by the very alliances, compromises, and strategies that “You” have chosen and served?

Hill’s answer was clear enough in the spring of 2008, when he was named the Chief Foreign Policy Adviser to Rudy Giuliani, whose presidential campaign is best remembered for turns of phrase like “The Terrorists’ War on Us,”, and for every pronouncement having consisted of “A verb, a noun, and ‘9/11,’” as Joe Biden put it mockingly.

Sharing Hill’s “360 degrees” presumptions, Wieseltier complains, in his own perverse and backhanded way, that Obama “has been trying to escape the Middle East… and ‘pivot’ to Asia, as if the United States can ever not be almost everywhere, leading and influencing, supporting or opposing, in one fashion or another….” In other words, Wieseltier thinks that the U.S. has no choice but to be everywhere and that, as he puts it, “only small powers” would think otherwise.”

If the U.S. is thinking that small, he tells us, it’s thanks to “the tiresome futurism of Obama,” who “feels inconvenienced by history,” which… regularly exasperates him and regularly disappoints him. It flows when he wants it to ebb and it ebbs when he wants it to flow….”

But if Obama is captive to a tiresome futurism, Wieseltier is the prisoner of equally tiresome pastism. He doesn’t feel inconvenienced by history; he’s obsessed with it, and he demands to be delivered from it by a president who’ll make it ebb when the United States wants it to ebb and flow when it wants it to flow. To do anything less, he tells us, would be to betray history’s victims:

“The Obama administration abandons to their fates one people after another, who pay the price for the president’s impatience with large historical struggles“ because Obama “is flummoxed that the world won’t stay saved, or agree to be saved at all. After all, he came to save it. And so the world has only itself to blame if Obama is sick of it and going home.”

How Wieseltier knows this is unclear, but, rocking back and forth in his columnist’s chair, he keeps repeating it liturgically, as he did in his column of March 7:

“Having deceived the country into believing that almost everything may be accomplished, [Obama] is deceiving it into believing that almost nothing may be accomplished. He is not raising the country up, he is tutoring it in ruefulness and futility… The president is too often caught off guard by enmity, and by the nastiness of things”.

Wieseltier is determined not to be caught off guard by the nastiness of things. So is Brooks, although chastened by the grand misadventures he supported so credulously and vigorously. In a column for the weekly Yale student *Herald* of Nov. 8 2002, he admonished campus critics of the coming war that:

"There seems to be a pervasive micromania afoot: We have to think small because grand visions never work, and if we try to champion democracy in Iraq we will only screw it up…. [Y]ou hear pseudo-sophisticates say the interest in Iraqi regime change is all about oil—a concept so detached from the realities of the world petroleum markets that it doesn’t bear a minute’s scrutiny."

So effective were Brooks, Wieseltier, Kristol, Hill and their ilk in marginalizing critics of the war that they helped stampede the United States into destroying Iraqi hopes and American interests in the Middle East in the grandest strategic foreign-policy blunder in our history.

Now Brooks tells us, with no sense of his own responsibility, that:

"The U.S. faces a death by a thousand cuts dilemma…. It’s not worth it to spend huge amounts of treasure to establish stability in Syria or defend a Western-oriented Ukraine. But, collectively, all the little problems can undermine the modern system. No individual ailment is worth the expense of treating it, but, collectively, they can kill you."

What to do? Brooks considers [a model of containment](http://www.dissentmagazine.org/blog/kissingers-diplomatic-review) offered by John Gaddis, another of his “grand strategy” colleagues at Yale and a biographer of George Kennan. Gaddis wrapped himself so tightly around George W. Bush during the last decade that he was brought to the White House in 2005 to help draft the Second Inaugural Address and was invited back to receive a National Medal of the Humanities.

Now Gaddis, like Brooks more chastened and cautious, advocates a nuanced policy of containment against Putin and other rogues in what Brooks calls “a corrective to the death-by-a thousand cuts mentality. [Gaddis] argues that we should contain these menaces until they collapse internally…. “By not behaving stupidly, by not overextending ourselves” —as Bush did in Iraq and Afghanistan, for example?—“we can, Gaddis argues, ‘make sure Putin’s seeds of self-destruction are more deeply rooted than our own.”

Maybe that’s one way to “champion democracy” this time without screwing it up. But Brooks doubts that “time is on our side,” and, having labored so mightily in 2002 to stampede the American public into Iraq, he worries even more now than he did then that ”The weakness with any democratic foreign policy is the problem of motivation. How do you get the electorate to support the constant burden of defending the liberal system?”

How, indeed, if you’ve spent years working with people and powers that have weakened it? Brooks, Wieseltier, and Hill never acknowledge -- and here I hope I may be forgiven for repeating myself for once, since they repeat themselves so often - that they can’t square their yearning for republican-ordered liberty with their active service to the whims and riptides of a casino-financed, predatory-marketing juggernaut that’s dissolving republican virtues, morale, and even sovereignty.

Fatuous though they’ve been as warmongers in Iraq and Afghanistan, and pathetic though they look next to Winston Churchill, who warned darkly of Hitler’s intentions in the 1930s, Wieseltier, Brooks, and Hill aren’t wrong to discern the rise of a thousand cuts and the unraveling of the American capacity to deter them. Their blind spot is willful ignorance of their own complicity in that deterioration and their over-compensatory, almost pre-adolescent faith in the benevolence of a statist and militarist power they still hope to mobilize against the seductions and terrors rising all around them.

Small wonder that they fell into the arms of George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, and Donald Rumsfeld. In 2007 Wieseltier wrote one of nearly 200 letters that were sent to a federal judge urging clemency for I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby, former chief of staff for Vice President Dick Cheney, who’d been convicted on charges of lying, perjury, and obstruction of justice in the Valerie Plame affair.

In his letter, Wieseltier digresses from his testimony for Libby to assure the judge, “I am in no sense a neoconservative, as many of my neoconservative adversaries will attest. I am, to the contrary, the kind of liberal who many neoconservatives like to despise, and that’s fine with me.”

It would have been fine with the court, too, surely, had Wieseltier forgone such stylized bleating on his own behalf. But he had tracks to cover after serving with Richard Bruce (Dick) Cheney, Karl Christian Rove, and others on the advisory board of the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq, another now-defunct neo-conservative “Committee For” and a spawn of Kristol’s PNAC and the American Enterprise Institute.

Instead of acknowledging their deepest feelings publicly, or even to themselves, the writers I’ve mentioned who’ve brought so much folly and destruction upon their republic, are doubling down, more nervous and desperate than ever, looking for someone else to blame. Hence their whirling columns and rhythmic incantations.

[*Jim Sleeper*](http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/ten-miles-square/2014/05/editors%20%5bat%5d%20washingtonmonthly.com) *is a lecturer at Yale. He teaches a seminar on global journalism and national identities.*

*\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

<https://www.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/2015/innocents-abroad-liberal-educators-illiberal-societies/>

[**https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/studio/multimedia/20150615-an-interview-with-jim-sleeper-on-the-future-of-liberal-education**](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/studio/multimedia/20150615-an-interview-with-jim-sleeper-on-the-future-of-liberal-education)

<https://www.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/2015/innocents-abroad-liberal-educators-illiberal-societies/>

[**A SPECIAL PRESENTATION OF ETHICS & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, THE JOURNAL OF CARNEGIE COUNCIL FOR ETHICS IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**](http://www.carnegiecouncil.org/)



**Innocents Abroad? Liberal Educators in Illiberal Societies**

**JIM SLEEPER**

It might seem an American Dream come true: About 100 Massachusetts Institute of Technology professors, ten at a time, are managing five laboratories stocked with “totally state-of-the-art equipment” in a gleaming new tower on the National University of Singapore campus. As the *New York Times* reports, the campus houses the Singapore-MIT Alliance for Research and Technology and other projects, involving “world-class universities from Britain, China, France, Germany, Israel and Switzerland.”[1](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303366) The MIT professors and their forty PhD and postdoctoral researchers are designing “myriad innovations”: driverless cars that would respond to “killer app” sensors throughout Singapore; stingray-like robots that will collect ocean-bottom data to fight noxious algae; and technologies that will track infectious diseases, energy consumption, and other movements in this tightly run, wealthy city-state of 5.4 million people.

Singapore’s government is also funding grants and expert advice for commercial start-ups by “world-class local talent,” including MIT’s Singaporean students, using MIT research. A *Times* photo shows Alliance director Professor Daniel Hastings taking his first ride on a driverless golf cart developed in the program, and he and his colleagues seem as happy as kids inventing gadgets in an American garage. “Singapore has the will to innovate,” one enthuses. “Its stature is increasing year by year,” says Hastings, noting that MIT, which has been in Singapore for fifteen years, is there “for the long term . . . . We like the model; it works for us.”[2](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303371)

The professors’ almost boyish enthusiasm reminds me of the philosopher George Santayana’s century-old characterization of an American as “an idealist working on matter . . . successful in invention, conservative in reform, quick in emergencies. . . . There is an enthusiasm in his sympathetic handling of material forces which goes far to cancel the illiberal character which it might otherwise assume” and that spiritualizes the material things it encounters, thereby materializing the spiritual. Classically liberal in his individualism but democratic in his generosity, the American’s “instinct is . . . to wish everybody well [while] expecting every man to stand on his own legs and to be helpful in his turn.”[3](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303374)

A quasi-missionary zeal to carry this ethos of trust and candor to other regions and minds is one of the “spiritual” reasons why American universities export at least 83 of the world’s nearly 219 branch campuses—physical educational facilities, or “footprints,” bearing American institutional names, although not always full American ownership.[4](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303381) Thirteen of these American branch campuses are in China, seven are in Singapore, and fourteen can be found in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.[5](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303383) There are hundreds more American university offices, research projects, pedagogical programs, and other engagements abroad. At the same time, among the more than 4.5 million students who attend universities outside their home countries each year, about 825,000 come to the United States while 300,000 Americans study abroad. The overwhelming majority of universities with physical presences in other countries are American or British. Globalization and its discontents are as unpredictable as they are irresistible, but Anglo-American liberal educators are avid navigators of its economic, demographic, and technological riptides, and there is something evangelical as well as inquisitive in their ventures, along with something materially acquisitive.

**LISTEN TO A SPECIAL *ETHICS & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS* INTERVIEW WITH JIM SLEEPER AND *EIA* SENIOR EDITOR ZACH DORFMAN**

[**https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/studio/multimedia/20150615-an-interview-with-jim-sleeper-on-the-future-of-liberal-education**](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/studio/multimedia/20150615-an-interview-with-jim-sleeper-on-the-future-of-liberal-education)

But can the American idealistic pragmatism that Santayana described “cancel” the illiberal character of hosts and partners in authoritarian regimes such as plutocratic Singapore, the theocratic/kleptocratic Emirates, neo-Orthodox (and newly belligerent) Russia, and, most fatefully, China, whose Ministry of Education reported late in 2014 that its universities hosted 223 programs and partnerships with American universities? China is all but certain to surpass the United States in economic power and international clout, and it has been moving aggressively to extinguish “Western values” in its universities, even while absorbing their know-how, in order to reassert itself as the serene center and summit of a decidedly illiberal, anti-Western, global civilization.

Not only are authoritarian governments and their rising middle classes increasingly assertive in acquiring higher education; Americans no longer seem quite sure of themselves as bearers of the classical liberal individualism and civic-republican fairness Santayana admired. Liberal arts colleges and even research universities that have long nourished citizen-leaders as well as scholars and that have sustained a messianic faith in liberal education itself are now licensing out professors, intellectual property, and institutional prestige to regimes bent on other purposes. By so doing, American universities may be legitimizing such regimes more often than liberalizing them. They may be offering students in those countries too narrow and instrumental a curriculum, compromising liberal education’s ethos and mission and, not incidentally, reinforcing and implicitly ratifying similar compromises at home.

**WHAT IS AT RISK FOR LIBERAL EDUCATION?**

Although the very word “university” suggests openness, practitioners of the liberal arts and sciences rely on certain premises and practices and proscribe others in order to discover, preserve, and disseminate knowledge. Traditionally, they have done this in *collegiums*, or self-governing companies of scholars, whose principals determine and care for their missions by standing apart from markets and governments in order to follow reason wherever it may lead. American liberal arts colleges and even research universities have been distinctive in working to diffuse liberal education’s habits of inquiry and expression not only among scholars but among the public at large.

**A liberal capitalist republic has to rely on its citizens to uphold certain public virtues and beliefs—reasonableness, forbearance, a readiness to discover their larger self-interest in serving public interests—that neither markets nor the state do much to nourish or defend, and sometimes actually subvert.**

They have understood that a liberal capitalist republic has to rely on its citizens to uphold certain public virtues and beliefs—reasonableness, forbearance, a readiness to discover their larger self-interest in serving public interests—that neither markets nor the state do much to nourish or defend, and sometimes actually subvert. Good citizen-leaders must therefore be trained all the more intensively somehow, and American colleges have assumed that responsibility in ways and with results that have made them admired in much of the world.

Is this distinctively American liberal education transferrable? Are some efforts to transfer it making it less sustainable at home? I argue that American liberal educators have overreached. A few recent ventures that I discuss below, mainly in Singapore and China but with glances at other countries, illustrate how, by mistaking the “international” or “global” for the liberal and universal, they have committed themselves to regimes that exploit liberal education’s fruits but crimp its ways of discovering, preserving, and disseminating knowledge. Those ways can flourish in cross-border exchanges and collaborations undertaken by scholars themselves, but not so well in exchanges initiated by trustees and administrators who, thinking like managers of business corporations in the global marketplace, try to spread a university’s “brand name” and market share by selling or implicitly precommitting its pedagogy and its research. Doing this short circuits reason’s ability to assess openly the varied uses to which knowledge itself might be put; and I suggest that, in a worrying development, American liberal educators are being primed for such misappropriations of their work abroad by administrators who have already countenanced its misdirection at home.

To prevent that from happening, universities across the centuries have developed protocols for academic research and teaching to “encourage, and even require, that self-interested individuals who populate a university realize [disinterestedness] in its every function,” as University of Chicago classicist Clifford Ando put it to me.[6](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303387) Thanks to such requirements, polities where freedoms of inquiry and expression are well diffused accord their universities great respect and exempt them from taxation.

Disinterested scholarship’s two best, but fragile, defenses against corruption or conscription are, first, its expectation that persistent openness will generate widening, virtuous circles of trust; and, second, its hope that following reason toward truth will sustain more comity, freedom, and justice than would ideologizing and fortifying truths that serve unjust concentrations of power. If virtuous circles of trust turn vicious and engagement begins to reek of entrapment or commercialization, liberal educators may have to revise their strategies of engagement, for example by challenging or evading their hosts’ strictures. Or they may have to pull out completely. Such choices confront educators now in some countries where their universities have planted their flags.

**USURPED, OR SELLING OUT?**

When the iron curtain collapsed a quarter century ago, opening what seemed to be a world without walls, many Americans thought that freedoms of inquiry and expression would flourish. During a 1997 visit to China, President Bill Clinton told his hosts that they were “on the wrong side of history” in resisting liberal democracy, which capitalist development would inevitably bring about.[7](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303395) But even as many societies embraced neoliberal economic premises and practices, their rulers have struggled to balance its benefits with its social dislocations, which have inflamed popular resentments more than liberal-democratic yearnings. Elites straddling that fault line have been trying to clothe their state-capitalist modernizing in the trappings of old religious and mythic traditions (Hindu, Confucian, Russian Orthodox, and Ottoman, among others)—a move designed to temper capitalist excess while fortifying the state's iron-fisted control. At the same time, some of these states have also sought to adapt liberal higher education’s organizational and strategic strengths to consolidate their power.



**Skolkovo Institute of Science and Technology, Moscow, Russia.** [**fotiyka**](http://www.shutterstock.com/gallery-2696569p1.html) **/** [**Shutterstock.com**](http://www.shutterstock.com/editorial)

For example, MIT is being paid $300 million by the Russian government to head up research at the new Skolkovo Institute of Science and Technology, which was founded in 2011 as part of former President Dmitry Medvedev’s $2.7 billion answer to Silicon Valley. The collaboration, MIT spokesman Nathaniel Nickerson told Bloomberg News, is building “a new institutional paradigm bringing together education, research, and innovation” based on “intellectual relationships in a transparent environment, centering on open, fundamental, publishable research.” It sounds good, but in 2013 President Vladimir Putin, feuding with Medvedev, vetoed benefits for the project’s technology park, and government agents “raided the foundation overseeing the university in a corruption probe.”[8](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303397) In 2014 the FBI warned MIT and American tech companies in the complex to be vigilant against misappropriations of research and technology with national defense applications.[9](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303398) Although MIT cannot be faulted for failing to anticipate these specific legal and political difficulties, it should have considered that in Russia, as in Singapore, it cannot rely on independent judiciaries and other guarantors of the rule of law to protect scholarship and teaching from misappropriation.

**Some host regimes openly herald the passing of Western premises and power: “The Chinese aren’t trying to coexist with us; they’re offering to buy us,” notes Orville Schell, director of the Asia Society’s Center on U.S.-China Relations.**

Some host regimes openly herald the passing of Western premises and power: “The Chinese aren’t trying to coexist with us; they’re offering to buy us,” notes Orville Schell, director of the Asia Society’s Center on U.S.-China Relations. And not because they intend to emulate us.[10](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303399) Something very different is on order, a dispensation in which Americans may find themselves subordinate in new and discomfiting ways. In Singapore, the late Lee Kuan Yew, founder of that nation in 1965, was an early apostle of “Asian values” against Western presumptions, but, having read law at Cambridge, he, like other authoritarian rulers with a Western education, also tried to apply liberal education’s grace notes to illiberal practices. Singapore’s generous funding of MIT research captures that university’s world renowned imprimatur while enhancing not only benign transportation and health-care innovations but also the regime’s capacity to blanket its island with monitoring devices. This has made the country “a laboratory not only for testing how mass surveillance and big-data analysis might prevent terrorism, but for determining whether technology can be used to engineer a more harmonious society,” as *Foreign Policy* has reported in eerily cheery detail.[11](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303401)

Singapore has eagerly embraced the Total Information Awareness program, which was created by the U.S. National Security Administration but then curbed (and renamed) in the face of U.S. constitutional strictures, Edward Snowden’s revelations, and American political culture’s deep strain of skepticism about government overreach. No such constraints curb Singapore’s efforts to monitor its residents’ actions and even “moods” through patterned investigations of their email messages, phone calls, and physical movements. MIT’s experiments may not be driven explicitly by government directives or commercial contracts that would compromise the pursuit of knowledge, but it is not a stretch of the imagination to foresee the resulting technologies being used for such public surveillance.

Similarly, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates have poured billions of dollars into “education cities” hosting scores of American-university branch campuses that enjoy varying degrees of independence. Qatar’s National Research Foundation, designed with guidance from the RAND Corporation, funds specific research projects in partnerships with Virginia Commonwealth, Cornell, Carnegie Mellon, Texas A&M, and Georgetown universities to—as the foundation puts it—build human capital in Qatar, advance research “in the interest of Qatar, the region, or the world,” and “raise Qatar’s international profile in research.”[12](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303418) In Saudi Arabia, grants from the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology go only to research of interest to Saudi Arabia’s government. That may not compromise a project on, say, water desalinization or carbon capture, but it might limit public uses and dissemination of the research.[13](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303423)

**THE ROLE OF GLOBE-TROTTING ADMINISTRATORS**

“It’s easy to get addicted to any sort of funding in tough budgetary times,” warns Jeffrey Wasserstrom, Chancellor’s Professor of Chinese History at the University of California Irvine.[14](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303436) Fiscally strapped American university administrators have made questionable accommodations to practices that compromise academic integrity at home. In one among many recent scandals, the *New York Times* reported in 2008 that Virginia Commonwealth University (one of the Qatar National Research Foundation’s first partners) had agreed not to discuss or publish the results of studies funded by the tobacco giant Philip Morris and that it would not even respond to inquiries about the agreement itself. “There is restrictive language in here,” Virginia Commonwealth’s vice president for research acknowledged to the *Times*, but, even in admitting that it violated most university guidelines for university-sponsored research, he called it “a balancing act.”[15](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303440)

Donors with ideologically driven foreign-policy agendas have funded campus institutes and teaching programs at Yale and other universities, influencing the work of professors who should have been restrained by liberal requirements and protocols from advocating or otherwise promoting political and commercial ventures. Clifford Ando observes a “gradual abandonment . . . of the principles by which universities once organized themselves internally and situated themselves in the nation at large” and a proliferation of “research for hire and new centers or institutes immune from the systems of evaluation that universities otherwise deploy.”[16](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303445)

Administrators looking abroad often exclude their own universities’ scholarly experts on the relevant societies and governments from their assessments and planning, let alone their negotiations. NYU’s rapid global expansion, especially into Shanghai, prompted Rebecca Karl, an associate professor of East Asian Studies and a member of the Faculty Senators Council, to criticize “the non-consultative nature of the NYU leadership, where huge policy decisions about the structure of the university are taken and then all of the sudden we the faculty are apprised of it in the aftermath.”[17](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303448) Similarly, Yale’s administration and corporation apprised its faculty of the university’s commitment to enter a joint venture with Singapore to establish a liberal arts college bearing Yale’s name only when that undertaking had already been signed and sealed. Further, the full terms of the contract have never been shared with the faculty. In what was widely understood as a rebuke to the Yale administration, the faculty’s Southeast Asia Studies Council joined with an undergraduate organization to bring to New Haven two leaders of tiny opposition parties in Singapore who have been harassed and suppressed there.

Amy Stambach, a professor of educational policy and anthropology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, suggests that university administrators try to reconcile two ways of pursuing cross-border higher education: the first, the “global marketplace” model, assumes that university competition for scholars and their research enhances the production of knowledge itself; while the second, “the global commons” model, posits that knowledge flourishes best by circulating freely and that universities therefore deserve more disinterested support in generating it. Both models are variations on a liberal theme, Stambach notes, but some host countries make only a pretense of following either one and, like Philip Morris, assume a cash-and-carry approach to university research.[18](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303454)

**THE BOSTON OF SOUTHEAST ASIA?**

Singapore, eager to displace Hong Kong and stay ahead of Malaysia as “the Boston of Southeast Asia”—a hub for global universities and for what its ambassador to the United States, Chan Heng Chee, has called “the education industry”—boasts a dozen branch campuses, partnerships, and other programs involving Western universities.[19](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303455) Bertil Andersson, president of Singapore’s Nanyang Technical University, characterizes the country as “Asia lite” for Western university partners. Indeed, it can seem so next to China’s increasingly intrusive, iron-fisted policies toward higher education. But the country has other distinctions. In 2015, Reporters Without Borders ranks Singapore’s press freedoms an abysmal 153 out of 180 nations on its sophisticated World Press Freedom Index. That is down from 135 in 2012, when the government began a crackdown on political websites.

Singapore also deploys Kafkaesque legalism to restrain artistic expression and political activity. In *Authoritarian Rule of Law*, the legal scholar Jothie Rajah distinguishes democratic rule *of* law (in which citizens have some voice and some power) from the rule *by* law. Relying on the latter, Singapore’s ruling party, using its control of Parliament and the judiciary (and of the press) passes and enforces repressive laws by invoking “emergencies”; orchestrating public denigrations of critics in “hearings” that are really show trials; infantilizing citizens by claiming to look after their best interests paternally; and wording its statutes vaguely to leave the state room to manipulate laws as it wishes.[20](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303456)Human Rights Watch calls Singapore “a textbook example of a repressive state.”[21](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303458) About a fourth of its population—some 1.3 million people—are virtually rights-less migrant workers.

Almost every year has brought an instance, and sometimes international condemnation, of the persecution of a professor who has criticized the regime or whose scholarship in history, political science, or law seems to threaten it.[22](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303460) Johns Hopkins University, University of Chicago, Australia’s University of New South Wales, and New York University’s Law School and Tisch School of the Arts have all pulled programs out of Singapore. Additionally, Britain’s venerable Warwick University and America’s distinguished Claremont, Haverford, Williams, and other liberal arts colleges have all rebuffed the country’s invitations to establish a liberal arts college there. “In a host environment where free speech is constrained, if not proscribed, . . . authentic liberal education, to the extent it can exist in such situations, will suffer,” warned the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in an open letter to the Yale community.[23](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303463) This worry is being borne out by experience: MIT faculty in Singapore report difficulty, for example, in “getting students to interact” and to “feel safe to voice an opinion or ask a question without fearing repercussions.”[24](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303465)

Confident that they had anticipated all such snares, Yale University’s president and trustees in 2009 commingled the college’s historically missionary sensibility and its long intimacies with American economic statesmanship and strategic foreign policymaking to partner with Singapore to found an undergraduate liberal arts institution: Yale-National University of Singapore College (Yale-NUS). The college is funded wholly by Singapore, a country whose sovereign wealth funds have long been advised and invested in by three of the Yale trustees. In response to this announcement, faculty in New Haven registered “concern regarding the recent history of lack of respect for civil and political rights in the state of Singapore” and urged Yale-NUS to protect ideals that lie “at the heart of liberal arts education as well as of our civic sense as citizens [and] ought not to be compromised in any dealings or negotiations with the Singaporean authorities.”[25](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303468) The faculty resolution, passed in 2012 over Yale President Richard Levin’s objections, played a part in his announcement four months later that he would resign the following year.

Undeterred, the Yale Corporation, administration, and selected professors joined with new colleagues to “reinvent liberal education from the bottom up” in an intriguing new curriculum that was introduced in August 2013 to the Yale-NUS inaugural class of 157 carefully selected students, more than 60 percent of them Singaporean, in its new panopticon of a campus. Pericles Lewis, a Yale professor of comparative literature who became Yale-NUS’s first president, struck an idealistic note by invoking John Stuart Mill: “It is hardly possible to overstate the value of placing human beings in contact with persons [and] modes of thought and action unlike those with which they are familiar,” he wrote, adding that “progress depends on continued engagement and dialogue rather than retreat or insularity.”[26](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303478)

But such noble sentiments, amply vindicated when a fine teacher inspires students to probe worlds beyond their own,[27](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303504) fade into truisms when expressed by university administrators hot in pursuit of international funding and prestige. “Engagement” and “sensitivity” can work magically well in free classrooms, but become weasel words on the lips of administrators and faculty apologists encountering subtler but harsher realities. “What we [Americans] think of as freedom, they [Singaporeans] think of as an affront to public order,” said Yale-NUS’s inaugural dean, Charles Bailyn, in 2013, trying to relativize if not justify Singapore’s prohibitions of public assembly.[28](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303507) The AAUP’s open letter concerning Yale-NUS posed sixteen questions that Yale has not answered, perhaps because it has yet to make public the terms of its contract with NUS, where administrators must approve even minor expenditures from professors’ allotted research funds. Such “light touch” repression, dismissed as a mere formality, can chill freedom in ways students may not detect.[29](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303508)

**THE GLOBAL VILLAGE’S SERENE CENTER?**

China’s economy is projected to be twice the size of the United States’ by 2030, and its trade strategies in Africa and Latin America may soon make the West beg for access to raw materials for the first time since the seventeenth century. Watching container ships unload in Valparaíso, Chile, a few years ago, I marveled that most of the containers were Chinese and learned that China buys 60 percent of the copper from Chile’s vast mines. That does not make the world flat, for China maintains, and lately has been touting, its ancient, quasi-Confucian self-understanding as the serene summit of a global village and marketplace to which all others will pay tribute.

Soon after Xi Jinping became China’s president in 2013, State Document No. 9 listed seven “subversive currents” not to be spoken of, including “universal values” such as human rights, press freedom, judicial independence, and economic neoliberalism. (Any mention of the historic mistakes of the Communist Party was also deemed subversive.) In 2015, Education Minister Yuan Guiren ordered universities to “never let textbooks promoting Western values appear in our classes,” adding that “remarks that slander the leadership of the Communist Party of China” and “smear socialism” must never appear in college classrooms.[30](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303514)

China’s tightening is not only internal: 97 Confucius Institutes (CIs) have been fully funded and staffed by China on campuses in the United States (with more than 350 CIs in other countries, and a projected world total of 1,000) to teach Chinese language and culture in pre-scripted ways. An important recent debate about CIs by well-informed American scholars and journalists at Chinafile.com[31](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303785) shows that Confucius Institutes sometimes muscle out American host universities’ own independent scholars on China, not only by offering them free Chinese language instruction but also by pressuring them to disinvite uncongenial speakers and cancel public discussions of “forbidden” topics, including Tibet, Taiwan, and Tiananmen. CI directors monitor the work and pronouncements not only of their own teaching staff but also of their nominal American colleagues, who, if they criticize China, may suddenly find it difficult to obtain visas to continue research there. The effect is to “intimidate and punish” scholars, Chinese and Western, who challenge Beijing’s agendas, says Perry Link, the University of California professor who testified about China’s academic modus operandi before the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee in late 2014.[32](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303519)



**Skyline in Hefei, China. Via Flickr. Courtesy of** [**Tao Wu**](https://www.flickr.com/photos/poenagabriel/)**.**

To head off suspicions that they accept such developments, institutional members of the American Association of Universities and two other international associations met in Hefei, China, in October 2013 with representatives of nine elite Chinese universities that host Western university projects and programs to sign the “Hefei Statement.” The statement pledged “to identify the key characteristics that make research universities effective; and to promote a policy environment which protects, nurtures, and cultivates the values, standards, and behaviors which underlie these characteristics and which facilitates their development if they do not already exist.” The Hefei Statement asserts that all universities are entitled to “autonomy” and to “responsible” academic freedom, and that “government fiat alone cannot create a research university. Such institutions are built from within, by university administrations having the strategic vision and operational excellence necessary to secure from multiple sources the funding needed to build the facilities and to recruit [faculty], across a broad range of disciplines.” This is true as far as it goes, but the statement nowhere acknowledges or even hints that “university administrations” in China are wholly appointed and controlled by the government and ruling party, as are their counterparts, with minor variations, in Singapore, the Emirates, the central Asian republics, and other nations whose regimes host American universities. The hosts and their guests enjoy only fig-leaf independence.

**“Two words remind us that Beijing sometimes pretends that old promises were never made or if made don’t need to be honored: ‘Hong’ and ‘Kong,’” says China historian Jeffrey Wasserstrom.**

“Two words remind us that Beijing sometimes pretends that old promises were never made or if made don’t need to be honored: ‘Hong’ and ‘Kong,’” says China historian Jeffrey Wasserstrom.[33](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303522) Even veteran China watchers who have learned to be skeptical of draconian pronouncements like Guiren’s (as well as of more constructive ones like the Hefei Statement) might agree with Mary Gallagher, an associate professor of political science and director of the Center for Chinese Studies at the University of Michigan, that the crackdown is “not just going to be about social activists, NGOs, political dissidents . . . [but about] telling people what they could or could not talk about in the classroom,” and that it “will be a huge challenge to Western universities as they begin to open facilities in China and do more collaborative programs with Chinese universities.”[34](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303523)

New York University certainly faces such a challenge. It characterizes its new campus in Shanghai, a joint venture with East China Normal University, as one of two “portals” to what President John Sexton calls a Global Network University, which he also characterizes as an “organic circulatory system.” NYU has another large portal in its huge, stand-alone NYU Abu Dhabi campus, as well as the original anchor portal in New York, and twelve “Study Away Sites” on four continents. Its undergraduate Stern Business School—named for trustee Leonard Stern, the Hartz Mountain pet foods magnate—“allows students who opt for ‘Stern World’ to do ﬁve semesters in New York, one in London, one in Shanghai, and one in Abu Dhabi—all with . . . quality at the level NYU demands.”[35](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303821)

The result is really a presidents’ and trustees’ dream of globalization from the top, but the dreamers have blundered into sticky entanglements that will compromise liberal education beyond recognition. In Abu Dhabi, where NYU’s campus is the product of a kleptocracy that also pays most students’ tuition, most of the compromises involve not just academic life but the virtual indentured servitude of thousands of laborers from Southeast Asia who have been imported to construct the campus. In March 2015, Abu Dhabi barred NYU American Studies professor Andrew Ross, who has called attention to the labor abuses, from entering the country.[36](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303528)In the United States, Ross was followed by a private investigator; and a reporter who had worked with the *New York Times* on a story about the Abu Dhabi campus said that a representative of the United Arab Emirates had offered him payments to write more positively about the government.[37](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303531)

President Sexton’s handling of reports about those abuses and of NYU’s complicity in them are troubling. His characterization of NYU Shanghai as part of his university’s global “organic circulatory system” is even more troubling academically, given China’s controlling interest in NYU’s joint venture with East China Normal University, on a campus built wholly by China. East China Normal University has control of the “cooperator’s” intellectual property if it is used—in an academic context—“as an educational investment.” The state, working with the Communist Party, has imposed on all its universities new demands and punishments as part of its larger strategy to absorb their Western partners’ know-how while rebuffing “Western values” at home and advancing Chinese intellectual and cultural alternatives to liberalism around the world. Chinese state documents have referred to its two major campus-based joint ventures—with NYU in Shanghai and with Duke University in Kunshan, forty miles to the west—as pilot programs for new models of cooperation. But its policies and practices reflect a drive to inoculate its own students on these campuses against whatever liberal ideas they may encounter, and to indoctrinate Western visitors in a Chinese alternative to liberal democracy and, indeed, liberal education. How effective and sustained this strategy will be remains to be seen, but American university administrators who entered into such partnerships with liberal expectations can feel the ground shifting under their feet.

**EVADE, RESIST, DEPART?**

Too many American administrators seem not to acknowledge such shifts, even when they are experiencing them. In 2011 graduate students of international relations at Johns Hopkins-Nanjing Center—whose website describes it as a place “for genuinely free and open academic exploration and intellectual dialogue”[38](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303770)—were barred from using a center lounge to show a documentary about the Tiananmen uprising and from distributing a student journal. A dean advised a Chinese student to remove his article from the journal, and Hopkins-Nanjing “administrators removed the word ‘center’ from the journal’s title so that it didn’t appear to be an official publication,” its student editor told Bloomberg News.[39](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303534) Center codirector Jan Kiely told frustrated students that academic freedom “doesn’t include being able to put Chinese students and professors in a very difficult position in their own country.” Hopkins President Ronald Daniels was almost as evasive: “Is it what we would desire for every project, every center we’re involved in? The answer is no. We would hope over time that the scope for discussion can extend beyond the center.” Carolyn Townsley, director of the center’s Washington office, extended the discussion only to blame students: “If you want understanding, you don’t constantly antagonize people.”[40](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303537)

Duke University officials, learning of the crackdown in Nanjing while working on their new campus in Kunshan, had “some pretty good conversations with people at Hopkins” and decided to draw similar distinctions between “intra-campus discussion and what you do at large,” Duke President Richard Brodhead told Bloomberg News. “If you want to engage in China, you have to acknowledge that fact,” he added.[41](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303541) Nora Bynum, the vice provost for Duke Kunshan, touted the Hefei Statement, adding, “We think it’s very important to take an active and engaged response to these kinds of issues.”[42](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303544) Other Americans are more forthright. “The one thing we have to do is maintain our academic integrity, our academic independence,” says Lee Bollinger, president of Columbia University, whose eight “learning centers” abroad can be withdrawn quickly if their freedom is imperiled. “There are too many examples of a strict and stern control that lead you to think that this is kind of an explosive mix,” Bollinger warns.[43](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303552) So does Morton Schapiro, president of Northwestern University and an economist who studies higher education. “There’s nothing wrong with pulling the plug,” Schapiro told Bloomberg News. “What’s wrong is staying there when it’s not working.”[44](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303564)

**China's policies and practices reflect a drive to inoculate its own students on these campuses against whatever liberal ideas they may encounter, and to indoctrinate Western visitors in a Chinese alternative to liberal democracy and, indeed, liberal education.**

Wellesley College has taken a middle course with Peking University, which is sometimes characterized as the Harvard of China. Peking is a locus for partnerships of different sorts with Wellesley, Stanford, Columbia, Cornell, and the University of Michigan. As Peking signed the Hefei Statement in 2013, it was preparing to fire Xia Yeliang, an economist who had joined in drafting Charter 08, a statement to end China’s one-party Communist rule. When the news reached Wellesley, 130 faculty members sent Peking a letter warning that Xia’s dismissal would jeopardize the partnership. Peking fired him anyway, stating—as Singapore’s Nanyang Technical University had in denying tenure to Cherian George—that it was doing so only for academic reasons. Wellesley balanced resistance with pointed engagement by setting up a “Freedom Project” that made Xia a visiting fellow at Wellesley while continuing its Peking partnership—a gentle provocation to its partner to live up to the Hefei Statement. “We’re not telling them to adopt the Bill of Rights,” said Wellesley sociologist Thomas Cushman. “We’re asking what it means for Wellesley to work with a regime that instills fear in people.”[45](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303566) Yet Xia’s firing prompted silence or evasion from Peking’s other American partners. Richard Saller, dean of the School of Humanities and Sciences at Stanford, which has a $7 million center at Peking University, told the *New York Times*’ Tamar Lewin, “We went into our relationship with Peking University with the knowledge that American standards of academic freedom are the product of 100 years of evolution. We think engagement is a better strategy than taking such moral high ground that we can’t engage with some of these universities.”[46](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303568)



**Graduation Ceremony at Carnegie Mellon. Via Flickr. Courtesy of drpavloff.**

Perhaps the best strategic suggestion comes from a nonacademic, David Schlesinger, who studied Chinese politics for a master’s degree at Harvard and was chairman of Thomson Reuters China. Drawing upon this experience in a discussion with China scholars, Schlesinger advises university representatives to stand their ground in asserting freedoms of inquiry and expression: “Just as China repeats its ‘principled stands’ on Taiwan, Tibet, human rights . . . so I, too, when I worked for Reuters, would use that company’s Trust Principles and fundamental journalistic values as the introduction to any official meeting. If your principles are strong and steadfast, they become something that has to be dealt with. If your principles can be changed, they become simply a negotiating point.”[47](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303569)

**WELLSPRINGS**

Is anything in liberal education nonnegotiable? In 2013 the Yale-NUS founding faculty met for months in Betts House, a mansion on a hill overlooking much of the Yale campus in New Haven, in order to design an unprecedented curriculum for their “new community of learning” in Singapore. Here, Pericles Lewis believed he was witnessing “the liberal arts experience made manifest,” and he anticipated “a place of revelatory stimulation” in the new campus on the other side of the world.[48](http://projects.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/liberaleducation#block-303570) Yale itself was founded by graduates of an older university—at Cambridge, in England—who intended to carry revelatory stimulation across an ocean to a strange people in a strange land. Like the Yale-NUS founders, they intended their new “city upon a hill” to set an example for both their coreligionists and their oppressors back home, where their faith was beleaguered, as liberal education is in America now.

**Liberal arts missionaries and mercenaries may be seeking more help now from hosts abroad than the latter are seeking from them. But too desperate a convergence will yield to codependency or, worse, a conflict the West may not win.**

Of course, their incentives were commercial as well as missionary: the first arrivals on the *Mayflower*—among them, the Elder William Brewster, a direct ancestor of Kingman Brewster, Jr., Yale’s president of the late 1960s and early 1970s—needed material support from Native Americans and were beholden to investors back home. Eighty years later, Yale’s Puritan founders sought a benefactor in Elihu Yale, a governor of the East India Company, one of the world’s first multinational corporations (and, a century later, the acquirer of the island of “Singapura” for the British crown). Yet the Americans’ missionary strain never died. It was made manifest hundreds of years later in “The American Century,” the 1941 essay heralding America’s world-saving dominance following World War II, written by *Time* magazine cofounder Henry Luce, the China-born son of Yale missionaries there. A strain of it is also evident in the work of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist John Hersey (Yale ’36), himself a descendant of Massachusetts Puritans, notably in his novel *The Call,* about missionaries like his own parents in China, where Hersey was also born. It was manifest, too, in Yale President Alfred Whitney Griswold, a descendant of Puritan governors of Connecticut, who defended liberal education during the Cold War not only against communism but also against McCarthyism and national security-ism; and in Kingman Brewster, Jr., who awarded an honorary doctorate to Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1964, when more than a few Yale alumni still considered King a lawbreaker and rabble rouser.

Now that Yale, like other American universities, resembles a global business corporation more than a self-governing, civic-republican company of scholars, the more idealistic Yale-NUS founders in Singapore hope that their example will spur a transformation back home. They are more likely, however, to effect the all-too-smooth convergence of Asian and American state capitalism mentioned earlier.

John Winthrop warned against succumbing to the “carnall lures” of wealth-making that he feared would reduce knowledge to mere know-how and deep faith to frantically worldly works. The world is not flat, the Puritans insisted; it has abysses, opening unpredictably at our feet and in our hearts, and the young need a community of mutual trust that is strong enough to help them plumb those depths, face demons in them, and even defy worldly powers in the name of a higher one. Puritans did not live up to that ideal, but, almost despite themselves, they sowed civic-republican seeds and standards that the humanities took up in colleges, and that continued to nourish the ethic of mutual responsibility that lay deep in their origins and traditions. For three centuries the old colleges struggled, in Calvinist and classical ways, to temper capitalist wealth-making and civic-republican power-wielding with religious or humanist truth-seeking.

Every liberal arts college should still be doing that, all the more so because of the new challenges that we face. When Luce limned the American Century with Puritan fervor in 1941, the United States bestrode the world, riding the twin horses of civic-republican nationalism and industrial capitalism. The horse of capitalism has slipped its American harness and galloped off to China, turning the old mission back upon itself and exposing sinkholes in what had seemed a bedrock foundation. Liberal arts missionaries and mercenaries may seek more help now from hosts abroad than the latter seek from them. But too desperate a convergence will yield to codependency or a conflict the West may not win.

*Jim Sleeper, a writer on national civic cultures and politics, is a lecturer in political science at Yale, teaching seminars on journalism, liberalism, and democracy. He is the author of* The Closest of Strangers: Liberalism and the Politics of Race in New York *(1990) and* Liberal Racism *(1997) and editor of or contributor to several anthologies. A former editor and columnist for the* New York Daily News *and* Newsday*, Sleeper is a member of the editorial board of the quarterly* Dissent*. He holds a doctorate in education from Harvard and a B.A. from Yale. His reportage and commentary on foreign policy and other subjects can be found at* [*www.jimsleeper.com*](http://www.jimsleeper.com/)*.*