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## DEAR FRIENDS....

Last week the controversial President of Venezuela, **Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías** died. Although highly popular in his home country this four-term President was often portrayed by Western Media as a cross between Zimbabwe's despot president, *Robert Mugabe* and American comedian, actor, radio-TV personality and host *Soupy Sales*. And for most of us, whether you liked or hate him, he was and most likely will always be an enigma. With more than three million grieving supporters going past Hugo Chávez casket paying their respects, there is no doubt that he enjoyed a special place in millions of his fellow countryman's hearts. Let's remember that Hugo Chávez was elected four times by a majority of Venezuela's voters without the aid of voter suppression, rigged voting machines, the help of his Supreme Court and hanging chads. I recently heard someone who knows Venezuelan politics say, that if Chávez had lived and wanted it, he would have easily been re-elected to a fifth term. I don't know much about Venezuela, its politics and Chávez, but I do know that he didn't start any wars, he didn't loot the country's treasury to amass huge wealth home or abroad and during his presidencies the country's economy grew, while American's contracted and most of all.... he bettered the quality of life for the average citizen through the building of schools and housing for the poor, as well as providing healthcare, food and fuel subsidies for the poor. Yes, he was larger than life, and often his actions were contrary to his dialog, but he has never forgot that he was raised in a three room dirt floor shack to cozy up to his country's elite. Not a bad legacy....

### WIKIPEDIA:

**Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías** (28 July 1954 – 5 March 2013) was the President of Venezuela from 1999 until his death in 2013. He was formerly the leader of the Fifth Republic Movement political

party from its foundation in 1997 until 2007, when it merged with several other parties to form the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), which he led until his death.

Following his own political ideology of Bolivarianism and "*socialism of the 21st century*", he focused on implementing socialist reforms in the country as a part of a social project known as the Bolivarian Revolution, which has seen the implementation of a new constitution, participatory democratic councils, the nationalization of several key industries, increased government funding of health care and education, and significant reductions in poverty, according to government figures. Under Chavez, Venezuelans' quality of life improved according to a UN Index and the poverty rate fell from 48.6 percent in 2002 to 29.5 percent in 2011, according to the UN Economic Commission for Latin America.

Born into a poor working-class family in Sabaneta, Barinas, Chávez became a career military officer, and after becoming dissatisfied with the Venezuelan political system, he founded the secretive Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200 (MBR-200) in the early 1980s to work towards overthrowing it. Chávez led the MBR-200 in an unsuccessful coup against the Democratic Action government of President Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1992, for which he was imprisoned. Released from prison after two years, he founded a social democratic political party, the Fifth Republic Movement, and was elected president of Venezuela in 1998.

He subsequently introduced a new constitution which increased rights for marginalized groups and altered the structure of Venezuelan government, and was re-elected in 2000. During his second presidential term, he introduced a system of Bolivarian Missions, Communal Councils and worker-managed cooperatives, as well as a program of land reform, whilst also nationalizing various key industries. He was re-elected in 2006 with over 60% of the vote. On 7 October 2012, Chávez won his country's presidential election for a fourth time, defeating Henrique Capriles, and was elected for another six-year term.

Allying himself strongly with the Communist governments of Fidel and then Raúl Castro in Cuba and the Socialist governments of Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, and Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, his presidency was seen as a part of the socialist "*pink tide*" sweeping Latin America. Along with these governments, Chávez described his policies as anti-imperialist, being a prominent adversary of the United States' foreign policy as well as a vocal critic of the US-supported neoliberalism and laissez-faire capitalism.

He supported Latin American and Caribbean cooperation and was instrumental in setting up the pan-regional Union of South American Nations, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas, the Bank of the South, and the regional television network TeleSur. However, Chavez had extensive disputes with Colombia, and supported rebels in Colombia and Ecuador, causing ambassadors to be recalled and troops to be mobilized. Chávez was a highly controversial and divisive figure both at home and abroad, having insulted other world leaders and compared US president George W. Bush to a donkey, and called him the devil.

On 30 June 2011, Chávez stated that he was recovering from an operation to remove an abscessed tumor with cancerous cells. He required a second operation in December 2012. He was to have been sworn in on 10 January 2013, but the National Assembly of Venezuela agreed to postpone the inauguration to allow him time to recuperate and return from a third medical treatment trip to Cuba. He died in Caracas on 5 March 2013 at the age of 58.

IN SUMMARY: During his four presidencies Chávez upended the Venezuelan aristocracy — that old, corrupt, entrenched establishment of oil tycoons and beauty queens. He made the poor his cherished children. And yes, to keep firm control of his message, he abolished the ministries' press offices and centralized the news. He renamed the country the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. He forged ties with Fidel and shunted petrodollars to Cuba. He nationalized Venezuela's huge reserves of oil, gave away fortunes, created a new class of rich (merrily referred to as the Boligarchy), built miles of housing for the indigent and, when the bills came around, printed more money until the over-leveraged economy foundered. His goal, was to unite Latin America in a firm alliance of revolutionary republics that served as a bulwark against the United States, which wouldn't have been possible if the US hadn't supported so many corrupt dictatorial regimes/banana republics throughout the Caribbean, South and Central American.

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With everything else that happened last week, (the Pope retiring, the death of Hugo Chávez, the sequester and Rand Paul thirteen hour filibuster in the US Senate), you may have not noticed that voters in Switzerland this past week overwhelmingly approved a referendum to give shareholders a binding say on executive pay. The Swiss measures are the latest and most far-reaching of various say-on-pay policies now in place or under consideration in many European nations. Denmark, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands all have some form of voting on binding pay. This Swiss measures require lawmakers to pass a law giving shareholders the right to hold a binding vote on all compensation for executives and directors of Swiss-based public companies. The law will also ban one-time bonuses for joining or leaving a company, and it will require greater transparency. For example, pension funds will have to disclose how they vote at shareholder meetings, which will enable a fund's members to assess whether their interests have been represented. And although top corporate executives may bristle at the suggestion that they are overpaid. But the higher the pay, the likelier it is to be disconnected from market fundamentals or the concerns of shareholders, employees and, in cases of bailed-out bankers, taxpayers. Also, it often weakens moral with a company whereas last year the CEO of a major US company received a 27% pay-raise, while other executive pay was limited to a maximum 3% and the company did a 5% across the board employment cut.

While American laws do not require the level of control imposed by some European nations, the Securities and Exchange Commission has been too slow in carrying out the shareholder protections that are on the books. In the United States, shareholder votes on executive pay are nonbinding. That's better than having no say at all, which was the case before the rules were changed in 2011 under the Dodd-Frank law. But a nonbinding vote still regards shareholders as advisers, rather than owners. And the S.E.C. has not yet proposed rules to implement a Dodd-Frank provision that requires companies to calculate and disclose the ratio of a chief executive's compensation to the company's median pay package. That data is crucial to gauging whether executive pay is excessive and how pay disparities affect company performance and the economy. This week, in a pre-emptive strike against

rules that have not yet been written, Senator Richard Shelby of Alabama, the ranking Republican on the Banking Committee, introduced a bill that would weaken the executive pay disclosures required by Dodd-Frank. That would be exactly the wrong way to go. Again, one of the problems with unrestricted executive pay is that it leads to management often goosing stock price instead of concentrating on longer term structural objectives and the best way to make sure that this doesn't happen is to decouple huge bonuses from short-term stock profits.

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As an ardent supporter of President Obama I believe that one of his major failings has been his administration's inability to bring criminal charges against a single major Wall Street bank or a single leading Wall Street banker for what the FBI termed an "*epidemic of fraud*" that blew up the entire economy, even though a number of investigations here and in the UK revealed the banks committed routine fraud in peddling mortgage securities they knew were garbage, trampled basic property laws, laundered money from Iran, Libya and Mexican drug lords, conspired to game the basic measure of interest rates and more. Yet, time after time, the Justice Department and regulatory agencies settled for sweetheart deals, with no admission of guilt, no banker held accountable, and institutional fines that were the equivalent in earnings of a speeding ticket to the average family.

Yesterday Attorney General Eric Holder stated openly what was already apparent: The Justice Department believes that Too Big to Fail Banks are Too Big to Jail. Criminal indictments against banks or leading bankers might endanger the economy and thus were too big a risk. Here's what Holder said: "*I am concerned that the size of some of these institutions becomes so large that it does become difficult for us to prosecute them when we are hit with indications that if you do prosecute, if you do bring a criminal charge, it will have a negative impact on the national economy, perhaps even the world economy. I think that is a function of the fact that some of these institutions have become too large.*"(emphasis added) Holder was responding to questions by Republican Senator Charles Grassley about why the Justice Department brought no criminal charges against the large British bank HSBC after it admitted laundering money for parties in Iran, Libya and Mexico on behalf of drug lords. The Attorney General acknowledged that the sheer size of the big banks "*has an inhibiting impact on our ability to bring resolutions that I think would be more appropriate. That is something you (members of Congress) all need to consider.*"

This is outrageous. Allowing the big banks to operate above the law is at one with the philosophy that has guided both the Bush and the Obama administrations during the financial collapse. Tim Geithner, former head of the New York Federal Reserve bank under Bush and Treasury Secretary under Obama, would preach that it was necessary to "foam the runway" to protect the banks from total crackup. That "foam" included literally trillions in the backdoor bailout of banks organized by the Federal Reserve, abandoning the underwater homeowners who were victimized by Wall Street's wilding, while neutering any regulatory or criminal accountability.

Holder's outrageous admission means that bankers operate -- and know that they can operate -- above the law. As a result the argument about regulations and legal limits is laughable, and in reality it is beyond the big ugly. With bankers spending tens of millions lobbying to weaken regulations and starve regulators of authority and resources so that they can trample the laws, mislead the regulators

and defraud their customers, swathed in the confidence that the laws will not apply to them, is something that should not be tolerated.

There is no reason a bank with billions of assets could not survive the indictment of its CEO or CFO and their traders. If the Fed and Treasury can "*foam the runway*" to protect otherwise insolvent banks from collapse, they surely could insure that a multi-billion dollar bank survives while the executives are held personally responsible for their crimes. Putting a few bankers in jail and holding them personally accountable for their frauds would do much to bring sobriety back to Wall Street. For some reason the Attorney General is afraid. Wall Street and the big banks know it, and as such feel free to operate above the law. And as the conservative head of the Dallas Federal Reserve Bank Richard Fischer and many others have argued, the big banks are not disciplined by the market. They know their losses are covered, while they pocket their winnings. They have multi-million dollar personal incentives to leverage up, use other people's money to make big bets on high risk gambles that offer big rewards. Their excesses blew up the economy, but they got bailed out and emerged bigger and more concentrated than ever.

And, of course, since investors know the big banks can't fail, the big banks can attract money at much lower rates than smaller banks, a subsidy worth about \$89 billion a year, according to recent calculations by **Bloomberg News**. Clearly, institutions that are above the law and beyond the discipline of the market cannot exist in their current form. Congress has only two choices. The big banks can be nationalized and treated as public utilities. The public would pocket their profits and cover their losses. Or the big banks can be broken up, and be accountable to both the law and the market. Something has to be done, otherwise this same behavior that cause the financial markets to crash in 2008 will happen again. And in a country that puts teenagers in jail for selling \$20 worth of drugs, there should be no problem jailing executives that laundry money for drug cartels and despots and oversee institutions that issue predatory loans and sell financial instruments that they know will fail. To that I say..... ***Eric Holder get some balls and do your job....***

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In the 1959 British film comedy – ***The Mouse That Roared*** – of the 1955 satirical novel by Irish-American writer Leonard Wibberley, an impoverished backward nation declares a war on the United States of America, hoping to lose, but things don't go according to plan. The Plot: The tiny (three miles by five miles) European Duchy of Grand Fenwick, supposedly located in the Alps between Switzerland and France, proudly retains a pre-industrial economy, dependent almost entirely on making Pinot Grand Fenwick wine. However, an American winery makes a knockoff version, "Pinot Grand Enwick", putting the country on the verge of bankruptcy. The prime minister decides that their only course of action is to declare war on the United States. Expecting a quick and total defeat (since their standing army is tiny and equipped with bows and arrows), the country confidently expects to rebuild itself through the generous largesse that the United States bestows on all its vanquished enemies (as it did for Germany through the Marshall Plan at the end of World War II).

Instead, the Duchy defeats the mighty superpower, purely by accident. Landing in New York City, almost completely deserted above ground because of a city-wide disaster drill, the Duchy's invading

"army" (composed of the Field Marshal Tully Bascomb, three men-at-arms, and twenty long-bowmen) wanders to a top secret government lab and unintentionally captures the "Q-bomb" (a prototype doomsday device that could destroy the world if triggered) and its maker, Dr. Kokintz. The invaders from Fenwick are sighted by a Civil Defense Squad and are immediately taken to be "men from Mars" when their mail armor is mistaken for reptilian skin. The Secretary of Defense pieces together what has happened (with help from the five lines in his encyclopedia on Grand Fenwick and the Fenwickian flag left behind on a flagpole) and is both ashamed and astonished that the United States was unaware that it had been at war for two months.

With the most powerful bomb in the world now in the smallest country in the world, other countries are quick to react, with the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom offering their support. With the world at the tiny country's mercy, Duchess Gloriana, the leader of Grand Fenwick, lists her terms: all the nuclear weapons of the powerful nations must go through an inspection by impartial scientists and the "Tiny Twenty" (a joke about the "Big Three" Nations) should be formed, a group of twenty small nations so that small nations can get their voices heard as well as large ones. Soon Duchess Gloriana and Tully Bascomb get married, and during the wedding Dr. Kokintz discovers that the bomb is a dud and that the bomb Grand Fenwick used to threaten the world into obedience never had any power whatsoever. However, Dr. Kokintz decides to keep that fact to himself considering that the pretense still furthers the cause of world peace.

I am not sure if 28 year old Kim Jong-il, Supreme Leader of North Korea has ever read the book or saw the movie, but this past week when he threaten a pre-emptive nuclear strike on the United States, he reminded of ***The Mouse That Roared***. And yes North Korea has 1.2 million soldiers, approximately 12,000 artillery guns mostly near its border with South Korea, 820 fighter jets, 4,200 tanks, several submarines, a limited number of short and mid-range missiles, a stockpile of fissile material that could be enough for six to eight nuclear weapons, and up to 5,000 metric tons of biological and chemical weapons that can wipe out a mid-size industrial city. Experts say North Korea is years away from being able to hit continental America with a nuclear weapon despite a decades-long push toward an atomic capability. And he doesn't even have enough fuel to fly sorties or conduct needed drills to maintain combat effectiveness against South Korea's 460 jets across the border.

***So why is this Mouse Roaring.....*** Obviously, like many of his generation who grew up in privilege with rap music, video games, NBA and soccer and now being **The Supreme Leader** who is married to a local Pop Star, he wants attention, evidenced his recent foray into international diplomacy, when he invited former basket ball player & bad-boy, Dennis Rodman to Pyongyang. As I use to say in the 1960s if we had dropped televisions instead of bombs in Vietnam, the war would have been over years earlier. And in this case, if we send JayZ and Beyoncé to visit him and then invite him to Disney World and Aspen.... to assuage his ego, so we can avoid war with the Mouse.

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This week the Dow closed Friday at 14,397.07 more than double of what it was four years ago. Also the Labor Department data showed 236,000 jobs were added in February. January's numbers were revised down, but the figures from December were increased. All told, monthly gains have averaged

more than 200,000 jobs since November. and the unemployment rate dropped to 7.7 percent, the lowest in four years. With both housing starts and home values their highest since 2008. And corporate America has hoarded more than \$3 trillion. THINK: *if government employment had just held steady since the end of 2008, instead of cutting more than 700,000 jobs, the unemployment rate would be 7.2 percent today*, noted the **Wall Street Journal's** Justin Lahart. Mitt Romney campaigned in 2012 on the slogan, "Obama isn't working." With almost every other Republican leader echoing that the President's economic policies would cause another recession. At the same time Republican National Committee Chair Reince Priebus said that Republicans should take credit for the stronger than expected economy.

The problem is that numbers don't always reflect the strength of the economy. From 2009 to 2011, average real income per family grew modestly by 1.7% but the gains were very uneven. Top 1% incomes grew by 11.2% while bottom 99% incomes shrunk by 0.4%. **Hence, the top 1% captured 121% of the income gains in the first two years of the recovery.** Warren Buffet recently noted, 40 years ago, the corporate tax contribution of 4% of GDP was far higher than today's 1.5% and growth was stronger. And corporations are making more money than ever. Yet no one is concentrating on the most important economic problem in the country, the need for more jobs. Yes, companies are doing better than ever and the rich are getting richer. While the Middle Class is being squeezed and the needs of the elderly and poor are being ignored. So as encouraging as the numbers were this past week, both Congress and the President should do whatever they can to create jobs which will have a multiplier effect on the economy. And when the Private Sector is not creating enough jobs, government should. And with borrowing costs at the lowest point ever, we should use this opportunity to rebuild the country's infrastructure, which is a way to give future generations, something, akin to what Congress did in the 1930s with the Hoover Dam, Eisenhower did with The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. And successive Administrations did to create the transcontinental railroad.

## THIS WEEK'S READINGS

Last Sunday's Weekend Readings started out with a critique on Bill Moyers show - ***Fighting Creeping Creationism*** -- where he interviewed 19-year-old anti-creationism activist Zack Kopplin, who from the time he was a high school senior in his home state of Louisiana, has been speaking, debating, cornering politicians and winning the active support of 78 Nobel Laureates, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the New Orleans City Council, and tens of thousands of students, teachers and others around the country, challenging education laws that encourage teaching creationism alongside evolution, and supporting school vouchers to transfer taxpayer money from public to private schools, where religious fundamentalists backed by the right wing can push a creationist agenda. And then talked with journalist and historian Susan Jacoby who talked with Bill about the role secularism and intellectual curiosity have played throughout America's history -- a topic explored in her new book, ***The Great Agnostic: Robert Ingersoll and American Freethought.***

If you didn't think that I was crazy last week, I am revisiting Religion again based on Frank Bruni op-ed in the **New York Times** last week -- ***Reading God's Mind*** -- questioning why there is such a

stubborn barrier to the full acceptance and bigotry against gay and lesbian Americans in the Christian religion. If we are all God's People, why are there still bigoted attitudes toward homosexuality deeming such love sinful and against God's wishes in many Christian Churches?

Bruni tells a story of Jeff chu who married last September on the lawn of a house on Cape Cod, against the backdrop of an ivy-covered fence. And although 80 people came, his mother and father who are strict Southern Baptist, didn't Jeff homosexual feelings surfaced while he was attending a Christian high school. To suppress these feelings he dated women when he attended Princeton. But in London for graduate school, he began to date men, and to wonder how that orientation could be wrong, when God had presumably made him the way he was. To explore these issues, Jeff roamed the country, visiting Christian churches and groups of diverse theological stripes to explore their attitudes toward homosexuality. At the same time he was coming to terms with his own homosexuality, knowing that he was going to hell because he is gay.

Neither being gay or religious, this story caused me to recall one of gospel singer Kirk Franklin's favorite musical chants, "████. are you with me." And if you believe that we are all God's children, then why in Christian circles is homosexuality a sin and these children of God, going to hell?

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After watching R.J. Cutler's disturbing new feature documentary called "***The World According to Dick Cheney***", this week in **The Huffington Post** columnist Howard Fineman posted – ***We Are Living in the World Dick Cheney Made*** – as it is a cautionary tale of unchecked zealotry in action and how deep conviction can also take down a democracy. Cheney at his height, had virtually unchecked power to rain destruction on other nations and who drove the creation of the military-diplomatic world in which we still live on the eve of the 10th anniversary of the fiery "*shock and awe*" launch of the Iraq War. And as a result the country and the world that we now live in is largely the product of Cheney's thinking.

The film distils interviews with journalists, biographers and central figures in Cheney's saga, including 20 hours with the former vice president himself, Cutler chronicles how Cheney -- zealously, relentlessly, single-mindedly -- accumulated the power he then wielded in the first term of President George W. Bush. We see Cheney shrewdly and patiently playing the inside game for decades -- attaching himself to rising stars in successive Republican administrations; becoming a leader in Congress; finally steering Bush to pick Cheney as his running mate and then insisting on unprecedented control of security matters. This portrait is riveting because we know what Cheney's ascent led to: our seemingly irrevocable, full-blown security state, with all the attendant risks of constitutional and civil liberties abuses; wholesale destruction and civilian deaths in swaths of Afghanistan and Iraq; more than 6,500 dead and more than 50,000 wounded U.S. soldiers; the rise of remote-control warfare, now embodied by drones; and a relationship with the Arab and Muslim worlds arguably more antagonistic than ever before. The film has the dreadful fascination of a road trip you know ends in a car wreck.

Since Cheney left the capital, President Barack Obama not only hasn't dismantled most of the "world according to Dick Cheney"; in many cases, he has either actively ratified it (drones and intrusive surveillance and monitoring of leaks). In other cases in which he has opted for rollback (Afghanistan), Obama has moved with extreme caution. And although the documentary is about Cheney, it is about Bush, too. In his first term, the president let Cheney be Cheney, often without even knowing he was doing so. As the years passed, Bush belatedly moved to rein in his vice president, siding with Justice Department lawyers on surveillance issues; firing Cheney's dearest friend, Donald Rumsfeld, from his Pentagon job; letting Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice win the argument over whether to bomb a Syrian nuclear reactor site (we didn't). Finally understand that he had been seriously played by Cheney, in the administration's last days, Bush refused to pardon his right-hand man, Lewis I. "Scooter" Libby, who had been convicted of obstruction of justice and perjury in the Valerie Plame case (though he did commute Libby's prison sentence).

Unrepentant, convinced of his rectitude and his ultimate place in history, the 72-year-old former vice president unequivocally defends wars, harsh interrogation methods, domestic surveillance and other features of the world he made. At the same time, he uses the film to sharply criticize Bush and to settle scores with bureaucratic rivals from back in the day. Cheney to this day regards his critics as weak, naïve, partisan and unpatriotic. The saying is that Power Corrupts and All Power corrupts absolutely and no one personifies this more than former Dick Cheney. I strongly urge everyone to watch this 109 minute film when it premieres on **Showtime**, next week (9 PM on March 15), because I am and whether you are a supporter or hater, it is important to understand how and what happen..... and most of all why America is becoming more and more a police state, which is the real lasting legacy of Dick Cheney.

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David Brooks wrote an interesting op-ed this week in the **New York Times** – **The Brutality Cascade** – using the metaphor of how the pervasive use of steroids in Major League pressured a number of top athletes to use them too. And how students feel pressured become junior workaholics in preparations of college admissions. And how these situations have become brutality cascades where the most brutal player gets to set the rules and everyone else feels pressure to imitate, whether they want to or not, or whether it is in their best interest or not.

Nowhere is this "brutality cascade" (as Brooks coined it) more rife than in politics. Let's say you are a normal person who gets into Congress. You rather not spend all your time fund-raising. You like to be civil to your opponents and maybe even work out some compromises. But you find yourself competing against opponents who fund-raise all the time, who prefer brutalism to civility and absolutism to compromise. And if you don't you get primaried by people in your own party. Pretty soon you must follow their norms to survive.

You might call these situations brutality cascades. In certain sorts of competitions, the most brutal player gets to set the rules. Everybody else feels pressure to imitate, whether they want to or not. The political world is rife with brutality cascades. Let's say you are a normal person who gets into

Congress. ■■■ rather not spend all your time fund-raising. ■■■ like to be civil to your opponents and maybe even work out some compromises. But you find yourself competing against opponents who fund-raise all the time, who prefer brutalism to civility and absolutism to compromise. Pretty soon you must follow their norms to survive.

Brooks then extends this theory to world affairs. Whereby the United States, a traditional capitalist nation that has championed an open-seas economic doctrine, and believes that everybody benefits if global economics is like a conversation, with maximum openness, mutual trust and free exchange. But along comes China, an economic superpower with a more mercantilist mind-set. Many Chinese, at least in the military-industrial complex, see global economics as a form of warfare, a struggle for national dominance.

Americans and Europeans tend to think it is self-defeating to engage in cyberattacks on private companies in a foreign country. You may learn something, but you destroy the trust that lubricates free exchange. Pretty soon your trade dries up because nobody wants to do business with a pirate. Investors go off in search of more transparent partners. But China's cybermercantilists regard deceit as a natural tool of warfare. Cyberattacks make perfect sense. Your competitors have worked hard to acquire intellectual property. Your system is more closed so innovation is not your competitive advantage. It is quicker and cheaper to steal. They will hate you for it, but who cares? They were going to hate you anyway. *C'est la guerre.*

In a brutality cascade the Chinese don't become more like us as the competition continues. We become more like them. And that is indeed what's happening. The first thing Western companies do in response to cyberattacks is build up walls. Instead of being open stalls in the global marketplace, they begin to look more like opaque, rigidified castles. Next, the lines between private companies and Western governments begin to blur. When Western companies are attacked, they immediately turn to their national governments for technical and political support. On the one hand, the United States military is getting a lot more involved in computer counterespionage, eroding the distance between the military and private companies. On the other hand, you see the rise of these digital Blackwaters, private security firms that behave like information age armies, providing defense against foreign attack but also counterattacking against Chinese and Russian foes.

Brooks continues: Pretty soon the global economy looks less like Monopoly and more like a game of Risk, with a Chinese military-industrial complex on one part of the board and the Western military-industrial complex on another part. Brutality cascades are very hard to get out of. You can declare war and simply try to crush the people you think are despoiling the competition. Or you can try what might be called friendship circles. In this approach, you first establish the norms of legitimacy that should govern the competition. You create a Geneva Convention of domestic political conduct or global cyberespionage. Then you organize as broad a coalition as possible to agree to uphold these norms. Finally, you isolate the remaining violators and deliver a message: If you join our friendship circle and abide by our norms, the benefits will be overwhelming, but if you stay outside, the costs will be devastating.

Where I differ from Brooks is with his analogy that somehow President Obama should break out of this vicious cycle when pressured by Republican zealots, whose #1 goal is to score points at all costs, making his a failed Presidency even if it hurts the country. As Brooks points out, *“President Obama is caught between these two strategies. He never quite pushes budget showdowns to the limit to discredit Republicans, but he never offers enough to the members of the Republican common-sense caucus to tempt them to break ranks.”* When everyone knows, carrots alone don’t work and you better have a big stick and make sure that your adversaries know that you are not adverse to using it liberally. Otherwise, I find Brook’s op-ed insightful.

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Paul Krugman in an op-ed this week in the **The Washington Post** — ***Mooching Off Medicaid*** — ‘Conservatives like to say that their position is all about economic freedom, and hence making government’s role in general, and government spending in particular, as small as possible. And no doubt there are individual conservatives who really have such idealistic motives.’ He continues, *“When it comes to conservatives with actual power, however, there’s an alternative, more cynical view of their motivations — namely, that it’s all about comforting the comfortable and afflicting the afflicted, about giving more to those who already have a lot. And if you want a strong piece of evidence in favor of that cynical view, look at the current state of play over Medicaid.”*

Some background: Medicaid, which provides health insurance to lower-income Americans, is a highly successful program that’s about to get bigger, because an expansion of Medicaid is one key piece of the Affordable Care Act, aka Obamacare. But there is a catch. Last year’s Supreme Court decision upholding Obamacare also opened a loophole that lets states turn down the Medicaid expansion if they choose. And there has been a lot of tough talk from Republican governors about standing firm against the terrible, tyrannical notion of helping the uninsured. Now, in the end most states will probably go along with the expansion because of the huge financial incentives: the federal government will pay the full cost of the expansion for the first three years, and the additional spending will benefit hospitals and doctors as well as patients. Still, some of the states grudgingly allowing the federal government to help their neediest citizens are placing a condition on this aid, insisting that it must be run through private insurance companies. And that tells you a lot about what conservative politicians really want.

Consider the case of Florida, whose governor, Rick Scott, made his personal fortune in the health industry. At one point, by the way, the company he built pleaded guilty to criminal charges, and paid \$1.7 billion in fines related to Medicare fraud. Anyway, Mr. Scott got elected as a fierce opponent of Obamacare, and Florida participated in the suit asking the Supreme Court to declare the whole plan unconstitutional. Nonetheless, Mr. Scott recently shocked Tea Party activists by announcing his support for the Medicaid expansion. But his support came with a condition: he was willing to cover more of the uninsured only after receiving a waiver that would let him run Medicaid through private insurance companies. This is not about free markets. This is all about spending taxpayer money, and the question is whether that money should be spent directly to help people or run through a set of private middlemen. And despite some feeble claims to the contrary, privatizing Medicaid will end up requiring more, not less, government spending, because there’s overwhelming evidence that Medicaid is much cheaper than private insurance. Partly this reflects lower administrative costs, because Medicaid neither advertises nor spends money trying to avoid covering people. But a lot of it reflects the government’s bargaining power, its ability to prevent price gouging by hospitals, drug companies and other parts of the medical-industrial complex.

For there is a lot of price-gouging in health care — a fact long known to health care economists but documented especially graphically in a recent article in *Time magazine*. As Steven Brill, the article's author, points out, individuals seeking health care can face incredible costs, and even large private insurance companies have limited ability to control profiteering by providers. Medicare does much better, and although Mr. Brill doesn't point this out, Medicaid — which has greater ability to say no — seems to do better still. You might ask why, in that case, much of Obamacare will run through private insurers. The answer is, raw political power. Letting the medical-industrial complex continue to get away with a lot of overcharging was, in effect, a price President Obama had to pay to get health reform passed. And since the reward was that tens of millions more Americans would gain insurance, it was a price worth paying.

But why would you insist on privatizing a health program that is already public, and that does a much better job than the private sector of controlling costs? The answer is pretty obvious: the flip side of higher taxpayer costs is higher medical-industry profits. So ignore all the talk about too much government spending and too much aid to moochers who don't deserve it. As long as the spending ends up lining the right pockets, and the undeserving beneficiaries of public largess are politically connected corporations, conservatives with actual power seem to like Big Government just fine.

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One of the great traditions of the past 150 years is American thirst for innovation and its tradition of exploring the limits of basic science. From Thomas Edison's famous workshop to Bell Labs to Silicon Valley, every American could be proud of our country's many scientific accomplishments. But this tradition maybe coming to an end, with budget cuts that are challenging the tenants of basic science — science for science sake and corporate downsizing and the quest that every penny produce sizable results, has limited many companies from pursuing basic science. Today basic science is only pursued in universities and at a few think tanks. Except even here both public and private funding is becoming scarcer and scarcer. To which Dennis Overbye wrote this week in the *New York Times* — ***Particle Physicists in U.S. Worry About Being Left Behind*** — “*Are the glory days of American physics over?*”

On a Sunday morning early in January, about two dozen prominent physicists gathered behind closed doors at the California Institute of Technology to ponder the state of their craft. American physicists were not exactly sitting on the sidelines last July when CERN announced the probable discovery of the long-sought Higgs boson, the key to understanding the origin of mass and life in the universe. The United States contributed \$531 million to building and equipping the Large Hadron Collider, the multi-billion-dollar European machine with which the discovery was made. About 1,200 Americans work at CERN, including Joe Incandela from the University of California, Santa Barbara, who led one of the two teams making the July announcement. But as science goes forward, American particle physicists are wondering what role, if any, they will play in the future in high-energy physics — the search for the fundamental particles and forces of nature — a field they once dominated. “*There is enormous angst in the field,*” said Michael S. Turner, a physicist and cosmologist at the University of Chicago, who attended the Caltech meeting.

After canceling the Superconducting Super Collider, which would have been the world's most powerful physics machine, in 1993, and shutting down Fermilab's Tevatron in 2011, the United States no longer owns the tool of choice in physics, a particle collider. Fermilab's biggest project going forward is a plan to shoot a beam of neutrinos, ghostlike particles, 800 miles through the earth to a detector at the old Homestake gold mine in Lead, ■■■, to investigate their shape-shifting properties. The results could bear on one of the deep-seated and intractable problems in cosmology, namely why the universe is made of matter and not antimatter, but there is not enough money in the project's budget to put the detector below ground, at the bottom of the mine, where it would be sheltered from cosmic rays and able to observe neutrinos from distant supernova explosions, instead of on the surface. Americans who want to taste the thrills of the frontiers of high-energy physics have to cast their eyes east to CERN's collider, which is set to dominate the field for the next 20 years. Or they might look west, to Japan, which is budgeting about \$120 billion in stimulus money to help recover from the disaster at the Fukushima nuclear power plant after the earthquake and tsunami in 2011 and wants to use some of it to host the next big machine, the International Linear Collider, which would be 20 miles long and could manufacture Higgs bosons for precision study.

In February, in a ceremony at a physics conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, the team that had been designing the collider for the last decade handed over the plans to a new consortium, the Linear Collider Collaboration, directed by Lyn Evans, who built the Large Hadron Collider at CERN. Dr. Evans said the next big highlight of his career would be seeing construction start in the next couple of years in Japan. How desperately does the United States want to participate in these projects, from which the next great advances in our understanding of the universe could come? *"Our issue is that Europe and Asia are contemplating or have made \$10 billion investments in particle physics,"* explained Jim Siegrist, associate director for high-energy physics at the Department of Energy, who says that kind of money is not going to be forthcoming in the United States. *"How we compete is a problem for us."*

Physicists are hoping to have some answers by this summer when they convene in Minneapolis for Snowmass, a planning conference named after the Colorado resort where it used to be held until the place got too expensive. In the meantime there are only questions, like what is the country's future relationship with CERN? The United States is presently an observer at CERN, but that arrangement expires in 2017. Joining as a full member would cost somewhere around \$250 million a year and is out of the question. *"Neither the agencies nor Congress is interested,"* Dr. Siegrist said. Nor, he thought, was CERN itself interested in having the United States Government Accountability Office and others "crawling down their shorts." For only about \$25 million, however, the United States could become an associate member, an outcome favored by CERN's director general, Rolf-Dieter Heuer. "To my mind, that would be a breakthrough," Dr. Heuer said in an interview recently, but he acknowledged that it would be fraught with political and budgetary difficulties on the American side. For now, Dr. Siegrist said, American officials and CERN would talk about how the United States could help with a major upgrade in the collider planned for 2022. That will require new superconducting magnets made of niobium-tin wire. *"CERN would like to take advantage of our technology there,"* Dr. Siegrist said.

Likewise with the coming linear collider. Dr. Siegrist said Japanese officials and a Japanese delegation would be visiting the United States this spring to talk about schemes for cooperation. Dr. Siegrist said the American investment in the CERN collider had set a precedent for helping to support particle accelerators overseas. And it showed that the United States could be a reliable partner in such

projects. In return, he said, Fermilab might get foreign aid for the neutrino experiment, enough to put the detector underground, or for a proposed facility to produce intense proton beams, called Project X. How such efforts will fare in this age of sequestration and federal cutbacks is unknown, he admitted, but particle physics has produced important spin-offs into medicine, including imaging devices and beams to treat cancer, and in materials science.

But with no clear vision and goal other than “*what if*” — or a “*let’s try this*” attitude — and that there might be nothing else to discover or understood with today’s technology — this kind of discovery science is clearly the business of government. We need politicians who understand the potential benefits thus support basic science, which is the quest to discover the unknown instead of cynics and bean-counters who have the curiosity of a hibernating slug and no sense of adventure.

Would Americans have landed on the Moon in 1969 if JFK had not challenge the scientific community and the country at large? I often disagree with Newt Gingrich, but applauded him when during a January 2012 Republican Primary Debate he tried to defend US space exploration, suggesting that America should embark on setting up a colony on the Moon.... only to have to abandon this vision, when he was slammed by the rest of his Republican opponents. Common everyday products started out as NASA inventions, including Invisible braces, Scratch-resistant Lenses, Memory Foam, Shoe Insoles, Long-distant Telecommunications, Adjustable Smoke Detector, Cordless Tools, Water Filters and everyone’s favorite Tang. Louis Pasteur once said, “*chance favors the prepared mind.*” So here are some of the accidental inventions; Penicillin, vulcanized rubber, the Pacemaker, plastic, Teflon, Saccharin and Coke. Basic science allows for creation beyond what is known..... And physics is one of its cornerstones...

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At a time when we are cutting nutritional programs in schools, pre-school programs for the poor, benefits for returning servicemen and women, support initiatives for the elderly and putting off repairing the country’s crumbling infrastructure, we still have huge military bases in Germany, Japan, Korea and elsewhere as a line for protection for our allies. Since 1947, when President Harry S. Truman set forth a policy to stop further Soviet expansion and “*support free peoples*” who were “*resisting subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures,*” America has acted as the world’s policeman.

From the Truman Doctrine emerged a strategy comprising multiple alliances: the Rio Pact of 1947 (Latin America), the NATO Treaty of 1949 (Canada and Northern and Western Europe), the Anzus Treaty of 1951 (Australia and New Zealand) and the Seato Treaty of 1954 (Southeast Asia). Seato ended in 1977, but the other treaties remain in force, as do collective-defense agreements with Japan, South Korea and the Philippines. Meanwhile, we invented the practice of foreign aid, beginning with the Marshall Plan.

But conditions have changed radically since the cold war. When the United States established major bases in West Germany and Japan, they were considered dangerous renegades that needed to be watched. Their reconstructed governments also desired protection, particularly from the Soviet Union and China. NATO's first secretary general, Hastings Ismay, famously said the alliance existed "*to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.*"

Today, our largest permanent bases are still in Germany and Japan, which are perfectly capable of defending themselves and should be trusted to help their neighbors. It's time they foot more of the bill or operate their own bases. China's authoritarian capitalism hasn't translated into territorial aggression, while Russia no longer commands central and eastern Europe. That the military brass still talk of maintaining the capacity to fight a two-front war — presumably on land in Europe, and at sea in the Pacific — speaks to the irrational endurance of the Truman Doctrine.

Our wars in the Middle East since 2001 doubled down on that costly, outdated doctrine. The domino theory behind the Vietnam War revived under a new formulation: but for the American umpire, the bad guys (Al Qaeda, Iran, North Korea) will win. And despite his supporters' expectations, President Obama has followed a Middle East policy nearly identical to his predecessor's. He took us out of Iraq, only to deepen our commitment to Afghanistan, from which we just now pulling out. He rejected the most odious counterterrorism techniques of George W. Bush's administration, but otherwise did not change basic policies. Mr. Obama's gestures toward multilateralism were not matched by a commensurate commitment from many of our allies.

Realists contend that if we quit defending access to the world's natural resources — read, oil — nobody else would. Really? It's not likely that the Europeans, who depend on energy imports far more than the nation that owns Texas and Alaska would throw up their hands and bury their heads in the sand. It's patronizing and naïve to think that America is the only truly "*necessary*" country. Good leaders develop new leaders. The Libyan crisis showed that our allies can do a lot. The United States can and should pressure Iran and North Korea over their nuclear programs. It must help to reform and strengthen multilateral institutions like the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. It must champion the right of small nations, including Israel, to "freedom from fear." But there are many ways of achieving these goals, and they don't all involve more borrowing and spending. And acting as the World's Police Force is not the only way to do it.

As Elizabeth Hoffman wrote this week in the **New York Times** — ***Come Home, America*** — With everyone focused on getting out of Iraq and Afghanistan, we should ask, why do we have military forces/bases in Germany, Korea and Japan? And why during the sequester — and \$85 billion this year in across-the-board budget cuts, about half of which will come from the Pentagon — gives Americans an opportunity to discuss a question we've put off too long: Why we are still fighting World War II?

America since 1945 has paid a price in blood, treasure and reputation. Umpires may be necessary, but they are rarely popular and by definition can't win. Perhaps the other players will step up only if we threaten to leave the field. Sharing the burden of security with our allies is more than a fiscal necessity. It's the sine qua non of a return to global normalcy. And if North Korea Kim Jong-un's

nukes are such a danger, why don't we let South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, China and Vietnam deal with the problem, instead of our normal knee-jerk reaction that *he is only minutes away from dropping a bomb over Manhattan*, when all he really wants to do is hang out with Dennis Rodman with the hope that JayZ and Bayonne drop by for a visit someday soon...

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If you ask most white Americans, they will tell you that America is a post racial pluralistic society, evidenced by the fact that there is a Black President and JayZ, P Diddy, Kobe Bryant and Oprah Winfrey are rich. But anyone with a black or brown skin can tell you that this isn't true. This week in an op-ed in the **New York Times** – ***The Good, Racist People*** – Ta-Nehisi Coates starts the piece, *“Last month the actor Forest Whitaker was stopped in a Manhattan delicatessen by an employee. Whitaker is one of the pre-eminent actors of his generation, with a diverse and celebrated catalog ranging from “The Great Debaters” to “The Crying Game” to “Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai.” By now it is likely that he has adjusted to random strangers who can’t get his turn as Idi Amin out of their heads. But the man who approached the Oscar winner at the deli last month was in no mood for autographs. The employee stopped Whitaker, accused him of shoplifting and then promptly frisked him. The act of self-deputization was futile. Whitaker had stolen nothing. On the contrary, █████ been robbed.”*

Coates: Since the Whitaker affair, I've read and listened to interviews with the owner of the establishment. He is apologetic to a fault and is sincerely mortified. He says that it was a “sincere mistake” made by a “decent man” who was “*just doing his job.*” I believe him. And yet for weeks now I have walked up Broadway, glancing through its windows with a mood somewhere between Marvin Gaye's “*Distant Lover*” and Al Green's “*For the Good Times.*” In modern America we believe racism to be the property of the uniquely villainous and morally deformed, the ideology of trolls, gorgons and orcs. We believe this even when we are actually being racist. In 1957, neighbors in Levittown, Pa., uniting under the flag of segregation, wrote: “*As moral, religious and law-abiding citizens, we feel that we are unprejudiced and undiscriminating in our wish to keep our community a closed community.*”

A half-century later little had changed. The comedian Michael Richards (Kramer on “*Seinfeld*”) once yelled at a black heckler from the stage: “*He’s a nigger! He’s a nigger! He’s a nigger!*” Confronted about this, Richards apologized and then said, “████ not a racist,” and called the claim “*insane.*” The idea that racism lives in the heart of particularly evil individuals, as opposed to the heart of a democratic society, is reinforcing to anyone who might, from time to time, find their tongue sprinting ahead of their discretion. We can forgive Whitaker's assailant. Much harder to forgive is all that makes Whitaker stand out in the first place. New York is a city, like most in America, that bears the scars of redlining, blockbusting and urban renewal. The ghost of those policies haunts us in a wealth gap between blacks and whites that has actually gotten worse over the past 20 years.

But much worse, it haunts black people with a kind of invisible violence that is given full force only when the victim happens to be an Oscar winner. The promise of America is that those who play by the rules, who observe the norms of the "middle class," will be treated as such. But this injunction is only half-enforced when it comes to black people, in large part because we were never meant to be part of the American story. Forest Whitaker fits that bill, and he was addressed as such.

How else can you explain why a majority of white Americans believe that the shooting of an unarmed African American teenager walking home with a bag of snacks from a local convenience store by a twenty-eight year old Caucasian Hispanic man, who stalked him for several blocks believing him as suspicious because he was wearing a hoodie (it was rainy) and confronted this teenager which escalated into a street fight and killing him – that this was/is self defense. I am trying to imagine that if the colors were reversed, even if using police jargon, "this was a righteous shooting," these same people wouldn't be saying that the shooter should have taken the beat-down that people like me would say he deserved, as he initiated the events that lead to the killing of an unarmed seventeen year old. Stereotypes can get you killed

As Chris Matthews said this week – *"I think about these hate groups. What did Obama do to earn their hatred? Is he some kind of dangerous criminal? Not exactly, Obama came up as a community organizer, a soft-cell guy. He's done just about everything right in his life. Didn't have a father around, but did a great job in school himself. Got into Columbia, later, Harvard law. He didn't become a money grubber. He decided to work helping people in his own community, a peaceful kind of guy. Is he some bouncer who doesn't take responsibility for his manhood? I say just the opposite. So what is it that the haters fear about this guy? What do they hate? That he's black? Is that it? He didn't push gun issues until Newtown. Is it the immigration issue? He's the same as the gang of 8 right there in the middle. What is it they hate in this guy? They should be applauding him as a role model. A hundred years from now, white, black and brown, this is just the guy [redacted] want standing out there as our role model."*

I understand that every white person isn't a racist but I believe that the racist jingoistic culture that permeates the culture in America today that allows people to feel justified to ask the President for his long-form birth certificate (which I couldn't produce today for myself), and in a PPP poll after the 2012 election, 49% of Republicans believe that the defunct group ACORN is the reason that President Obama won re-election -- ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform) closed its offices and ceased operations on November 2, 2010. So why do so many Republicans believe this in their hearts and heads. The crazies are still on the rise.

A study by the Southern Poverty Law Center finds that the number of anti-government patriot groups has exploded over the last four years. According to the study, these groups typically believe that the federal government is conspiring to take Americans' guns away from them and destroy their liberties as it paves the way for a global one-world government.-- groups like the Constitution Party, We Are Change, Tyranny Response Team, and Americans For a Free Republic. And these anti-government patriot groups have skyrocketed in number during President Obama's time in office. There were only 149 groups back in 2008. In 2012, there are more than 1,300. And that's an increase of over 800 percent.

Coates: *I am trying to imagine a white president forced to show his papers at a national news conference, and coming up blank. I am trying to imagine a prominent white Harvard professor*

arrested for breaking into his own home, and coming up with nothing. I am trying to see Sean Penn or Nicolas Cage being frisked at an upscale deli, and I find myself laughing in the dark. It is worth considering the messaging here. It says to black kids: "Don't leave home. They don't want you around." It is messaging propagated by moral people. The other day I walked past this particular deli. I believe its owners to be good people. I felt ashamed at withholding business for something far beyond the merchant's reach. I mentioned this to my wife. My wife is not like me. When she was 6, a little white boy called her cousin a nigger, and it has been war ever since. "What if they did that to your son?" she asked. And right then I knew that I was tired of good people, that I had had all the good people I could take.

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In **The Huffington Post** this week – Arianna Huffington wrote – **10 Years Later: Looking Back on the Iraq War So We Can Clearly Look Forward**. Starting out the article with Milan Kundera's – *"The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting,"* that on March 20<sup>th</sup> it will be the 10th anniversary of one of the biggest disasters in the history of the United States. That was the day George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, and a team of others -- along with much of Washington and a very complicit mainstream media -- took the nation to war against Iraq. The devastating consequences of that war will continue for decades, but a full accounting has still yet to happen. And that in itself has consequences. Allowing the toxic mixture of lies, deception and rationalizations that led to that war to go unchallenged makes it more likely that we will make similar tragic mistakes in the future.

With this, she asked that we all try to understand what happened to so that it can be avoid in the future. Who got it right and who got it wrong? What was the role of the media? What are the ongoing consequences? Especially when those who are most responsible for it still have loud voices in our foreign policy. *"For a decade or more after the Vietnam war, the people who had guided the U.S. to disaster decently shrank from the public stage,"* writes James Fallows. *"Rusk, Rostow, Westmoreland were not declaiming on what the U.S. should and should not do."* And yet, after what Fallows calls *"the biggest strategic error by the United States since at least the end of World War II,"* that accounting has not happened.

After Iraq, there has been a weird amnesty and amnesia about people's misjudgment on the most consequential decision of our times. ... Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Bremer, Rice, McCain, Abrams, and others including the pro-war press clique are still offering their judgments unfazed. One of my father's saying is, **"history is always re-written by the winners."** And somehow with most people acknowledging their glaring blunders and falsehoods, these warmongers feel free to continue their lies and deceptions that led to this calamity. Here are just a few of the classics from Huffington's article:

George Tenet, who, according to Bob Woodward's book *Plan of Attack*, was asked by President Bush, "George, how confident are you?" Tenet's answer? "Don't worry, it's a slam-dunk." And what were the personal consequences of that colossal misjudgment? He was awarded the Medal of Freedom, as were then-General Tommy Franks and former Coalition Provisional Authority head Paul Bremer. "These

three men symbolize the nobility of public service, the good character of our country, and the good influence of America on the world," said President Bush. So much for accountability.

Then, of course, there was Vice President Cheney: *"We do know, with absolute certainty, that [Saddam Hussein] is using his procurement system to acquire the equipment he needs in order to enrich uranium to build a nuclear weapon." -- "No. I think we may well have some kind of presence there over a period of time. But I think the level of activity that we see today, from a military standpoint, I think will clearly decline. I think they're in the last throes, if you will, of the insurgency."*

Or this one, from then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, uttered in the midst of the rioting and looting that broke out in the very predictable vacuum created when we toppled a central government with not much of a plan to replace it: *"Stuff happens... and it's untidy and freedom's untidy, and free people are free to make mistakes and commit crimes and do bad things. They're also free to live their lives and do wonderful things. And that's what's going to happen here."* Or how about then-National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice's warning that *"we don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud."* Or, of course, when President Bush declared the end of "major combat" in Iraq on May 1, 2003, while standing in front of a banner that read "Mission Accomplished." Over 90 percent of coalition deaths occurred after that victory lap.

How about then-National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice's warning that "we don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud." Or, of course, when President Bush declared the end of "major combat" in Iraq on May 1, 2003, while standing in front of a banner that read *"Mission Accomplished."* Over 90 percent of coalition deaths occurred after that victory lap. Then there was the moment when then-General Eric Shinseki told Congress that an occupation of a country as large as Iraq would require a force of "several hundred thousand soldiers." Two days later, then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz indirectly called Shinseki's analysis *"outlandish"* to a House committee. He continued: I would expect that even countries like France will have a strong interest in assisting Iraq's reconstruction ... We can't be sure that the Iraqi people will welcome us as liberators ... [but] I am reasonably certain that they will greet us as liberators, and that will help us to keep requirements down ... It's hard to conceive that it would take more forces to provide stability in post-Saddam Iraq than it would take to conduct the war itself and to secure the surrender of Saddam's security forces and his army. Hard to imagine.

And the big ugly is how huge a role that the media played in allowing -- indeed, enabling -- this catastrophe. What should have been a brake on a process fueled by lies was instead an accelerator. But here, too, there were those who got it right. As **HuffPost's** Max Follmer put it in 2008: In the months before the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the reporters in the Knight Ridder Newspapers Washington ■■■ bureau were virtually alone in their questioning of the Bush Administration's allegations of links between Saddam Hussein, weapons of mass destruction and international terrorism. The team of Knight Ridder reporters, led by Jonathan Landay, Warren Strobel, John Walcott and Joe Galloway, produced stories that now read like a prescient accounting of how the Bush Administration sought to sell the war to the American people. There was also the AP's Charles Hanley, who actually looked into the Iraqi sites that the Bush administration had claimed had failed inspections. *"In almost two months of surprise visits across Iraq," he wrote, "■■■ arms monitors have inspected 13 sites identified by U.S. and British intelligence agencies as major 'facilities of concern,' and reported no signs of revived weapons building, an Associated Press analysis shows."*

And the consequences of this disastrous war are still very much with us. In the seemingly endless manufactured crisis over the "fiscal cliff" and the sequester, it's amazing how much airtime and print space have been devoted to the deficit with the word "Iraq" barely getting a mention. Clearly a triumph of forgetting. *"It's really the decision of how to pay for it that has had such a negative effect on the U.S. economy,"* said Linda Bilmes, lecturer at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and co-author, along with Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, of ***The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict***. *"Because unlike any previous war in U.S. history, this was paid for entirely by debt at the same time that we cut taxes."*

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, by 2019, the Iraq War and the Bush tax cuts will account for nearly half of our \$17 trillion projected debt. And even less discussed than the ongoing costs of the war are the opportunity costs -- the many things we might have spent that money on instead. In 2010, Bilmes and Stiglitz wrote that not only was their \$3 trillion estimate of the war's cost too low, but so was their estimation of the opportunity costs: The Iraq war didn't just contribute to the severity of the financial crisis, though; it also kept us from responding to it effectively. Increased indebtedness meant that the government had far less room to maneuver than it otherwise would have had ... The result is that the recession will be longer, output lower, unemployment higher and deficits larger than they would have been absent the war. In addition to the ongoing debt, there's the issue of the cost of the care for the millions of Iraq war veterans. *"We will have a vast overhang in domestic costs for caring for the wounded and covering retirement expenditure of the war fighters,"* said policy expert Loren Thompson in 2011. *"The U.S. will continue to incur major costs for decades to come."*

Will those who argued vehemently to get us into the war advocate as single-mindedly on behalf of those who fought and died and got wounded in that war? I think we already know the answer to that one.

More proof of our losing struggle against forgetting could be seen just a few weeks ago, in the battle over Chuck Hagel's confirmation to be Secretary of Defense. Not only was opposition to his nomination led by those who were most wrong on the biggest foreign policy catastrophe in recent memory, the opposition was, to a large extent, actually based on the fact that Hagel had been right about Iraq. Having been in favor of the war initially, Hagel quickly saw it for what it was, and committed the grave error of speaking the truth. Like the fact that: *"Iraq is not going to turn out the way that we were promised it was."* And that: The Iraq War was "ill-conceived" and "poorly prosecuted." And: *"When I think of issues like Iraq, of how we went into it -- no planning, no preparation, no sense of consequences, of where we were going, how we were going to get out, went in without enough men, no exit strategy, those kind of things -- I'll speak out."*

And yet, here we are, 10 years later, when being right about a war actually costs a nominee for Secretary of Defense confirmation votes. And what of Iraq today? As it turns out, it's one of the closest allies of Iran. Just last week, it was reported that Iraqi Premier Nouri al-Maliki has turned down the U.S. demand for sanctions against Iran for its nuclear program. Iraq also just approved the building of a pipeline for natural gas to flow across Iraq to connect Iran and Syria, which, as the AP put it, is *"likely to strengthen Tehran's influence over its neighbors."* Meanwhile, 136 Iraqis were killed in

February. In January, it was 177 killed. For 2012, the body count was 4,471 civilians killed. This week, a bombing in Baghdad killed four. A few days earlier, bombings in Baghdad and elsewhere killed 22.

In December of 2011, as the last combat troops were being brought home from Iraq, President Obama stood at Fort Bragg and declared, "*The war in Iraq will soon belong to history.*" That may be true, but it's vital that our accounting of the failures that led to this tragedy not be relegated to the past. Does President Bush, while painting his pictures in Texas, ever look back and assess the worst decision of his presidency (and that's a pretty high bar)? It seems doubtful, but that doesn't mean the rest of us shouldn't. No doubt there will someday, rightly, be a monument to those who bravely fought and died in Iraq. But for the 10th anniversary, let's also build online monuments dedicated to those who planned and provoked and fomented the war, so we can join in the struggle of memory against forgetting.

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As Charles Blow's article points out this week in the **New York Times** — ***A Dangerous 'New Normal' in College Debt*** — Americans are reaching a crisis point in this country's higher education system. With college tuition rising and state and local funding for higher education falling — along with median household incomes — students are taking on staggering levels of debt. And many can't find jobs that pay well enough to quickly pay off the debt. This has long-term implications for our society and our economy, as that debt begins to affect when and if young people start families or enter the housing market. As a consequence the student debt crisis may become a dangerous "*new normal*," according to a report this week by the nonprofit State Higher Education Executive Officers Association:

*"In the 'new normal,' retirement and health care costs simultaneously drive up the cost of higher education, and compete with education for limited public resources. The 'new normal' no longer expects to see a recovery of state support for higher education such as occurred repeatedly in the last half of the 20th century. The 'new normal' expects students and their families to continue to make increasingly greater financial sacrifices in order to complete a postsecondary education. The 'new normal' expects schools and colleges to find ways of increasing productivity and absorb ever-larger budget cuts, while increasing degree production without, we hope, compromising quality."*

In constant dollars, state and local educational appropriations per full-time student reached their high in 2001, at \$8,670. In 2012, those appropriations fell by nearly one third, to just \$5,896. The cost of tuition, on the other hand, has increased dramatically. According to a September report by CNN Money: "*Over the past decade, average annual tuition for a year of community college has risen 40 percent to \$3,122, according to the College Board, a nonprofit group that runs the SAT exam. At four-year public universities, the cost has risen 68 percent to \$7,692 a year.*"

Meanwhile, a September Census report shows, median household incomes fell by nearly 7 percent from 2001 to 2011. And there are now more Americans living in poverty than at any time since record-keeping began more than half a century ago. This confluence of trends has led to higher borrowing by students. An analysis last month by Donghoon Lee, an economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of New

York, found that “student debt is the only kind of household debt that continued to rise through the Great Recession” and is now the “second largest balance after mortgage debt.” According to Mr. Lee, student loan debt is fast approaching a trillion dollars, up from less than \$400 billion in 2004, and both the number of borrowers and the average balance per borrower have “*increased by 70 percent between 2004 and 2012 (7 percent per year)*.” A September Pew Research Center report found that “*a record one-in-five households now owe student loan debt.*”

That report also found that student loan debt as a share of household income was 24 percent for families in the lowest income quintile. That was at least twice the share of any other quintile. As the report put it, “The relative burden of student loan debt is greatest for households in the bottom fifth of the income spectrum, even though members of such households are less likely than those in other groups to attend college in the first place.”

And many of those graduates can’t find work or are underemployed, and they struggle to pay back their own personal mountain of debt.

A January report from the Center for College Affordability and Productivity found that “about 48 percent of employed U.S. college graduates are in jobs that the Bureau of Labor Statistics suggests requires less than a four-year college education.” *That number included 37 percent in occupations requiring no more than a high school diploma. For example, the report pointed out that “in 1970, fewer than 1 percent of taxi drivers and 2 percent of firefighters had college degrees, while now more than 15 percent do in both jobs.”* And yet, this country needs a more knowledgeable work force to be competitive. While the number of college graduates in America is increasing, that number is growing even faster in some other countries. And, as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development noted in 2011, “*The U.S. is the only country where attainment levels among those just entering the labor market (25- to 34-year-olds) do not exceed those about to leave the labor market (55- to 64-year-olds).*” Our national educational aspirations and the debt crisis that they’re creating are colliding. We are on an unsustainable track.

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Last week in a **New York Times** – ***Student Debt and the Economy*** – the editorial points out that student loan debt crisis has become a drag on the economy because of the many younger Americans who are saddled with bankrupting payments – or credit ratings damaged by delinquency – are in no position to buy homes, save for retirement or start businesses. The Federal Reserve Bank of New York recently released a study showing just why many young people are being strangled by student loans. It found that 43 percent of 25-year-olds had student debt in 2012, an increase from 27 percent in 2004. Unemployment and the collapse of household income in the recession only made the borrowing problem worse.

According to the new study, student debt almost tripled between 2004 and 2012, and is approaching \$1 trillion, while the percentage of borrowers who were more than 90 days delinquent had risen to 17 percent, from 10 percent in 2004. In addition, student loan debt was the only kind of household debt that continued to rise through the Great Recession, and it is now the second largest after mortgage

debt. The student debt crisis has its roots in state cuts to higher education that began in the 1980s. By savaging support to the public colleges and universities that educate about 70 percent of the nation's students, the states forced up tuition, causing students to borrow steadily more. The Federal Reserve study estimates that nearly 18 percent of borrowers now have student loan debts of \$25,000 to \$50,000, and nearly 4 percent have balances greater than \$100,000.

Distressed borrowers who financed their educations with federal student loans can get relief through the federal Income-Based Repayment program, which allows them to reduce their monthly payments based on their income. Another program, called Pay As You Earn, is limited to people who started borrowing during the recession. It also allows for lower payments, and borrowers who adhere to the payment arrangement can have their loans forgiven after 20 years — or 10 years if they hold public service jobs. But students who have taken out private loans from banks or other institutions are often stuck with high interest rates, high payments and few consumer protections. For example, one federal analysis of student payments in 2009 found that 10 percent of borrowers with private loans were spending more than 25 percent of their incomes in monthly payments.

Because private loans offer little flexibility, borrowers in bad straits have few options except default, which makes it difficult for them to get jobs or credit, or even to rent apartments. Refinancing a private student loan at a lower rate is rarely possible. To get a handle on the student debt problem, the federal government needs to provide relief programs for private loan borrowers too. The federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau announced last month that it was soliciting ideas from policy makers and others for a plan that would give private loan borrowers some relief. Such a plan, which would most likely involve a public-private partnership that freed up capital for refinancing, would have to be part of any solution to the student debt crisis.

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This week in **The Washington Post**, Conservative columnist, Charles Krauthammer wrote this op-ed -- ***Why we give foreign aid*** -- supporting the Obama Administration and in particular, Secretary of State John Kerry, traveling to Cairo and handing President Mohamed Morsi of Egypt, a cool \$250 million in foreign aid during the current sequestration. Remember, Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood is openly anti-Christian, anti-Semitic and otherwise prolifically intolerant. Just three years ago, Morsi called on Egyptians to nurse their children and grandchildren on hatred for Jews, whom he has called "*the descendants of apes and pigs,*" But Krauthammer says that, "*we should not cut off aid to Egypt. It's not that we must blindly support unfriendly regimes. It is perfectly reasonable to cut off aid to governments that are intrinsically hostile and beyond our influence. Subsidizing enemies is merely stupid. But Egypt is not an enemy, certainly not yet. It may no longer be our strongest Arab ally, but it is still in play. The Brotherhood aims to establish an Islamist dictatorship. Yet it remains a considerable distance from having done so. Precisely why we should remain engaged. And engagement means using our economic leverage.*"

As Krauthammer points out, "*if we're going to give foreign aid, it should be for political concessions — on unfettered speech, on an opposition free of repression, on alterations to the Islamist constitution, on open and fair elections. We give foreign aid for two reasons: (a) to support allies*

who share our values and our interests, and **(b)** to extract from less-than-friendly regimes concessions that either bring their policies more in line with ours or strengthen competing actors more favorably inclined toward American objectives. That's the point of foreign aid. It's particularly important in countries like Egypt, whose fate is in the balance. But it will only work if we remain clear-eyed about why we give all that money in the first place." I applaud Krauthammer who in this hostile partisan environment see the trees within the forest and voice sensible policies whoever is in power, wherever they come from and to ever they support with it is to the advantage of our country and humanity itself.

## QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"The most dangerous creation of any society is the man who has nothing to lose."

James A. Baldwin

## THIS WEEK'S MUSIC

One of the greatest R&B-dance vocal groups of my generation is The Whispers, from Los Angeles, California, with a consistent track record of hit records dating back to the late 1960s. The Whispers were inducted into the Vocal Group Hall of Fame in 2003, and were winners of the Rhythm and Blues Foundation's prestigious Pioneer Award in 2008. By popular vote, the group was inducted into **The SoulMusic Hall Of Fame** at [REDACTED] in December 2012. *I remember one magically evening in the early 1990s at an open mike evening at **R&B Live** in Century City Los Angeles, when inspired by the music members of The Whispers who were in the audience came on stage and so blew everyone's mind to the point that Prince and several other major musicians also in the audience join them on state..... rocking the house until the end of the evening.*

The Whispers formed in 1964 in Watts, California. The original members included the twin brothers, Wallace "Scotty" and Walter Scott, along with Gordy Harmon, Marcus Hutson and Nicholas Caldwell. In 1973, Harmon was replaced by former Friends of Distinction member Leaveil Degree. Scotty Scott's fluid, melodic voice is featured on virtually all of their hits. The group scored many hits on the R&B and Billboard Hot 100 charts throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and they hit #1 on the Hot Dance Club Play chart in 1980 with "And the Beat Goes On / "Can You Do the Boogie" / "Out the Box". In 1987, they enjoyed a brief tenure in the Top 40 when "Rock Steady" a collaboration with Kenneth "Babyface" Edmonds became their first Top 10 success on the Hot 100 (it reached #7) while also capturing the #1 spot on the R&B chart.

Although they recorded mainly in Philadelphia in the early to mid 70s, most of their studio work has been in Los Angeles. Their most successful period was in the 1980s with Solar Records (Sound Of Los Angeles Records), run by their manager at the time, Dick Griffey. The Whispers later founded their

own Black Tie record label. The group opened Game 2 of the 1989 World Series at Oakland - **Alameda County Coliseum** with their rendition of the National Anthem. Marcus Hutson left the group in 1992 due to illness. According to the Whispers' website, when Hutson died in 2000 they vowed to never replace him, and now perform as a quartet. Jerry McNeil resigned his position as keyboardist in the later part of 1993, to spend more time with his family. And although my very favorite Whisper's song is - **It Just Gets Better With Time** - please also listen to **Lady** -- as someone once said of it, "if there was ever a metaphor on how a man should treat his woman as it says everything said everything that a woman would want to hear.... You caressed us.... You romanced us.... It's almost like foreplay..."

The Whispers - **And The Beat Goes On** -- [REDACTED]

The Whispers - **A Song For Donny** -- [REDACTED]

The Whispers - **It Just Gets Better With Time** -- [REDACTED]  
[v=B4\\_HotPszyA](#)

The Whispers - **Rock Steady** -- [REDACTED]

The Whispers - **(Olivia) Lost And Turned Out** -- [REDACTED]  
[v=ljLWLwlyF\\_I&list=AL94UKMTqg-9AFCNbL9Z8ED\\_fOQ4mBzfd](#)

The Whispers - **Lady** -- [REDACTED]

The Whispers - **Did You Know** -- [REDACTED]  
[dXshdys&list=AL94UKMTqg-9AFCNbL9Z8ED\\_fOQ4mBzfd](#)

THE WHISPERS - **IN THE MOOD - MY HEART, YOUR HEART - SAY YES** -- [REDACTED]

THE WHISPERS - **WELCOME TO MY DREAM** -- [REDACTED]  
[v=TYlx3ltSqdM](#)

THE WHISPERS - **BUTTA** -- [REDACTED]

The Whispers - **Let's Go All The Way** -- [REDACTED]

The Whispers - **Say You (Would Love For Me Too)** -- [REDACTED]  
[v=bJWjkcH4qWw](#)

The Whispers - **It's A Love Thing** -- [REDACTED]

The Whispers - **Keep On Lovin' Me** -- [REDACTED]

Whispers - **Chocolate Girl** -- [REDACTED]

*I hope that you enjoyed this week's offerings and I wish you a great week....*

Sincerely,

Greg Brown

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