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Article 1.	The Council on Foreign Relations <u>Foreign Policy and the Obama-Romney Race</u> An interview with James M. Lindsay
Article 2.	The Washington Post <u>Avoiding a sectarian split in the Middle East</u> James Jeffrey
Article 3.	The Weekly Standard <u>What Comes After Assad?</u> Bartle B. Bull
Article 4.	Newsweek <u>America's top diplomat on Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Taliban's weakness</u> Leslie H. Gelb
Article 5.	Foreign Policy <u>How the intelligence community can better see into the future</u> Michael C. Horowitz, Philip E. Tetlock
Article 6.	The New Yorker <u>An Open Letter to Wikipedia</u> Philip Roth

Article 1.

The Council on Foreign Relations

Foreign Policy and the Obama-Romney Race

An interview with [James M. Lindsay](#)

September 7, 2012 -- *Although foreign policy does not appear to be a major issue in the campaign between President Barack Obama and Republican challenger Mitt Romney, "foreign policy can play a [significant] role given the needs of both campaigns to try and find people in the moveable middle that they can draw to their side," says James M. Lindsay, CFR's expert on U.S. politics. He says that one problem that Romney shares with all challengers to a sitting president is "it is not at all clear what his foreign policy will be." He also warns that in a tight contest, a major mistake by a candidate can be decisive.*

The two political conventions are now over. From what has been said, what is your estimate of how foreign affairs are going to play in the campaign?

Well broadly speaking, foreign policy is going to play a secondary role in the campaign. Look at all the polls. The American public is worried about the economy; it is worried about jobs. And the iron law of democratic politics is that politicians gravitate to the issues that people care about. So they are going to talk about jobs and the economy much more than they are going to be talking about foreign affairs. That said, foreign policy can play a [significant] role given the needs of both campaigns to try and find people in the moveable middle that they can draw to their side. This is going to be a very close election by all accounts, so even an issue that doesn't resonate with the broader public could resonate with folks in those ten battleground states that are going to decide the outcome. So you'll probably see, over the course of the next several months, some select issues that candidates will hit on. Obviously, Mitt Romney has been hitting on the issue of what he claims is Obama's lack of support for Israel. Likewise, you are going to see Obama do as he did at his convention speech--point out that Osama bin Laden is dead, and he is dead because of actions his administration took. One last caveat, of course: The role of foreign policy in the campaign could change overnight, depending upon events overseas.

Such as if Israel decided to attack Iran in the next sixty days, perhaps?

Whether you are talking about an Israeli attack on Iran [or] a North Korean attack on South Korea [or] the potential for a clash in the South China Sea, there are a variety of events that could pop up that could change the course of the conversation.

Can President Obama take credit for ending the Iraq war, since Bush signed the agreement on the pull out timetable? And on Afghanistan, he keeps saying U.S. troops will be out by the end of 2014, but clearly they won't all be out; there will still be about 20,000 U.S. advisers.

On the issue of Iraq, it brings to mind the old saying that when you are president, if good things happen on your watch you take credit for them regardless of how important you were to their occurring, because if bad things happen, you are going to take the blame. Barack Obama in 2007-2008 campaigned to get out of Iraq. It is not at all clear that President George W. Bush would have signed the [Status of Forces Agreement](#) leading to the U.S. exit from Iraq last December if Senator John McCain had won the [2008] election, because McCain ran on a pledge to stay in Iraq for the duration. Bush signed the Status of Forces Agreement, but it was Obama who carried it out. Presidents can often overturn the decisions made by their predecessors. So I think on the score, the president can quite rightly say, "I made a promise, I carried forth on it." On the issue of Afghanistan, what's interesting is that both candidates are actually behind the American public. If you look at public opinion polls, it is very clear that Americans want to get out of Afghanistan. You note that after 2014, there will be a sizeable American military presence remaining behind there. Romney has tried in a number of speeches, especially during the Republican primary campaign, to distance himself from Barack Obama and to create the impression that he would have a significantly different Afghanistan policy. But other than disagreeing over the timing of when a troop withdrawal might begin, it looks to be pretty much in the same, let's say area code, as Obama. But obviously, a problem one has with Romney is that it is not at all clear what his foreign policy will be. That is the same for any candidate who is running as a challenger to the president.

Is there any difference between the two on Iran?

It's hard to say what the differences are in terms of substance. It's clear there is a difference in terms of tone. Obviously, Romney, over the course of his campaign, has implied that he will somehow take tougher action against Iran and that Obama has been insufficiently tough. But when you ask how does [his policy] differ from what President Obama has done, and why should we expect it to be more successful, the answers to those questions are not obvious because Romney has not committed himself to using force. Plus, we always have to keep in mind that if Romney becomes president, he would take office in January; that is several months down the road. Events in the region could change quite dramatically, so policy options that might have seemed feasible in September 2012 could fall by the wayside by February or March of 2013.

One significant difference seems to be over Russia. Romney has said that Russia is a threat to the United States and that the reset policy of President Obama hasn't worked. Both Biden and Obama implied that Romney didn't know what he was talking about.

Romney has gone out of his way to say, time and time again, that Russia is America's number one geopolitical threat. That has raised eyebrows not just among administration officials, but also among a number of Republican strategists who look at Russia and say Russia is not an American ally, it's in some sense more of a "frenemy." That is, there are some issues that we can work with them on and they are important to us, most notably on the issue of what's called the Northern Distribution Network, the supply lines to American troops in Afghanistan. Now obviously, on other issues we differ. But while Romney has talked about Russia as our geopolitical foe and indicated that he probably would not want to engage in arms control negotiations with the Russians, which the Obama administration has spoken about but hasn't made much progress on since the signing of the [New START Treaty](#), it's not at all clear what specific policy changes come out of a denunciation of Russia as America's number one geopolitical foe. If Romney becomes president, he is going to have to deal with President Vladimir Putin because the nature of world politics is that you have to deal with people, even if you don't like them.

If Obama should be reelected, do you think he will move very quickly to try to get a second START Treaty?

What's really interesting about Obama's convention acceptance speech is he talked at great length about foreign policy, far more than Romney did in his acceptance speech in Tampa. That was remarkable because traditionally, you think of the Republican Party as being the party of national security and the Democrats being the party that wants to talk about peace and coming home. I think that really does show a shift between the two parties on this issue. What he did was he talked basically about his accomplishments, almost like a checklist, talking about Iraq, terrorism, Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden being killed, tribute to American troops, then a run-through of mistakes or shortcomings of Romney's foreign policy. But what he didn't really talk about is what he would really want to do in his second term, what his priorities would be. On the specific issue of opening up new arms control negotiations with the Russians, that's clearly something the administration would like to do. Go back to the [president's speech in Prague](#) in April 2009. He indicated he would like to lower the number of nuclear weapons on both sides. But his ability to do that, to enact that agenda, is going to be constrained and hampered by domestic opposition in the United States. At the end of the day, if you want to negotiate a treaty, you have to get two-thirds plus one in the Senate, and unless something really remarkable changes in the November 6 election, you're going to have more than thirty-four Republican senators. So that makes the task of negotiating a new treaty daunting. But the third thing is that as you get lower and lower in terms of numbers [of missiles], a lot of difficult military insecurity issues begin to pop up. Now you begin to factor in the Chinese arsenal, which is getting large. You may want to look down the road at the Pakistani or Indian arsenals. You have the issue of missile defense. Obviously, what the administration would hope from any deal with the Russians would be significant cuts in Russian short-range battlefield tactical nuclear weapons. But the Russians, again, aren't really indicating that that is a high priority for them because that is the one thing they happen to have in great abundance.

Any thoughts on the October 22 foreign policy debate between Obama and Romney?

That will be two weeks before the election, and obviously, when you have a debate, you have the chance that one or perhaps both of the candidates says something that he is going to regret within minutes of the debate ending. The most famous case being [President Gerald Ford](#) back in 1976 debating challenger Jimmy Carter, and Ford conveyed the impression that he thought Poland was not under Soviet domination. It became a major problem for him. If he had had a fifteen percentage point lead in the polls, it wouldn't have mattered. Nobody but a few foreign policy experts would recall it, but in a neck-and-neck race, a little misstep like that on the eve of an election can change votes and can change the outcome. This election is likely going to come down to not just the ten or so battleground states, but a total of somewhere between twelve and twenty counties in those states. Those is where the battles are being fought and how you move voters in, let's say, Tampa, Florida, and the surrounding suburbs could very much end up determining who is going to be the next president of the United States.

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Article 2.

The Washington Post

Avoiding a sectarian split in the Middle East

James Jeffrey

September 8 -- As the Assad regime hurtles toward deserved collapse in Syria, I often think back to a warning I received from a friend 18 months ago. I was serving then as the U.S. ambassador in Baghdad and was focused on Iraqi problems. But my confidant, an Iraqi Kurd with a strong commitment to a unified, multi-sectarian Iraq, and who was no friend of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, was worried about the uprising brewing in neighboring Syria. Unless the United States was able to influence

events, he cautioned, a revolt might violently split Syria, and then Iraq and finally the region along sectarian lines. The sense that Assad's days are numbered has prompted worries that militant Sunni extremists might claw their way to the top in Damascus. A greater and related danger, however, is that the uprising will degenerate into a Sunni-Shiite conflict that could spread beyond Syria's borders and further destabilize the Middle East. Already, reports are mounting that sectarian violence is commonplace in Syria and beginning to take hold in neighboring Lebanon. The Iranians and Assad have done their part to aggravate the problem by stoking fears among Iraqi Shiites and other Shiite groups about the consequences of a Sunni triumph in Syria.

But even without Iranian meddling, the danger is urgent. For Iraqi Shiites, the birth of the Shiite-Sunni split is as vivid as if it had happened yesterday. In fact, the divide began in Kabala more than 13 centuries ago, when forces from what is now Syria, who became Islam's Sunni branch, put to the sword the prophet Mohammed's grandson Hussein and many members of what became the Shiite sect.

Fueling Shiite anxieties today is the fact that al-Qaeda in Iraq has taken its anti-Shiite violence to Syria, and Arab leaders in the Persian Gulf have been reluctant to distance themselves from inflammatory Sunni clerics who have cast Arab Shiites as "apostates." Adding to this combustible mix, Hamas has left Syria, opting for solidarity with their fellow Sunnis instead of maintaining Iranian support, and Turkey has lined up with the conservative Arab states against Syria and Iran. Assad's fall would deprive Iran of an ally in a strategically vital region and could open the door to a representative, humane Syrian state. But such gains may never materialize if we do not handle the sectarian fallout of the Syrian uprising. Past conflicts in the Middle East have generally been waged by states, a phenomenon that has limited their geographic spread and allowed international responses using traditional diplomatic and military tools. But serious antagonisms between religious groups could easily burst into all-encompassing violence region-wide, undermining the "Westphalian" model of statecraft by shifting loyalty from governments and the rule of law to one's religious brethren and a "hate thy neighbor" theology. If the sectarian fires grow, the first victims could be Lebanon and Iraq, with their unhappy history of Shiite-Sunni violence; the international

community has barely managed to contain this in wars past. The upheavals in the Balkans in the 1990s — a violent fissure between Orthodox Christians and Muslims that eventually involved most of former Yugoslavia — provide a taste of what might be in store for the Middle East. Only concerted and forceful U.S. action averted a broader regional war in Europe in the '90s, and the Middle East is an even tougher neighborhood. U.S. officials are not blind to this danger. They have been working with Iraqi political leaders to maintain a relative peace between Sunnis and Shiites and to encourage Iraqis to stay out of the Syrian crisis. If these efforts fall short, however, sectarian violence would be extremely difficult to contain. As formidable as the problems are, additional steps could be taken. One would be to speed the end of the Assad regime and quickly restore order in Syria. After 18 months, the continued chaos merely fuels sectarian hatreds. President Obama's recent warning to the Assad regime about the use of chemical weapons was important, but we need to consider limited military assistance to the Syrian resistance even without the backing of the [REDACTED] Security Council.

Beyond that, we must maintain our values, even when reaching for the undeniable prize of an Iranian defeat in Syria. As in the Balkans, the United States needs to ensure that we vocally defend the sanctity of borders, the human rights of all groups and the responsibility of all governments to protect all of their citizens. We also need to underscore the international political and legal consequences for those who ignore these responsibilities. (Judicial actions, including against some former U.S. allies, are still underway in the Balkans for just these sorts of transgressions.) Toward this end, we need to make clearer that, in contrast with the views of some of our friends in the region, Shiites are not America's enemy and that our problem is with the Iranian regime and Assad. We should start by taking a stronger position on Bahrain's oppression of its Shiite majority. Those who see difficulty in this approach must keep in mind that the states where Shiites are a majority — namely Iraq and Iran — probably have more than 300 billion barrels of oil reserves between them. That is almost two-thirds of the reserves of the Gulf Cooperation Council states, including Saudi Arabia, and more than 20 percent of global reserves.

There is still time for the United States to control this growing sectarian threat, but the volatile cocktail of religious antagonism, national interests and oil requires immediate and vigorous action.

Article 3.

The Weekly Standard

What Comes After Assad?

Bartle B. Bull

September 17, 2012 -- The moral and geostrategic arguments for a Western intervention in Syria speak for themselves. There is only good in helping a courageous majority free itself of a barbaric puppet of Iran and Russia who indiscriminately bombs his own civilians from land, air, and sea. Ethically, no outcome could be worse than more of this war. Strategically, nothing could be worse for civilized interests than Assad coming out of it the winner.

But what happens in the aftermath of an intervention? There seems to be growing concern that al Qaeda has infiltrated the opposition and would come out of the conflict the big winner. On my most recent trip to Syria, last month, I found that this scenario is highly unlikely.

To see what a Sunni-dominated Syria might look like, I traveled to Idlib Province, close to the Turkish border, in what might be called the country's Sunni heartland: the well-populated northwest, whose overflow has swelled Syria's two largest cities, Aleppo and Damascus, into metropolises of many millions. Al Qaeda's strategy in these parts of the country is to send organizers to the very poorest villages. The foreigners arrive with money, mobilize some locals, and gradually reveal the nature of their aims. The story always ends with the villagers rejecting the interlopers—just as the Sunnis of Iraq's Anbar Province eventually got rid of Al Qaeda in Iraq during the years 2004-07.

One understands the dynamic after digging behind the headlines. For example, there were press reports of a checkpoint flying an al Qaeda flag in the Idlib town of Taftanaz. What was absent from most media coverage is the fact that a week or two later the flag was gone and local commanders vowed never to let al Qaeda return.

Any cross-section of the Sunni community—from local families to rebel units, from the more relaxed Muslims who observe the Ramadan fast but break it all day long with cigarettes and coffee to members of the Muslim Brotherhood—shows, in words and behavior, that what they want from their revolution is a tolerant and forward-looking future. “We have lived with the Christians for over a thousand years,” the commander of a notably religious rebel unit tells me. “Of course we can live with them tomorrow.”

It’s useful to register such statements with a degree of skepticism since Assad’s strategy to fan the flames of sectarianism is having some effect. And yet the sentiment accords with what we already know from Syrian history, old and recent. As in Saddam’s Iraq, in Syria it is the so-called secular ideology of Baathism that—like the atheist regimes led by Stalin, Hitler, and Mao—has done the most damage to the country’s social fabric. As for other Sunni religious movements, experience in Syria indicates that, as with Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood is potentially a deterrent against extremist Salafi currents. In any case, a post-Assad political system would see the Brotherhood itself competing for space within the Sunni community with businessmen and tribal representatives as well as liberals and secularists. One goal of U.S. policy then should be to identify and work with those in the Sunni community who are likely American allies. The Obama administration’s current policy, using a small fraction of the CIA’s softer capabilities and budgeting less than \$100 million in nonlethal aid, merely perpetuates the stalemate.

The revolution, dominated by the Sunni Arab majority that represents around 60 percent of Syria’s population, is more than likely to prevail in the end and will not put down its weapons until it does. And yet Assad’s support from Russia and Iran means that, even as he has already ceased to govern, he will not soon be defeated by the lightly armed rebels.

Assad’s military advantages against the rebels rest on a relatively slender, and tactically vulnerable, base. The Damascus regime’s mostly Russian-supplied arsenal includes, according to Jeffrey White, defense fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, about 36-48 Hind combat helicopters, maybe 100 Mi-8 and Mi-17 up-armed utility helicopters, and perhaps 300 fixed-wing aircraft of types suitable for ground attack. About half, at most, of these aircraft are likely to be usable. On the ground,

Assad has perhaps 1,600 T-72 tanks, less combat losses since the beginning of the revolt, and another 3,000-odd lesser tanks. Assad's armor is worn down by a year and a half of hard fighting, and vulnerable now to simple RPGs.

White also explains that Syrian air defenses, once described by U.S. officials as "sophisticated," are "not a serious obstacle for a Western air force" seeking to impose a no-fly zone. Similarly, the Obama administration and its surrogates should no longer imagine that the prospect of an al Qaeda victory in Syria is an obstacle to American support.

Bartle B. Bull, a former foreign editor of Prospect magazine, is a founder of Northern Gulf Partners, an Iraq-focused investment firm.

Article 4.

Newsweek

America's top diplomat on Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Taliban's weakness

Leslie H. Gelb

September 10, 2012 -- This may stun the Washington cognoscenti, but America's coolest head and most knowledgeable diplomat on Afghanistan believes the recent spate of Afghans killing NATO soldiers and firing on the top U.S. general's plane is a sign of increasing Taliban weakness. "A large number of the attacks are perpetrated by Taliban infiltrators and represent a progressive degradation of their ability to engage us in unit combat," argues recently retired ambassador Ryan Crocker, a career diplomat of 38 years. "They lost the ability to mount large-scale operations early in the NATO surge. Their fallback--high-profile suicide attacks--didn't work particularly well for them either, thanks to the excellent work of Afghan and international security forces." Then his final plea, which he surely knows will strike few responsive chords: "We need to maintain perspective. There are tens of thousands of interactions every day between Afghan and international forces without incident."

This positive assessment represents what the 63-year-old Crocker actually believes. In a wide-ranging exclusive interview with Newsweek, he does not mince words or play to the crowd (or to presidents). Agree with him or not, he knows what he's talking about when it comes to Afghanistan or practically any other country in the Middle East and South Asia. Crocker is a person of great courage and directness--traits that should make recent presidents and many of their top aides tremble at the thought that he just might write his memoirs.

He's been everywhere, done everything, diplomatically, time and again. As Ambassador Frank Wisner, the State Department's Middle East expert of his day, put it: "Ryan is the premier U.S. diplomat of his generation." George W. Bush called upon Crocker to be his ambassador to Baghdad when all was falling apart in Iraq in 2007. Barack Obama snatched him back from retirement in 2011 and dispatched him to lead the U.S. mission in Kabul and check the deterioration there. In his unequaled record of service, he also served as ambassador to Syria, Lebanon, Kuwait, and Pakistan, among other earlier posts in Iran, Afghanistan, and Egypt. No diplomat matches him in direct experience in today's Middle East, which is why his musings about war and near-war slam like a hammer on the public debate. So many situations around the world could be termed "problems from hell" that it becomes difficult to parse out "which are vital national-security threats, and which are just messy?" he reflects. If it's a real threat, Crocker wants to know "What's our plan?" He's seen few plans. He's seen a deadly combination of inexperience and political pressure to "just do something," which has driven many an American politician to advocate for what he calls "ill-conceived military intervention abroad."

Crocker trusted the Bush administration's case that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. "Secretary of State Colin Powell believed it, and if he believed it, I was going to believe it too," he says. But Crocker didn't believe that was where the administration's analysis should stop. He tried to inject a voice of experience into the conversation, arguing for a full examination of the potential consequences of what he thought likely to be an unnecessary war. He then threw a thunderbolt: "Look, there may well have been WMDs in Iraq, but Saddam was not very likely to use them in an aggressive war that he initiated, because he

had to know the consequences would be the loss of his regime. He may have been insane, but he was not stupid." With a wisdom often lacking in the White House, Crocker nailed the point: "Deterrence works when your opponent knows that, should he remain undeterred, he will perish." Crocker says he communicated these thoughts to Powell, but to no avail. "My retrospective view is, by that time, Powell had become so marginalized by Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Don Rumsfeld--and probably by that point even the president--that whatever he was saying, and I never knew for sure, they certainly weren't listening." Instead, these hawks ignored U.S. diplomats and assembled their own experts. These were, Crocker recounted, "individuals in academia who did know something about the Middle East, but never served there in a governmental capacity." With some heat, Crocker imagines the hawks must have thought, Who needs those say-nothing, do-nothing foreign-service types when we've got some of the biggest names in Middle East studies who think we're doing the right thing?

Some of these same Middle East experts are now pressing for U.S. military intervention in Syria. If Obama had Crocker in a discussion of Syria in the Situation Room today, he would hear these words of ultimate wisdom: the U.S. does not and cannot have much influence in that situation.

Afghanistan was different. Crocker agreed that we needed to hit the Taliban, and hit them hard, for their harboring of the 9/11 attackers. That said, he then would have had the U.S. focus on training, helping Afghans fight their own war rather than making it an American war. "If you are absolutely convinced that the vital national-security interests of the United States are on the line--that this could be another 9/11 or worse if we don't take action--then action is probably called for." But the next move should be "to decide: what is the minimal action that will avoid danger and not entangle us in running someone else's country, which we cannot do." He was happy about Bush's keeping U.S. troop levels relatively low, and skeptical about President Obama's substantial increases.

He punctuated the interview with a pungent explanation of his philosophy: "It's pretty simple. Be very, very careful what you get into--and if you go through my checklist [on military intervention], you probably won't intervene." Then the exclamation point: "But if you do,

and you've brought down a regime, created a total revolution in the sense that everything is swept away--institutions, the basis of law, security forces, the whole lot-- then you've got to consider, having done that, what the consequences of a swift withdrawal might be. Because the ones who benefit from anarchy are almost always going to be our adversaries." He faults both Obama and Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki for failing to agree to a limited U.S. troop presence in 2011. For Afghanistan, he's advocating a similar approach: a small, training-oriented presence, special forces plus some logistics and intelligence, to stay there for an extended period past 2014.

Asked how he knows whether this approach will work, and won't just squander American lives and money, Crocker again demonstrated his famed complexity and fairness of mind.

"That's the issue," he lamented. "You don't. Dave [General Petraeus] and I didn't know in early '07 if [the Iraq surge] was going to work. But it was our last best shot, and we had to give it everything we could."

Crocker's ruminations echo those of the most experienced soldiers and diplomats. These professionals are seasoned, in countries around the world, in what works and what doesn't in national-security policy. Their political superiors can't match their firsthand involvement in matters of war and peace. No, these professionals shouldn't be the decision makers, but they should be at the table when decisions are being made--and generally they are not. If presidents were willing to listen, they would hear the final words of Ryan Crocker's interview: "If you didn't think it through carefully before getting in, for God's sake think it through carefully before you pull the plug. The consequences of withdrawal can be as great or greater than the consequences of intervention."

Editor's note: Late last month, Crocker was charged with driving under the influence and leaving the scene of an accident following a car crash in Washington state. He has pleaded not guilty. Asked for comment, Crocker said: "On advice of counsel, no comment. I am sure you understand."

How the intelligence community can better see into the future

Michael C. Horowitz, Philip E. Tetlock

SEPTEMBER 6, 2012 -- The next 15 years will witness the transformation of North Korea and resulting elimination of military tensions on the peninsula. No, this is not our rosy assessment of Northeast Asian politics or the reformist goals of Kim Jong Un. It was the verbatim prediction of the senior-most officials in the U.S. intelligence community -- 15 years ago. Needless to say, the Stalinist regime, though hardly the picture of health, remains untransformed. In fact, Pyongyang has since tested nuclear weapons, and relations between North and South show little sign of improving; military tensions are high.

One suspects the analysts who wrote that line regret it. But the truth is that prediction is hard, often impossible. [Academic research](#) suggests that predicting events five years into the future is so difficult that most experts perform only marginally better than dart-throwing chimps. Now imagine trying to predict over spans of 15 to 20 years. Sisyphus arguably had it easier. But that has not deterred the intelligence community from trying; that is its job.

Starting with the 1997 release of [Global Trends 2010](#) -- the report that featured the North Korea prediction -- the [National Intelligence Council](#) (NIC) has repeatedly tried to predict the trajectories of world politics over a 15-to-20-year period. These predictions run the gamut from a 1997 prediction that Saddam Hussein would no longer rule Iraq by 2010 to the more generic prediction of global multipolarity by 2025 in the most recent report. These predictions are the product of hard work by talented analysts who work under political pressures and intellectual constraints. And, in any case, we are skeptical how much better than chance it is possible for anyone to do in forecasting 15 to 20 years into the future.

That said, when we look at these reports in light of recent research on expert judgment, we cannot help wondering whether there are not ways of doing a better job -- of assigning more explicit, testable, and accurate probabilities to possible futures. Improving batting averages by even

small margins means the difference between runner-ups and World Series winners -- and improving the accuracy of probability judgments by small margins could significantly contribute to U.S. national security.

How Have They Done So Far?

The original Global Trends report came out of a series of conferences held by the NIC and the Institute for National Strategic Studies at National Defense University. The idea was to "describe and assess major features of the political world as they will appear in the year 2010." The report self-consciously focused on what it called evolutionary changes in world politics, positing that truly disruptive changes are too rare and difficult to predict. Three more reports, [Global Trends 2015](#), [Global Trends 2020](#), and [Global Trends 2025](#) followed. The NIC is now finalizing [Global Trends 2030](#), which will be released later this year.

There are several potential grounds for criticizing Global Trends reports. The reports almost inevitably fall into the trap of treating the conventional wisdom of the present as the blueprint for the future 15 to 20 years down the road. Many things the early reports get right, such as the continued integration of Western Europe, were already unfolding in 1997. Similarly, predicting that "some states will fail to meet the basic requirements that bind citizens to their government" or that information technology will have a large impact on politics was hardly going out on a limb.

Looking carefully at the first two Global Trends reports reveals how the reports have struggled to make accurate non-obvious predictions of big-picture trends. (It is harder to assess Global Trends 2020 and 2025 because we are still so far away.) There are some things the Global Trends reports got right, like Saddam Hussein leaving office before 2010, but many others they missed. Consider how the reports treat the rise of China. Global Trends 2010 predicted that "While China has the potential to become the region's dominant military power, it is beset by significant internal problems that in our judgment will preclude it from becoming so during this time frame." The report then goes on to predict the present (circa 1997): offering a thoughtful analysis of the large internal problems facing the Chinese government. Global Trends 2015, published in December 2000, contained similar statements. What can we make of this? On the one hand, both reports were technically correct. Yet it was not until Global Trends 2020, written in 2004, that the report fully embraced the

key trend: the notion of a rising China, which by that time was simply predicting the present.

Global Trends 2010 and Global Trends 2015, the two reports written before the 9/11 attacks, also underplay the threat of terrorism. Global Trends 2015 includes a paragraph on the risk to the United States in a laundry list of threats, but neither report references al Qaeda or comes close to predicting the events of the last 11 years.

The reports also engage in extensive hedging. For every prediction, there is a caveat. The reports lean heavily on words such as "could," "possibly," and "maybe." The lead-in to Global Trends 2025 uses "could" nine times in two pages, and the report as a whole uses the word a whopping 220 times. The report also uses "maybe" 36 times. Global Trends 2020 uses "could" 110 times. Add all of the caveats and conditionals, and a harsh critic might conclude that these reports are saying no more than that there is a possibility that something could happen at some point -- and it might have a big effect.

A different form of hedging arises in Global Trends 2015, which devotes a page to "significant discontinuities" that were not built into the scenarios but could disrupt trends noted elsewhere. These include things that have now occurred, such as domestic turmoil in Egypt, as well as things that may well never occur, such as a China-India-Russia alliance and an Asian Trade Organization that cuts off the United States. So many possibilities have been laid out that, no matter what happens, there is something someone could point to and say, "We predicted that."

These criticisms are not entirely fair, however. The Global Trends reports, for example, generally avoid low-hanging fruit. There are large pockets of stability in the world, such as Western Europe, and Global Trends does not pat itself on the back by "predicting" yet another decade of peace between France and Germany. The reports also mostly avoid TED-style buzz speak about disruptive change and synergies. Although qualification-ridden, the reports are well written and fill an important role: laying out the combined wisdom of the intelligence community and select outside experts at a given time on the future of world politics. The Global Trends reports are also an arguably rational bureaucratic response to an impossible political task: to signal that the intelligence community is

thinking hard about the future and not simply assuming that things will continue because that is how things usually work out.

There is also value to conducting Global Trends exercises even if the results only minimally improve our knowledge of the future. The process of creating these reports links the intelligence community with smart outsiders -- in academia and business -- who have different perspectives on the world. The reports also force policymakers to step back from the day-to-day and think hard about big-picture trends. Producing Global Trends may -- and we should treat this as a testable hypothesis -- help analysts become better short- and medium-term forecasters.

So, What Can We Expect?

Intelligence agencies are relentlessly second-guessed when they get it wrong, but the second-guessers rarely ask the deeper question: What level of accuracy is it realistic to expect -- and how can we help agencies reach it?

The core challenge confronting Global Trends and related exercises is that, all else being equal, our predictive accuracy falls sharply the further out we try to look. Research shows that expert predictions over five years are often no better than chance. Tetlock's book, [Expert Political Judgment](#), demonstrates that confident experts with deep knowledge in particular areas -- the "hedgehogs" in [Isaiah Berlin](#)'s typology of intellectuals -- are particularly likely to get things wrong in the long run. From this standpoint, the caveats in Global Trends reports are salutary: They acknowledge the inherent uncertainty of political life. Modesty about long-term forecasting is a useful antidote to overconfidence. The most accurate experts in Tetlock's book were the most diffident about their skills -- self-styled "foxes" who knew a bit about many things and were not wedded to one way of viewing the world. But even those forecasters, the best in show, could not see far into the future.

Given these constraints, imagine how hard it is to forecast over 15 to 20 years. You might get things right sometimes, but even when you do, it will rarely be for the right reasons. As scholars from Nobel Prize-winning psychologist [Daniel Kahneman](#) to political scientist [Robert Jervis](#) have noted, the world is vastly more complicated than our mental models of the world. The cognitive biases that distort individual judgment and the

irreducible uncertainties in volatile politics make forecasting something that falls between difficult and impossible.

We see evidence in the Global Trends reports of many "best practices" recommended by thoughtful psychologists, network theorists, and management consultants. These best practices include the sophistication of the expert talent pool, the self-conscious search for diversity of perspectives, rigorous attempts to prevent groupthink and encourage constructive confrontation of clashing views, and skillful deployment of scenario analysis to facilitate divergent thinking and prevent the status quo from excessively anchoring down estimates of the potential for change. But we also see potential "process" deficiencies, which make it difficult both to assess how accurate the reports are and to test alternative methods of making them more accurate.

How to Get Better (Maybe)

Let's compare the long-term forecasting exercises of the NIC with the much shorter-range forecasting competition sponsored by [Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity](#) (IARPA). IARPA is sponsoring a political-forecasting Olympics in which research teams are competing over the next four years to come up with the most innovative ways of assigning the most accurate probability estimates to outcomes that the intelligence community cares about. The teams in the IARPA tournament consist largely of experimental psychologists, statisticians, and computer scientists who focus on extracting as much predictive value as they can from the qualitative arguments and probability estimates of thoughtful political observers of the world scene. (In the interests of full disclosure, Tetlock is a principal investigator for the team that "won" Year 1, and Horowitz is also on the team.) Whereas the Global Trends reports focus on plate tectonics shaping the political landscape over decades, the IARPA tournament focuses on more immediate issues: the likelihood of a country exiting the eurozone in the next few months or of a leader falling from power in the next six months.

IARPA requires forecasters to translate vague hunches onto explicit probabilities that can be scored for accuracy. Work to date within the IARPA program has revealed that it pays off to obtain quantitative probability estimates, aggregate those opinions, and track the better forecasters and give them more weight, among other tools. IARPA's first-

year estimates suggest that the best combination of methods yields a roughly 60 percent improvement in predictive accuracy above the unweighted crowd average.

Can we apply these methods to the Global Trends enterprise? One challenge is that the Global Trends reports cover decades, while the longest predictions in the IARPA tournament are approximately two years. We do think, however, that some specific steps could be taken to bridge the gap between IARPA methods and Global Trends practices. To be clear, there are no guarantees that following our recommendations will boost predictive accuracy. Fifteen to 20 years may simply be too far out. But even knowing that would be helpful. (Once you know the limits on how far you can see at night, you also know the limits on how fast you should drive at night.)

Explicit quantification: Exposing policymakers to "deep thoughts" about the future has value, but the failure to offer even broad ranges of probability estimates for outcomes is unfortunate. This allergy to quantifying uncertainty makes it difficult to gauge how much uncertainty the expert community sees -- and impossible to evaluate accuracy. The Global Trends reports do not use the "estimative language" rubric the NIC has recently used to consistently convert words into probabilities (a move in the right direction but still too vague). The core problem here is that when you ask readers what "could" could mean, you get a staggering range of estimates, from 0.00000001 (an asteroid could strike in the next few hours and prevent us from finishing this manuscript) to 50 percent or higher (Obama could win reelection, given the polls up to Sept. 1). The Global Trends reports do not offer rough guidelines for translating hedging words into probability estimates, leaving it all to readers' imaginations.

There are two possibilities here. One is that the probability ranges are not nearly as wide as the vague verbiage allows but the authors want political cover in case the unexpected occurs. The other possibility is that the probability ranges are truly that wide, in which case Global Trends should divulge which schools of thought are generating the lower and upper estimates. That sort of predictive-track-record information could prove extremely useful when policymakers weigh the recommendations of differing schools of thought.

The best way to become a better-calibrated appraiser of long-term futures is to get in the habit of making quantitative probability estimates that can be objectively scored for accuracy over long stretches of time. Explicit quantification enables explicit accuracy feedback, which enables learning. This requires extraordinary organizational patience -- an investment that may span decades -- but the stakes are high enough to merit a long-term investment.

Signposting the future: The authors of these reports are keenly aware of the human tendency to project the present into the future ("anchoring on the status quo") -- and they fight it. The key analytical weapon against "present-ism" in the Global Trends reports has thus far been scenario planning. Scenarios frequently pop up in Global Trends reports with catchy labels such as "A New Caliphate" and "Cycle of Fear." Each scenario is a plausible extrapolation of what could happen if certain causal drivers take hold.

These scenarios are useful, and we are not recommending dropping them. Scenario generation is a great way for imaginative analysts to channel their inner social-science-fiction writers. Organizations that want to retain talent should provide such outlets. But if scenario generation is not eventually subjected to rigorous logical discipline, the net value of the exercise plummets. For instance, research shows that the more scenarios participants generate, the more support they typically find for each one -- and the higher their probability estimates go. What's more, experts rely on the same crude sense of the balance of forces for estimating both the weekly and monthly probabilities, so if they can see a 1/20 chance of the regime falling in a given week, they will see roughly the same probability in a given month, an effect that Kahneman calls scope insensitivity. When we finish unpacking all scenarios and subscenarios, it is not unusual for the probabilities to sum to closer to 2.0 than 1.0, a logical impossibility. Scenarios are more valuable when they come with clear diagnostic signposts that policymakers can use to gauge whether they are moving toward or away from one scenario or another. For instance, Global Trends 2025 outlines a "BRIC's Bust-Up" scenario -- a conflict between China and India over resources. Which signposts or early warning indicators might help policymakers know whether such a future is becoming more or

less likely? Falsifiable hypotheses bring high-flying scenario abstractions back to Earth.

Similarly, specifying signposts requires breaking 20 years into finer temporal segments. If we are on a historical trajectory leading to the Chinese Civil War of 2023, for example, what should we be observing in 2013, 2014, etc. to justify taking so speculative a scenario seriously? How diagnostic would these signposts have to be? One could imagine such a conflict erupting from tensions between the poor, neo-Maoist countryside and affluent technocratic coastal cities, but imagining is not enough. We need specifiable metrics.

Leveraging aggregation: Since James Surowiecki's influential [The Wisdom of Crowds](#), it has been well known that the average forecast is often more accurate than the vast majority of the individual forecasts that went into computing the average. Participants in Global Trends should therefore make individual probability judgments that can later be compared to the accuracy of various averages and weighted averages of those judgments. They should also get into the habit that some of the better forecasters in the IARPA tournament have gotten into: comparing their predictions to group averages, weighted-averaging algorithms, prediction markets, and financial markets.

Undoubtedly, some inside the intelligence community will reject these suggestions, especially explicit quantification. Recall the old Aristotelian maxim: Seek precision only insofar as the nature of things permits. But why not try? Explicit quantification of uncertainty helps in a wide range of professional domains, from finance to medicine to meteorology. We are not convinced that geopolitics falls in a category of its own when it comes to forecasting.

Perhaps the more serious objection is ultimately political. Analysts are right to worry that if they assign explicit probabilities to anything, partisan critics will jump on them whenever they appear to have either under- or overestimated anything. You should expect that when a perfectly calibrated forecasting system says 75 percent, for example, the lower-likelihood outcome will occur 25 percent of the time-- and, by this curious standard, appear to be wrong 25 percent of the time. But try explaining that to a congressional subcommittee looking for scapegoats.

We do not have a solution to the political problem except to say that it should not be a deal-killer because (a) the intelligence community has the option of keeping score in private by maintaining internal classified records of explicit probability assessments; (b) it would be tragic if democracy were incompatible with efforts to improve the accuracy of our expectations of the future; (c) following our suggestions of creating clear metrics and breaking down predictions by time frames will make it easier for Global Trends authors to update their predictions and bring previously invisible low-probability possibilities into focus. The projections will be both more accurate and more defensible.

Our key arguments might appear in tension with each other. On the one hand, we are skeptical that even the most astute analysts working with the best methodological tools can see 15 or 20 years into the future. On the other hand, we think the National Intelligence Council should aggressively experiment with rigorous methods that would allow us to assess how accurately they can see into the future and with tools that have the potential to improve foresight.

Even if we were 80 percent or 90 percent confident that there is no room for improvement -- and the Global Trends reports are doing as good a job as humanly and technically possible at this juncture in history -- we would still recommend that the NIC conduct our proposed experiments. When one works within a government that routinely makes multibillion-dollar decisions that often affect hundreds of millions of lives, one does not have to improve the accuracy of probability judgments by much to justify a multimillion-dollar investment in improving accuracy.

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Article 6.

The New Yorker

An Open Letter to Wikipedia

[Philip Roth](#)

September 7, 2012

Dear Wikipedia,

I am Philip Roth. I had reason recently to read for the first time [the Wikipedia entry](#) discussing my novel “The Human Stain.” The entry contains a serious misstatement that I would like to ask to have removed. This item entered Wikipedia not from the world of truthfulness but from the babble of literary gossip—there is no truth in it at all.

Yet when, through an official interlocutor, I recently petitioned Wikipedia to delete this misstatement, along with two others, my interlocutor was told by the “English Wikipedia Administrator”—in a letter dated August 25th and addressed to my interlocutor—that I, Roth, was not a credible source: “I understand your point that the author is the greatest authority on their own work,” writes the Wikipedia Administrator—“but we require secondary sources.”

Thus was created the occasion for this open letter. After failing to get a change made through the usual channels, I don’t know how else to proceed.

My novel “The Human Stain” was described in the entry as “allegedly inspired by the life of the writer Anatole Broyard.” (The precise language has since been altered by Wikipedia’s collaborative editing, but this falsity still stands.)

This alleged allegation is in no way substantiated by fact. “The Human Stain” was inspired, rather, by an unhappy event in the life of my late friend Melvin Tumin, professor of sociology at Princeton for some thirty years. One day in the fall of 1985, while Mel, who was meticulous in all things large and small, was meticulously taking the roll in a sociology class, he noted that two of his students had as yet not attended a single class session or attempted to meet with him to explain their failure to appear, though it was by then the middle of the semester.

Having finished taking the roll, Mel queried the class about these two students whom he had never met. “Does anyone know these people? Do they exist or are they spooks?”—unfortunately, the very words that Coleman Silk, the protagonist of “The Human Stain,” asks of his classics class at Athena College in Massachusetts.

Almost immediately Mel was summoned by university authorities to justify his use of the word “spooks,” since the two missing students, as it happened, were both African-American, and “spooks” at one time in America was a pejorative designation for blacks, spoken venom milder than “nigger” but intentionally degrading nonetheless. A witch hunt ensued during the following months from which Professor Tumin—rather like Professor Silk in “The Human Stain”—emerged blameless but only after he had to provide a number of lengthy depositions declaring himself innocent of the charge of hate speech.

A myriad of ironies, comical and grave, abounded, as Mel had first come to nationwide prominence among sociologists, urban organizers, civil-rights activists, and liberal politicians with the 1959 publication of his groundbreaking sociological study “Desegregation: Resistance and Readiness,” and then, in 1967, with “Social Stratification: The Forms and Functions of Inequality,” which soon became a standard sociological text. Moreover, before coming to Princeton, he had been director of the Mayor’s Commission on Race Relations, in Detroit. Upon his death, in 1995, the headline above his New York Times obituary read “MELVIN M. TUMIN, 75, SPECIALIST IN RACE RELATIONS.”

But none of these credentials counted for much when the powers of the moment sought to take down Professor Tumin from his high academic post for no reason at all, much as Professor Silk is taken down in “The Human Stain.”

And it is this that inspired me to write “The Human Stain”: not something that may or may not have happened in the Manhattan life of the cosmopolitan literary figure Anatole Broyard but what actually did happen in the life of Professor Melvin Tumin, sixty miles south of Manhattan in the college town of Princeton, New Jersey, where I had met Mel, his wife, Sylvia, and his two sons when I was Princeton’s writer-in-residence in the early nineteen-sixties.

As with the distinguished academic career of the main character of “The Human Stain,” Mel’s career, having extended for over forty years as a scholar and a teacher, was besmirched overnight because of his having purportedly debased two black students ■■■ never laid eyes on by calling them “spooks.” To the best of my knowledge, no event even remotely like

this one blighted Broyard's long, successful career at the highest reaches of the world of literary journalism.

This “spooks” event is the initiating incident of “The Human Stain.” It is the core of the book. There is no novel without it. There is no Coleman Silk without it. Every last thing we learn about Coleman Silk over the course of three hundred and sixty-one pages begins with his unwarranted persecution for having uttered “spooks” aloud in a college classroom. In that one word, spoken by him altogether innocently, lies the source of Silk's anger, his anguish, and his downfall. His heinous, needless persecution stems from that alone, as do his futile attempts at renewal and regeneration.

All too ironically, that and not his enormous lifelong secret—he is the light-skinned offspring of a respectable black family from East Orange, New Jersey, one of the three children of a railroad dining-car porter and a registered nurse, who successfully passes himself off as white from the moment he enters the U.S. Navy at nineteen—is the cause of his humiliating demise.

As for Anatole Broyard, was he ever in the Navy? The Army? Prison? Graduate school? The Communist Party? Did he have children? Had he ever been the innocent victim of institutional harassment? I had no idea. He and I barely knew each other. Over more than three decades, I ran into him, casually and inadvertently, maybe three or four times before a protracted battle with prostate cancer ended his life, in 1990.

Coleman Silk, on the other hand, is killed malevolently, murdered in a planned, prearranged car crash while driving with his unlikely mistress, Faunia Farley, a local farmhand and lowly janitor in the very college where he has been a highly esteemed dean. The revelations that flow from the specific circumstances of Silk's murder stun his survivors and lead to the novel's ominous conclusion on a desolate, iced-over lake where a showdown of sorts occurs between Nathan Zuckerman and Faunia and Coleman's executioner, Faunia's ex-husband, the tormented, violent Vietnam vet Les Farley. Neither Silk's survivors nor his murderer nor his janitor mistress found their source anywhere other than in my imagination. In Anatole Broyard's biography there were no comparable people or events as far as I knew.

I knew nothing of Anatole Broyard's mistresses or, if he ever had any, who they were or if a woman like Faunia Farley, injured and harassed by men from the age of four, had ever come along to help savagely seal his ghastly fate as she does Coleman Silk's and her own. I knew nothing at all of Broyard's private life—of his family, parents, siblings, relatives, education, friendships, marriage, love affairs—and yet the most delicately private aspects of Coleman Silk's private life constitute practically all of the story narrated in "The Human Stain."

I've never known, spoken to, or, to my knowledge, been in the company of a single member of Broyard's family. I did not even know whether he had children. The decision to have children with a white woman and possibly be exposed as a black man by the pigmentation of his offspring is a cause of much apprehension for Coleman Silk. Whether Broyard suffered such apprehension I had no way of knowing, and I still have none.

I never took a meal with Broyard, never went with him to a bar or a ballgame or a dinner party or a restaurant, never saw him at a party I might have attended back in the sixties when I was living in Manhattan and on rare occasions socialized at a party. I never watched a movie or played cards with him or showed up at a single literary event with him as either a participant or a spectator. As far as I know, we did not live anywhere in the vicinity of each other during the ten or so years in the late fifties and the sixties when I was living and writing in New York and he was a book reviewer and cultural critic for the New York Times. I never ran into him accidentally in the street, though once—as best I can remember, in the nineteen-eighties—we did come upon each other in the Madison Avenue men's store Paul Stuart, where I was purchasing shoes for myself. Since Broyard was by this time the Times's most intellectually stylish book reviewer, I told him that I would like to have him sit down in the chair beside me and allow me to buy him a pair of shoes, hoping thereby, I forthrightly admitted, to deepen his appreciation for my next book. It was a playful, amusing encounter, it lasted ten minutes at most, and was the only such encounter we ever had.

We never bothered to have a serious conversation. Badinage in passing was our specialty, with the result that I never learned from Broyard who were his friends or his enemies, did not know where or when he had been

born and raised, knew nothing about his economic status in childhood or as an adult, knew nothing of his politics or his favorite sports teams or if he had any interest in sports at all. I did not even know where he was presently living on that day when I offered to buy him an expensive pair of shoes. I knew nothing about his mental health or his physical well-being, and I only learned he was dying of cancer many months after ■■■■■ been diagnosed, when he wrote about his struggle with the disease in the New York Times Magazine.

I had never been a guest in his house or he in mine, I knew him only as—unlike Coleman Silk, a revolutionary dean at Athena College in western Massachusetts, where he is the center of controversy over standard college matters like the curriculum and requirements for tenure—a generally generous reviewer of my books. Yet after admiring for its bravery the article about his imminent death, I got Broyard’s home number from a mutual acquaintance and called him. That was the first and last time I ever spoke to him on the phone. He was charmingly ebullient, astonishingly exuberant, and laughed heartily when I reminded him of us in our prime, tossing a football around on the lifeguard’s beach in Amagansett in 1958, which was where and when we first met. I was twenty-five then, he thirty-eight. It was a beautiful midsummer day, and I remember that I went up to him on the beach to introduce myself and tell him how much I had enjoyed his brilliant “What the Cystoscope Said.” The story had appeared in my last year of college, 1954, in the fourth number of the most sterling of the literary magazines of the era, the mass-market paperback *Discovery*.

Soon there were four of us—newly published writers of about the same age—bantering together while tossing a football around on the beach. Those twenty minutes throwing the ball around constituted the most intimate involvement Broyard and I ever had and brought to a total of thirty the number of minutes we would ever spend in each other’s company.

Before I left the beach that day, someone told me that Broyard was rumored to be an “octoroon.” I didn’t pay much attention or, back in 1958, lend much credence to the attribution. In my experience, octoroon was a word rarely heard beyond the American South. It’s not impossible that I had to look it up in the dictionary later to be sure of its precise meaning.

Broyard was actually the offspring of two black parents. I didn't know this then, however, or when I began writing "The Human Stain." Yes, someone had once idly told me that the man was the offspring of a quadroon and a black, but that unprovable bit of unlikely hearsay was all of any substance that I ever knew about Broyard—that and what he wrote in his books and articles about literature and the literary temper of his time. In the two excellent short stories Broyard published in *Discovery*—the other, "Sunday Dinner in Brooklyn," appeared in 1953—there was no reason not to believe that the central character and his Brooklyn family were, like the author, a hundred per cent white.

On the other hand, over the years, not a few people had wondered if, because of certain seemingly Negroid features—his lips, his hair, his skin tone—Mel Tumin, who was adamantly Jewish in the overwhelmingly WASPY Princeton of his era, might not be an African-American passing for white. This was another fact of Mel Tumin's biography that fed into my early imaginings of "The Human Stain."

My protagonist, the academic Coleman Silk, and the real writer Anatole Broyard first passed themselves off as white men in the years before the civil-rights movement began to change the nature of being black in America. Those who chose to pass (this word, by the way, doesn't appear in "The Human Stain") imagined that they would not have to share in the deprivations, humiliations, insults, injuries, and injustices that would be more than likely to come their way should they leave their identities exactly as ██████ found them. During the first half of the twentieth century, there wasn't just Anatole Broyard alone—there were thousands, probably tens of thousands, of light-skinned men and women who decided to escape the rigors of institutionalized segregation and the ugliness of Jim Crow by burying for good their original black lives.

I had no idea what it was like for Anatole Broyard to flee from his blackness because I knew nothing about Anatole Broyard's blackness, or, for that matter, his whiteness. But I knew everything about Coleman Silk because I had invented him from scratch, just as in the five-year period before the 2000 publication of "The Human Stain" I had invented the puppeteer Mickey Sabbath of "Sabbath's Theater" (1995), the glove manufacturer Swede Levov of "American Pastoral" (1997), and the brothers Ringold in "I Married a Communist" (1998), one a high-school

English teacher and the other a star of radio in its heyday. Neither before nor after writing these books was I a puppeteer, a glove manufacturer, a high-school teacher, or a radio star.

Finally, to be inspired to write an entire book about a man's life, you must have considerable interest in the man's life, and, to put it candidly, though I particularly admired the story "What the Cystoscope Said" when it appeared in 1954, and I told the author as much, over the years I otherwise had no particular interest in Anatole Broyard. Neither Broyard nor anyone associated with Broyard had anything to do with my imagining anything in "The Human Stain."

Novel writing is for the novelist a game of let's pretend. Like most every other novelist I know, once I had what Henry James called "the germ"—in this case, Mel Tumin's story of muddleheadedness at Princeton—I proceeded to pretend and to invent Faunia Farley; Les Farley; Coleman Silk; Coleman's family background; the girlfriends of his youth; his brief professional career as a boxer; the college where he rises to be a dean; his colleagues both hostile and sympathetic; his field of study; his bedeviled wife; his children both hostile and sympathetic; his schoolteacher sister, Ernestine, who is his strongest judge at the conclusion of the book; his angry, disapproving brother; and five thousand more of those biographical bits and pieces that taken together form the fictional character at the center of a novel.

Sincerely,
Philip Roth