

September 5, 2013

We have a short history lesson today about Walter Duranty, a NY Times reporter who refused to report the early 30's famine in Ukraine. He was the dean of the West's reporters in the Soviet Union and was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his work, which was in many respects, outright lies. To this day, the Times includes his award in their brag. Last year the first Walter Duranty Prize for Mendacity in Journalism was awarded to Vogue Magazine for their adoring puff piece on the wife of Bashar Assad. Power Line's John Hinderaker posts on that award's prescience. Pickerhead has two Duranty biographies in his library. One is titled Stalin's Apologist. The other, his autobiography is titled I Write As I Please. True enough.

Last fall, PJ Media and the New Criterion teamed up to award the first-ever Walter Duranty Prize for mendacity in journalism. My wife and I attended the event, and I wrote about it [here](#). You can read the principal speeches, in which the grand prize and two runner-up awards were given out, [here](#). So, who won the Duranty Prize last October?

Vogue Magazine, and reporter Joan Juliet Buck and editor Anna Wintour, for their stunningly stupid cover story on the glamorous wife of Syria's dictator: "Asma al-Assad: A Rose in the Desert." Seriously. Claudia Rosett's speech awarding the grand prize was hilarious; here are a few excerpts:

'Styled as a profile of the first lady of Syria, Asma al-Assad, this article was a paragon of propaganda — a makeover of the Assad dictatorship, presenting Asma as the human face of President Bashar al-Assad's rule: "glamorous, young and very chic." ' ...

...How could these people be so dumb? PJ Media ridiculed Anna Wintour for falling for the murderous Assad dictatorship, but after all: Wintour may be a political figure by virtue of her massive fundraising for Democratic Party candidates, but she isn't the Secretary of State. Or the President. What we see here is a characteristic failing of liberals. They are easily seduced by glamour, and—always in the background of glamour—money. Why else do they keep voting for Kennedys with IQs in the 80s? Or wear Che Guevara t-shirts, because they think he's cute? These people are suckers.

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When Assad opposed W Bush the DC Dems were in Bashar/Love. Rowan Scarborough makes sure their statements don't get flushed down the media memory hole.

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As a bloc on the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, President Obama, Secretary of State John F. Kerry, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Vice President Joseph R. Biden all opposed the George W. Bush administration's playing tough with Mr. Assad.

None grew closer to Mr. Assad and promoted him in Washington more than Mr. Kerry.

"President Assad has been very generous with me in terms of the discussions we have had," Mr. Kerry, as a senator from Massachusetts, told an audience at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in March 2011. He predicted that Mr. Assad would change for the better.

But that same month, pro-democracy demonstrations erupted in Syria that would lead to a civil war, unmasking Mr. Assad's brutal tactics, including the Aug. 21 unleashing of nerve gas that killed more than 1,400 civilians.

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John Fund on "president present."

Washington is abuzz with talk about how much President Obama has damaged America's credibility with his indecisiveness on Syria. It's become accepted fact that Obama's decision-making style resembles that of an academic convening an unruly seminar whose participants he largely disdains. What he is not is a decisive leader with the ability to bring disparate players together behind a common purpose.

This shouldn't be a surprise. We had inklings of it a long time ago. Back when Barack Obama was running for president in 2008, Hillary Clinton accused him of "taking a pass" on tough issues when he was in the Illinois state senate, a theme later picked up by Republicans. Its basis is the 129 times he voted "present." On 36 of those occasions, he was the only one to vote present of the 60 senators. One of those occasions was in 1999, when he twice chose not to vote on a bill protecting sexual-assault victims from having the explicit details of their cases made public without "good cause." Bonnie Grabenhofer, the president of the Illinois National Organization of Women at the time, said she endorsed Hillary Clinton in 2007 in part because "when we needed someone to take a stand, Senator Obama took a pass."

Today President Obama's chaotic indecisiveness is a big part of his challenge in getting both houses of Congress to approve military action in Syria. Republicans are strongly leaning against intervention at this point, but Obama's real problem may be with Democrats. ABC News reports that several congressional Democrats pushed back against military action against Syria in a conference call with administration officials Monday. ..

And **Ed Morrissey** says the world has figured it out too.

One of the major arguments for intervention in Syria is that it will be a rescue mission for the credibility of the American presidency, if not for any other reason. John McCain has been making that point repeatedly over the last two weeks, insisting that a show of weakness now

would be fatal to American interests in the region and to our alliances with the Arab world. Jake Tapper interviewed the newsman who got Barack Obama's first televised interview in 2009 for Al-Arabiya, Hisham Melhem, who says that Obama's credibility in the region has been on the wane for four years:

'Arab allies now view Obama as "wobbly, indecisive, not strong enough," said Washington bureau chief of al Arabiya television Hisham Melhem, who also conducted that interview with Obama back in 2009.

Obama's style of leadership does not engage Arab leaders, and does not address regional issues, like Egypt, said Melhem.

But "everybody's crying out for American leadership, the Turks, the Arabs, and the Europeans. And given the weaknesses of the Europeans, given the vote in the British Parliament, given the fact that NATO ally Turkey is unable to lead – everyone is looking for the United States to lead, and there is no leadership," said Melhem.

"The United States is AWOL." '

Of all the arguments for intervention in Syria, this is actually the only one with any merit at all. ...

Here's something different. **Business Insider** publishes the American impressions of a student from Mumbai, India who has studied computer science the last two years at Carnegie-Mellon in Pittsburgh.

Aniruddh Chaturvedi came from Mumbai to Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Penn., where he is majoring in computer science. This past summer he interned at a tech company in **Silicon** Valley. During two years in the U.S., Chaturvedi has been surprised by various aspects of society, as he explained last year in a post on Quora. Chaturvedi offered his latest thoughts on America in an email to **Business Insider**.

The most surprising things about America:

- Nobody talks about grades here.
- Everyone is highly private about their accomplishments and failures. Someone's performance in any field is their performance alone. This is different compared to India where people flaunt their riches and share their accomplishments with everybody else.
- The retail experience is nowhere near as fun/nice as it is in India. Because labor is cheap in India, there is always someone who will act as a "personal shopper" to assist you with holding your clothes, giving suggestions, etc. In America, on the other hand, even if you go to a Nordstrom or Bloomingdales, there is almost nobody to help you out while you're shopping. Shopping in America is more of a commodity / chore than it is a pleasurable activity
- This may be biased/wrong because I was an intern, but at least in the tech world, nobody wants to put you under the bus for something that you didn't do correctly or didn't understand how to do. People will sit with you patiently till you get it. If you aren't able to finish something within the stipulated deadline, a person on your team would graciously offer to take it off your plate.

- *The same applies to school. Before I came to the United States, I heard stories about how students at Johns Hopkins were so competitive with each other that they used to tear important pages from books in the library just so other students didn't have access to it. In reality, I experienced the complete opposite. ...*

... Chaturvedi ended his post with a link to a video of "[America F--- Yeah](#)" from the movie "[Team America](#)."

Weekly Standard review tears away some of Jean Jacques Rousseau's "noble savage" BS.

*Fantasies of the "noble savage" are nothing new, of course. There were Jean-Jacques Rousseau's state-of-nature imaginings in the 18th century, and something similar appears even in the ancient epic Gilgamesh. In 1580, Montaigne compared holy-warring Europeans (unfavorably) with Brazilian cannibals, and the phrase itself first turns up in English in John Dryden's 1672 play *The Conquest of Granada*.*

Typically, the idea is that the natural man is the virtuous man, living in small, happy, family groups, treading lightly upon Mother Earth, taking only what he needs, and returning himself gratefully to her enfolding bosom after, one supposes, a decently short interval. It's become one of the left's foundation myths, as well as a congenial foil to the modern free-market industrial culture it blames for many of the world's woes.

Marlene Zuk now lends weight to some much-needed pushback. Although she doesn't tackle the doubtful politics behind this striving for a primitive past, she does provide a welcome corrective to the "newspaper articles, morning TV, dozens of books, and self-help advocates promoting slow-food or no-cook diets, barefoot running, sleeping with our infants, and other measures large and small claim[ing] that it would be more natural, and healthier, to live more like our ancestors." ...

Power Line

[The Prescience of the Duranty Prize](#)

by John Hinderaker

Last fall, PJ Media and the New Criterion teamed up to award the first-ever Walter Duranty Prize for mendacity in journalism. My wife and I attended the event, and I wrote about it [here](#). You can read the principal speeches, in which the grand prize and two runner-up awards were given out, [here](#). So, who won the Duranty Prize last October?

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How chic can you get?

Reported and published on the verge of the Syrian uprising and bloody government crackdown that began early last year, in which to date more than 30,000 people have died, “Rose in the Desert” glossed over the horrific realities of Syria’s despotism — which were abundantly evident even before the 2011 carnage, at least to anyone who cared to browse the reams of human rights reports and terror cases.

Instead, Vogue showcased as a breathless scoop a portrait of Syria’s ruling couple as a pair of classy and benevolent aristocrats; the kind of couple any self-respecting member of the global elite could admire and endorse without violating standards of either morality or the latest trends in Parisian footwear.



Ms. Buck, for whom Vogue obtained extraordinary access to the Assads, gushed about Asma as “the freshest and most magnetic of first ladies ... breezy, conspiratorial, and fun ... a thin long-limbed beauty with a trained analytic mind who dresses with cunning understatement.” Ms. Buck treated her readers to visions of Asma waking at dawn to begin her charitable rounds, including her campaign urging millions of young Syrians to engage in “active citizenship.” There were vignettes of Asma flying around Syria in a French-built corporate jet, or careening through traffic behind the wheel of a plain SUV, en route to museums, schools, and orphanages, a study in “energetic grace,” deftly accessorized with little more than a necklace of Chanel agates; shoes and Syrian silk tote bag by French designer Christian Louboutin.

Then there was Asma at home, with her husband and three young children, in their thoroughly modern apartment, where Asma herself, dressed in jeans, t-shirt, and old suede stiletto boots, answers the front door, and whips up fondue for lunch. This was a presidential dwelling, as reported by Ms. Buck, where neighbors freely peered in and dropped by; a household “run on wildly democratic principles” where Asma explains: “We all vote on what we want.”

Eventually, both Ms. Wintour—a major fundraiser for Barack Obama—and Ms. Buck recanted. Buck explained why she went awry:

Ms. Buck said she was initially reluctant to take on the Syria assignment, but did so at the urging of her editors at Vogue. Plus, a 2008 article in the British Conde Nast Traveller had described the “increasing hipness” of Damascus, and by 2010, Syria’s status, wrote Ms. Buck, was oscillating between “untrustworthy rogue state and new cool place.” In taking the road to Damascus, Ms. Buck was following in the footsteps of such luminaries as Representative Nancy Pelosi, Senator John Kerry, Sting, Angelina Jolie, Brad Pitt, and Francis Ford Coppola, as well as a public relations firm, Brown Lloyd James, hired by Mrs. Assad, which arranged the Vogue interview.

Claudia could have added Hillary Clinton, who famously dubbed Assad a “reformer,” to her list. But let’s focus for the moment on John Kerry, who is now—laughably—America’s Secretary of State. Kerry is a man of limited intelligence who loves money and glamour. In recent years, he has [repeatedly visited](#) Mr. and Mrs. Assad in Syria. This 2009 photo, which you may have seen on Power Line [first](#), is now all over the web. It shows Kerry and his wife Teresa (money) having dinner with Assad (money) and his wife Asma (glamour):



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Washington Times

Bashar Assad loses U.S. friends as Kerry, Hagel and Biden take Bush's stance on Syria

by Rowan Scarborough

The Obama national security team that wants to go to war with Syria and demonizes President Bashar Assad is the same group that, as senators, urged reaching out to the dictator.

As a bloc on the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, President Obama, Secretary of State John F. Kerry, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Vice President Joseph R. Biden all opposed the George W. Bush administration's playing tough with Mr. Assad.

None grew closer to Mr. Assad and promoted him in Washington more than Mr. Kerry.

"President Assad has been very generous with me in terms of the discussions we have had," Mr. Kerry, as a senator from Massachusetts, told an audience at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in March 2011. He predicted that Mr. Assad would change for the better.

But that same month, pro-democracy demonstrations erupted in Syria that would lead to a civil war, unmasking Mr. Assad's brutal tactics, including the Aug. 21 unleashing of nerve gas that killed more than 1,400 civilians.

Today, Mr. Kerry is a leading advocate for attacking Mr. Assad's regime. On Friday, he called the man he once befriended a "thug and murderer."

Mr. Hagel is assembling a small armada in the eastern Mediterranean Sea to launch scores of cruise missiles at the Assad regime as punishment for the gas attack. Mr. Obama and Mr. Biden are lobbying allies and Congress to approve an attack.

The message was different in the mid- and late 2000s, even as Mr. Assad was doing deeds that prompted the Bush administration to label him a "bad actor."

When Mr. Assad succeeded his late father, Hafez, as dictator in July 2000, there was hope in Washington that the young ophthalmologist who was trained in London would shift the country from its brutal ways in neighboring Lebanon and its deep association with Iran and terrorism.

'Constructive behavior'

But in the Bush administration's view, Mr. Assad proved as devious as his father. He increased ties to Hezbollah and Hamas, two U.S.-designated terrorist groups backed by Iran, and grew even closer to Iran, which used Syria to pass rockets to terrorists.

In 2005, the Assad regime rocked Lebanon by playing a role in Hezbollah's assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, who had led an anti-Syrian bloc in Beirut.

By that year, Mr. Assad had begun helping al Qaeda by opening his country to jihadists who passed through the Damascus airport on their way to safe houses and then across the border into Iraq, where they killed U.S. troops.

The Bush administration made repeated demands in Damascus for Mr. Assad to stop the flow of al Qaeda killers but saw no progress.

Noting that behavior, the Bush national security team refused to engage Mr. Assad in peace talks until he changed. That stance riled senators, especially Mr. Kerry, Mr. Hagel and Mr. Biden.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice explained the administration's position on Mr. Assad to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in 2007.

"If there were any evidence, any hint, that Syria was changing its course — and it should just change its course — we don't have an ideological problem with talking to Syria," Ms. Rice testified. "We've talked with them under this administration. We could do it again.

"But the problem is, they are not engaging in constructive behavior. And we don't see how that would change, currently, by talking to them."

Mr. Biden, then the committee's chairman, scolded her and reminded her of her duties.

"I do not agree with your statement, Madame Secretary, that negotiations with Iran and Syria would be extortion, nor did most of the witnesses we heard in this committee during the last month," Mr. Biden said. "The proper term, I believe and they believe, is diplomacy, which is not about paying a price but finding a way to protect our interests without engaging in military conflict. It is, I might add, the fundamental responsibility of the Department of State, to engage in such diplomacy, as you well know."

When it was his turn, committee member Mr. Hagel asked three times why Ms. Rice would not engage in direct talks with Mr. Assad.

"Have you included in those conversations, whether second- or third-party conversations, Iran and Syria?" Mr. Hagel said. "Because I don't know how we could come up with any kind of a plan or focus, working with the United Nations or anyone else, if Iran and Syria are not included in that."

One of Mr. Obama's major foreign policy positions as a senator was unconditional direct talks with the leaders of Iran over its quest for nuclear weapons.

He also favored talks with Mr. Assad. Once in office, Mr. Kerry became his main emissary to Damascus, engaging in talks there in 2009, a month after Mr. Obama took office, and 2010, marking his third and fourth visits as a senator.

A 'reformer'

Before the 2009 visit, the U.S. Embassy in Damascus sent a cable to Mr. Kerry and other senators on the trip.

"You should expect an enthusiastic reception by government officials of the Syrian Arab Republic (SARG) and from the media, who will interpret your presence as a signal that the [U.S. government] is ready for enhanced U.S.-Syrian relations," said the cable, published by the anti-

secrecy website WikiLeaks. "Your visits over the course of February 17-22 form a trifecta that Syrians will spin as evidence of the new Administration's recognition of Syria's regional importance."

At the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in 2011, Mr. Kerry was full of praise for Mr. Assad as the civil war in Syria erupted, and he predicted that the dictator would become a good actor.

"So my judgment is that Syria will move," he said. "Syria will change as it embraces a legitimate relationship with the United States and the West and economic opportunity that comes with it and the participation that comes with it."

That month, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, another alumnus of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, told "Face the Nation" on CBS that lawmakers who had visited Mr. Assad considered him a "reformer." The U.S., she said, did not need to contemplate military action against Syria.

"There's a different leader in Syria now," Mrs. Clinton said. "Many of the members of Congress of both parties who have gone to Syria in recent months have said they believe he's a reformer."

Conservatives wonder whether Mr. Assad, seeing that those who had scolded the Bush team for not talking to him are now in power, calculated he could put down the unrest in his country without U.S. interference.

"Absolutely," said Michael Rubin, a Middle East researcher at the American Enterprise Institute. "Syria is just one symptom of a greater problem."

National Review **President 'Present'**

Obama's pattern of indecisiveness continues — and it has Democrats worried.

by John Fund

Washington is abuzz with talk about how much President Obama has damaged America's credibility with his indecisiveness on Syria. It's become accepted fact that Obama's decision-making style resembles that of an academic convening an unruly seminar whose participants he largely disdains. What he is not is a decisive leader with the ability to bring disparate players together behind a common purpose.

This shouldn't be a surprise. We had inklings of it a long time ago. Back when Barack Obama was running for president in 2008, Hillary Clinton accused him of "taking a pass" on tough issues when he was in the Illinois state senate, a theme later picked up by Republicans. Its basis is the 129 times he voted "present." On 36 of those occasions, he was the only one to vote present of the 60 senators. One of those occasions was in 1999, when he twice chose not to vote on a bill protecting sexual-assault victims from having the explicit details of their cases made public without "good cause." Bonnie Grabenhofer, the president of the Illinois National

Organization of Women at the time, said she endorsed Hillary Clinton in 2007 in part because “when we needed someone to take a stand, Senator Obama took a pass.”

Today President Obama’s chaotic indecisiveness is a big part of his challenge in getting both houses of Congress to approve military action in Syria. Republicans are strongly leaning against intervention at this point, but Obama’s real problem may be with Democrats. ABC News reports that several congressional Democrats pushed back against military action against Syria in a conference call with administration officials Monday.

They may not be easy to bring into line. Recall that just two years ago, 70 House Democrats voted against a bill that would have authorized U.S. military action in Libya. Less than two months ago, a total of 111 House Democrats, a clear majority, voted to cut back on funding for National Security Agency surveillance programs.

Since then, further evidence has piled up that Obama is a dithering, indecisive leader willing to deflect making a decision because of what many see as political calculation. It’s one thing when this happens domestically, like when his administration delayed meaningful action by BP and the state of Louisiana to clear up the Gulf of Mexico oil spill in 2010. It’s another when it happens in foreign policy — especially in the Middle East. Obama stood aloof during the Iranian street protests of 2009. In Libya, he delayed a decision for weeks until choosing “to lead from behind,” in the famous words of one adviser. In Egypt, the administration was caught flat-footed not once, but twice, by uprisings.

Michael Gerson, a former speechwriter for President George W. Bush, outlined the pattern way back in 2011 in a *Washington Post* [column](#):

An administration that lacks a consistent foreign policy philosophy has nevertheless established a predictable foreign policy pattern. A popular revolt takes place in country X. President Obama is caught by surprise and says little. A few days later an administration spokesman weakly calls for “reform.” A few more days of mounting protests and violence follow. Then, after an internal debate that spills out into the media, the president decides he must do something. But hoping to keep expectations low, his actions are limited in scope. By this point, a strategic opportunity is missed and the protesters in country X feel betrayed.

Sounds just like the Syria story we’re seeing today, with the addition of Obama’s foolish “red line” threat should Syrian dictator Bashar Assad use chemical weapons. The pattern of behavior is a key reason why President Obama now has credibility problems — with both parties — on Capitol Hill.

No one should think the president can’t eventually get his way on Syria. Democrats will be reminded that if they help deliver a humiliating defeat for Obama it will not only hurt U.S. credibility abroad but will damage his domestic agenda and perhaps make his participation in the 2014 elections less valuable.

But Democrats who have watched House Republicans scramble to keep their coalition together and deliver majorities now have their own challenge. As David Drucker, congressional correspondent for the *Washington Examiner*, [reports](#): “This is a rare case of the shoe being on the other foot. This time, the president and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D., Calif.) have to deliver the votes first — if they want the (Syrian) resolution to clear the chamber.”

And as Democratic leaders try to corral those votes, part of the pushback will not just be questions about the advisability of a strike on Syria, but increasing worries that the president they elected is not ready for prime time when it comes to foreign-policy crises. A Democratic congressman who retired years ago once told me that, while he didn't vote for Ronald Reagan in 1980, he was "profoundly concerned" about how Jimmy Carter might have continued to mishandle U.S. foreign policy — from Afghanistan to Iran — if he'd won a second term that year.

Many Democrats may soon wake up to the fact they may indeed have reelected a Jimmy Carter — or worse. And he has a long 40 months left in his term.

Hot Air

[Shocker: Arab allies view Obama as "wobbly, indecisive, not strong enough"](#)

by Ed Morrissey

One of the major arguments for intervention in Syria is that it will be a rescue mission for the credibility of the American presidency, if not for any other reason. John McCain has been making that point repeatedly over the last two weeks, insisting that a show of weakness now would be fatal to American interests in the region and to our alliances with the Arab world. Jake Tapper interviewed the newsman who got Barack Obama's first televised interview in 2009 for Al-Arabiya, Hisham Melhem, who says that [Obama's credibility in the region has been on the wane for four years](#):

Arab allies now view Obama as "wobbly, indecisive, not strong enough," said Washington bureau chief of al Arabiya television Hisham Melhem, who also conducted that interview with Obama back in 2009.

Obama's style of leadership does not engage Arab leaders, and does not address regional issues, like Egypt, said Melhem.

But "everybody's crying out for American leadership, the Turks, the Arabs, and the Europeans. And given the weaknesses of the Europeans, given the vote in the British Parliament, given the fact that NATO ally Turkey is unable to lead — everyone is looking for the United States to lead, and there is no leadership," said Melhem.

"The United States is AWOL."

Of all the arguments for intervention in Syria, this is actually the only one with any merit at all. A leadership vacuum is dangerous anywhere, but especially in the Middle East, which is why a policy of talking loudly and carrying a small stick is probably worse than just keeping one's mouth shut entirely. Melhem tells Tapper that Arab leaders have issues with Obama's solicitude of Israel, but that's a complaint they have with every American leader. It's the other points that Melhem makes that gets to the heart of the lack of leadership — abandoning Mubarak, ignoring a popular revolt against the Iranian mullahs, and the sudden *pas de deux* around Syrian intervention — and why Arab leaders are worried that the US will abandon them to the Iranian-Syrian axis.

That still doesn't equate to having an American interest in creating another failed state in Syria as we did in Libya, or worse, handing Syria over to an al-Qaeda-run *shari'a* totalitarian dictatorship that would be worse than Assad's, as it has already proved to be in areas controlled by the Nusra Front and other terrorist networks. However, American leadership over the last two years should have made that a very public issue with these Arab leaders, rather than offer continuous pox-on-both-houses commentaries along with red-line threats that Obama didn't have the will to enforce, nor have the support of key allies in doing so either. Throughout the Arab Spring, Obama has clearly been playing checkers while everyone in the region plays three-dimensional chess, and that may be the biggest confidence-sapper among leaders in the region. A few missile strikes won't solve that problem, either.

Business Insider

[The Most Surprising Things About America, According To An Indian International Student](#)

by Gus Lubin



Aniruddh Chaturvedi

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- The same applies to school. Before I came to the United States, I heard stories about how students at Johns Hopkins were so competitive with each other that they used to tear important pages from books in the library just so other students didn't have access to it. In reality, I experienced the complete opposite. Students were highly collaborative, formed study groups, and studied / did assignments till everyone in the group "got it". I think the reason for this is that the classes are / material is so hard that it makes sense to work collaboratively to the point that students learn from each other.
- Strong ethics — everyone has a lot of integrity. If someone cannot submit their completed assignment in time, they will turn in the assignment incomplete rather than asking for answers at the last minute. People take pride in their hard work and usually do not cheat. This is different from students from India and China as well as back home in India, where everyone collaborates to the extent that it can be categorized as cheating.
- Rich people are thin/ well maintained, poor people are fat. This stems from the fact that cheap food is fatty, rich people don't eat cheap food — they tend to eat either home-cooked food which is expensive or eat at expensive / healthy places. Unfortunately, it is expensive to be healthy in America.
- Fat people are not respected much in society. Being fat often has the same connotations as being irresponsible towards your body. If you're thin (and tall, but not as much), people will respect you a lot more and treat you better. You will also receive better customer service if you're well maintained. This extends my previous point which mentioned that if you're thin, you're statistically likely to be rich. Reason why I know this is that I went down from being 210lbs to 148-150lbs. The way people started treating me when I was thin was generally way better than the way I was treated when I was fat. As a small example, the Starbucks baristas were much nicer to me and made me drinks with more care / love.
- Girls are not very promiscuous, contrary to most Hollywood films
- Almost every single person in America has access to basic food, clothing, water and sanitation. I haven't been to states like Louisiana and cities like Detroit, but from what I can tell, nobody is scrambling for the basic necessities required for sustenance.
- Dearth of African Americans in technical fields. This probably stems from the fact that they aren't given enough opportunity, broken families, etc. I'm pretty sure you can extend upon this if you'd like.
- It's expensive to have brick houses in America, contrary to India where brick houses are the norm
- Emphasis on physical fitness / being outdoorsy — this is more of a California thing but I noticed families going on biking trips, boat trips, hiking, camping, barbecuing, etc. Americans take pride in the natural beauty of their surroundings and tend to make the most of it

- Americans waste a lot of food. It is very easy to buy in bulk because it's so much **cheaper** and as a result a lot of wastage occurs.
- Obsession with coffee — Starbucks, Dunkin' etc is crowded with office-goers and students every morning. I don't understand why they can't drink or make coffee before leaving for work. Such a waste of money! ($\$5/\text{day} * 5\text{days} / \text{week} * 52\text{weeks}/\text{year}$)!
- Split families, not having married parents, etc is not seen differently than the contrary.
- Support towards the LGBT community — it's fairly normal to be part of the LGBT community; it's not considered a mortal sin if you like someone in your own gender or if you aren't comfortable being male/female/etc. Proof of this is the LGBT Pride Day held in every city etc.
- Smoking weed is seen the same as smoking cigarettes.

And here are some more things he found surprising about America, [excerpted from his post last summer on Quora](#) :

The way that stores price their products makes no apparent economic sense, and is not linear at all.

For example, at a typical store:

- 1 can of coke : \$1.00
- 12 cans of coke : \$3.00
- 1 Häagen-Dazs ice cream bar : \$3.00
- 12 Häagen-Dazs ice cream bars : \$7.00

The return policy on almost everything: None of my friends back in India believed me when I told them that you can literally buy anything, including food, and return it within ninety days for a full refund even if you don't have a specific reason for doing so (most stores actually have a "Buyer's Remorse" category under Reason for Return options while returning the product).

The pervasiveness of fast food and the sheer variety of products available: The typical supermarket has at least a hundred varieties of frozen pizza, 50 brands of trail mix, etc. I was just astounded by the different kinds of products available even at small gas station convenience stores.

Soda being cheaper than bottled water: It makes no sense that carbonated and flavored water with HFCS are cheaper than regular water, but hey, that's just how it is.

The fact that there are full service rest stops with decent chain restaurants and big supermarkets every couple of miles on interstate highways

Fruit and vegetable prices, as compared to fast food prices:

- Bag of grapes : \$6.00
- Box of strawberries : \$5.00
- 1 lb tomatoes : \$3.00
- McChicken : \$1.00
- [McDouble] : \$1.00

Unlimited soda refills:

The first time (and one of the last times...) I visited McDonalds in 2007, the cashier gave me an empty cup when I ordered soda. The concept of virtually unlimited soda refills was alien to me, and I thought there was a catch to it, but apparently not.

Slightly digressing, I've noticed that the typical fountain machine has a huge selection, including Pepsi, Pepsi Max, Sprite, Sprite Zero, Hi-C, Powerade, Lemonade, Raspberry Lemonade (and/or their coca-cola counterparts)... The list goes on. This may not seem like much, but it is actually a lot more compared to the 3-4 options (coca-cola, sprite, fanta, limca) that most Indian soda fountain machines have.

Serving Sizes: American serving sizes are HUGE! I've noticed that entree sizes are huge as well. I am by no means a small eater, but it usually takes me at least 1.5 meals to finish the entree.

US Flag displayed everywhere: I was surprised to see that the US flag is displayed in schools, on rooftops of houses, etc. India has very strict rules governing the display and use of the national flag. Also, something that struck out to me was how it was completely normal to wear the US flag or a US flag-like pattern as a bikini.

Over-commercialization of festivals: I'm not denying that festivals like Diwali and Eid aren't extremely commercialized in India, but America takes it to a whole new level. Black Friday, Cyber Monday, etc., and an almost year-round sale of Christmas, Halloween, Easter, etc. items.

An almost-classless society: I've noticed that most Americans roughly have the same standard of living. Everybody has access to ample food, everybody shops at the same supermarkets, malls, stores, etc. I've seen plumbers, construction workers and janitors driving their own sedans, which was quite difficult for me to digest at first since I came from a country where construction workers and plumbers lived hand to mouth.

Also, (almost) all sections of society are roughly equal. You'll see service professionals owning iPhones, etc. as well. This may be wrong but part of it has to do with the fact that obtaining credit in this country is extremely easy. Anybody can buy anything, for the most part, except for something like a Maserati, obviously. As a result, most monetary possessions aren't really status symbols. I believe that the only status symbol in America is your job, and possibly your educational qualifications.

Chaturvedi ended his post with a link to a video of "[America F--- Yeah](#)" from the movie "[Team America](#)."

Weekly Standard

[Keep It Simple](#)

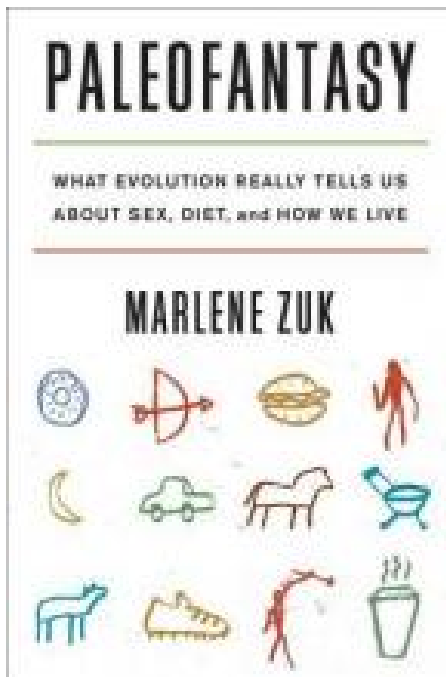
Some 'much-needed pushback' to the myth of the noble savage.

by Daniel Lee

Fantasies of the "noble savage" are nothing new, of course. There were Jean-Jacques Rousseau's state-of-nature imaginings in the 18th century, and something similar appears even in the ancient epic *Gilgamesh*. In 1580, Montaigne compared holy-warring Europeans

(unfavorably) with Brazilian cannibals, and the phrase itself first turns up in English in John Dryden's 1672 play *The Conquest of Granada*.

Typically, the idea is that the natural man is the virtuous man, living in small, happy, family groups, treading lightly upon Mother Earth, taking only what he needs, and returning himself gratefully to her enfolding bosom after, one supposes, a decently short interval. It's become one of the left's foundation myths, as well as a congenial foil to the modern free-market industrial culture it blames for many of the world's woes.



[Paleofantasy: What Evolution Really Tells Us about Sex, Diet, and How We Live](#)

Author:Marlene Zuk **Hardcover:**337 pages**Publisher:**W. W. Norton & Company

Available format: Hardcover, Kindle, Audio Book

Marlene Zuk now lends weight to some much-needed pushback. Although she doesn't tackle the doubtful politics behind this striving for a primitive past, she does provide a welcome corrective to the "newspaper articles, morning TV, dozens of books, and self-help advocates promoting slow-food or no-cook diets, barefoot running, sleeping with our infants, and other measures large and small claim[ing] that it would be more natural, and healthier, to live more like our ancestors."

Some, for example, insist that since man evolved eating a particular diet—imagined as fruits, roughage, meat, bone marrow, and whatever else nature deigned to provide—many of our modern maladies can be traced to our more wide-ranging menu. But beyond our sheer overconsumption, Zuk doubts this claim. There has been ample time to move beyond the elemental hunting and gathering diet endorsed by fans of a paleo-lifestyle. And modern DNA studies demonstrate that evolution doesn't require eons to play out.

Change is always underway, she says: “In just the last few years we have added the ability to function at high altitudes and resistance to malaria to the list of rapidly evolved human characteristics, and the stage is set for many more.” For instance, the ability of some groups, so far mostly Northern European, to digest cow’s milk into adulthood is relatively new, but likely continuing: “[A]s little as a 3 percent increase in the reproductive fitness of those with lactase persistence (which allows digestion of the milk sugar lactose) would result in the widespread distribution of such a gene after only 300 to 350 generations. That’s about 7,000 years—a blink of the evolutionary eye,” she writes.

Agriculture itself—considered the source of early prosperity, settled communities, and civilization—takes heat for its supposed successes from people like Jared Diamond. “With agriculture came the gross social and sexual inequality, the disease and despotism, that curse our existence,” he writes. Yet anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon has vividly chronicled remarkably similar behavior in primitive peoples like South America’s Yanomami, who know nothing of settled agriculture. Chagnon is controversial, of course. Meanwhile, “environmental writer and activist” John Feeney observes that “as hunter-gatherers, we were a species that lived in much the same way as any other, relying on the whims of nature to provide us with our food and water.” He considers this a good thing.

Zuk concedes that there was a downside to early agricultural settlement—at first: The new European Global History of Health project “suggest[s] that people living in early urban settlements were indeed of poorer health than their hunter-gatherer ancestors.” She blames living at close quarters with larger numbers of people and domesticated animals, disease vectors all. But the same data indicate that “health improved later, after trade networks allowed the exchange of goods and food became more diverse.” Higher death rates likely stemmed from infant mortality associated with increased birth rates, a sign of prosperity.

Tuberculosis is also high on the exhibit list for the anti-agriculturists among us. Early cattle wranglers supposedly suffered from a bovine form of the disease, *Mycobacterium bovis*, which mutated into the human disease, *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. But advanced DNA studies have now dated *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* to about three million years ago, when little hominins like *Australopithecus afarensis* and *sediba* were likely just trying to avoid being trampled by Bessie’s ancestors, not swapping germs with them as domesticated livestock.

Of course, modern life gets blamed for cancer as well. Zuk discusses the Egyptologists Rosalie David and Michael Zimmerman, who claim to find almost no cancer in ancient peoples, concluding that “cancer was rare in antiquity.” Zimmerman, in fact, links cancer directly to modern lifestyles, since “there is nothing in the natural environment that can cause cancer.” This must come as a surprise to anyone shelling out four bucks for a tube of SPF 50 sunblock, or \$30-\$60 for a radon test kit.

In fact, says Zuk, many cancers leave no skeletal evidence, and many ancient skeletons are incomplete anyway. She cites biologist Caleb Finch, who finds a source for cancer in our longevity: “Our long life spans have come at a price,” explains Zuk. “Our immune systems can keep us going for many decades by fending off viruses, bacteria, and other onslaughts, but they also make us prone to inflammation, heart and neurological disease, and cancer.”

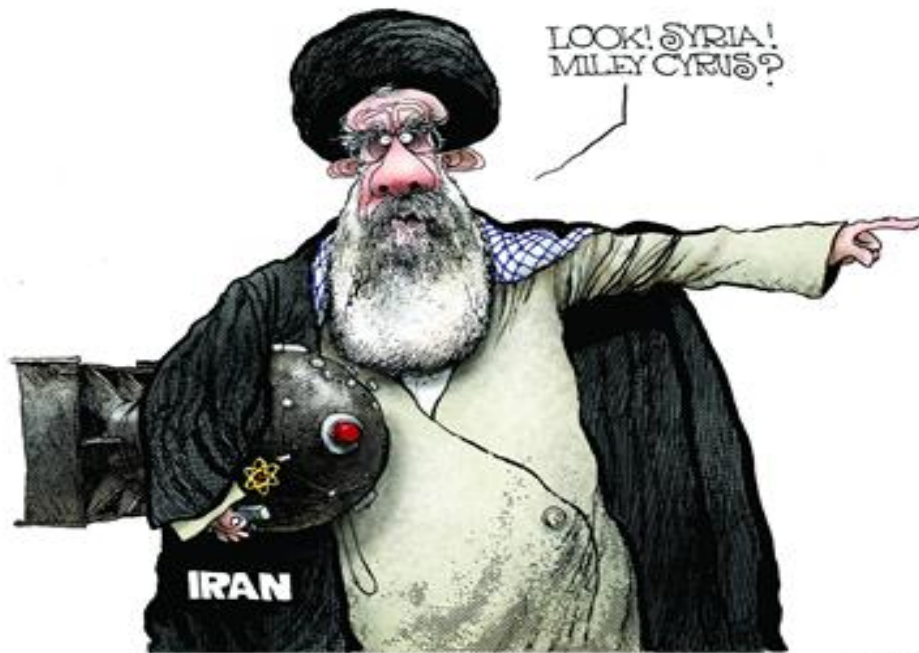
A good deal of Zuk’s argument depends on what she sees as a key misunderstanding of evolution: namely, that there was some point when we reached a perfect adaptation to the environment, a state of grace from which we have since lapsed.

We all wish we could be healthier, and it is easy to fantasize that before Big Macs, or roads, or houses, we were. But evolution doesn't work that way, with the accomplishment of perfect health or perfect adaptation after some arbitrary period of time. Instead, diseases perfectly demonstrate that life is an endless series of checks and balances, with no guarantees of a happy ending.

Or, as she says elsewhere, "We all have to die of something." She makes a good case that hiding in an imaginary past won't save us.

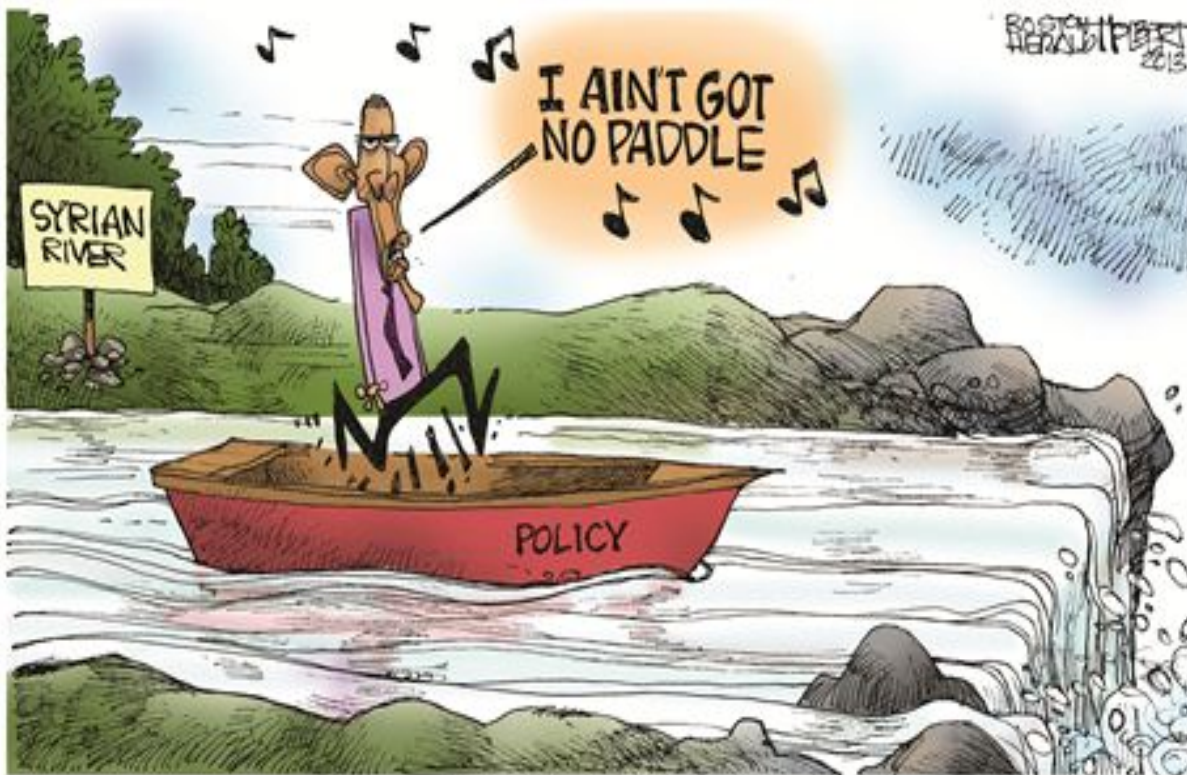
Daniel Lee is a writer in Indiana.



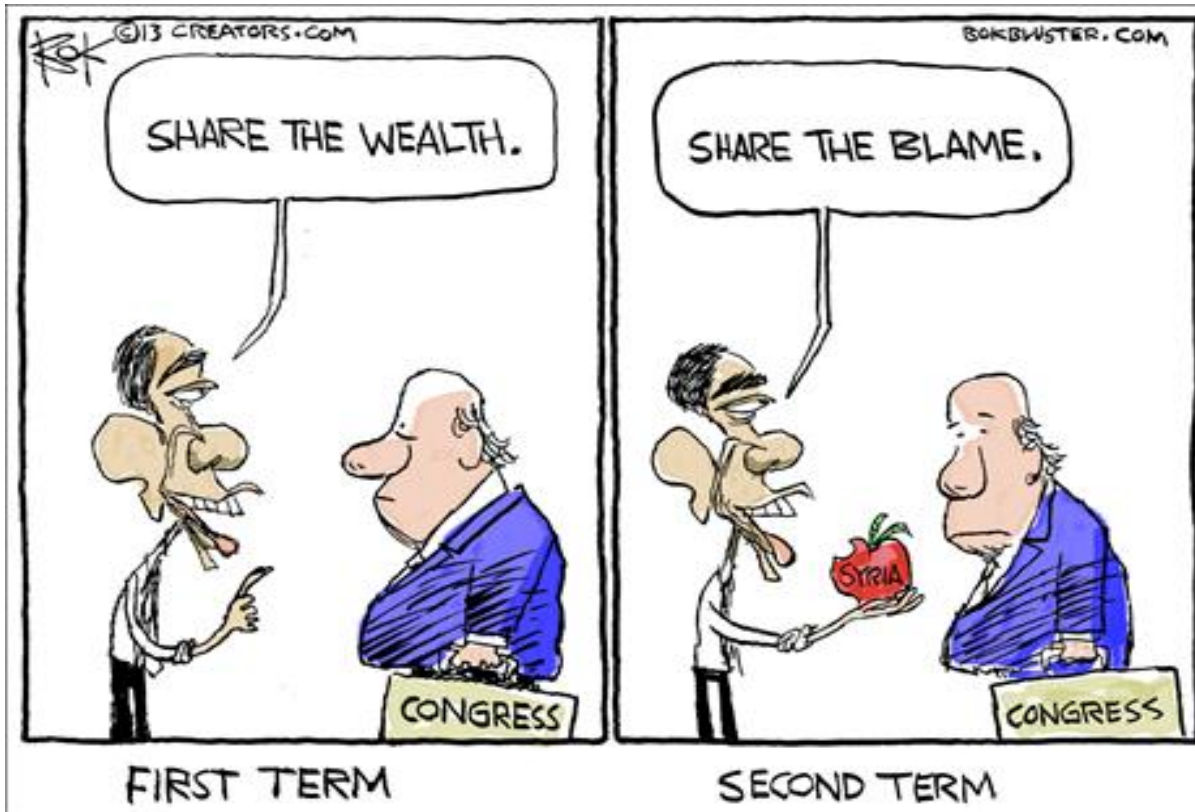


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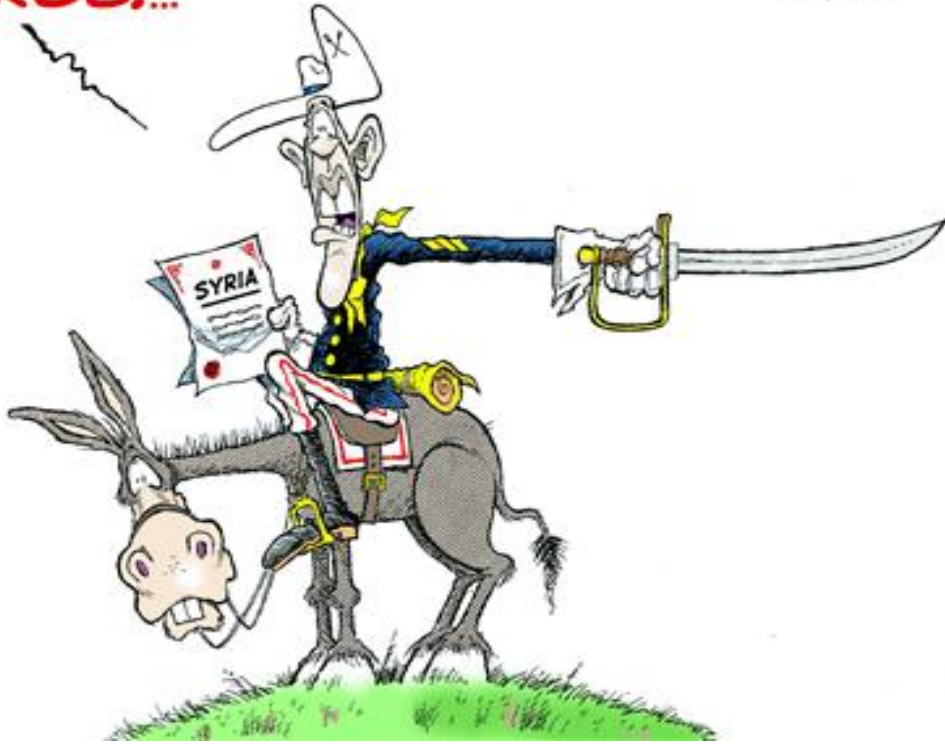


UPRIVER DANCE



CHARGE?...

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I STILL HAVEN'T
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STRIKE AGAINST
SYRIA, BUT I'M
NOT RULING
ANYTHING OUT.

EXCEPT FOR
THE ELEMENT
OF SURPRISE...



