

October 20, 2013

It will be a long time before Americans forget what the park service did during the shutdown. You'll enjoy John Fund's account of the grilling the head of the service received before a house committee.

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Jarvis responded that, while he was required by the Anti-Deficiency Act to close all parks and memorials, any veterans who wanted to enter the war memorials could have done so if they had "declared" they were there to exercise their First Amendment rights.

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Ebell also noted the number of barricades and printed signs needed to close 401 parks and monuments on the shutdown's first day required foresight and planning. The speed of the closures and the procurement of barricades has also convinced former secretary Norton that a lot of thought had gone into how to conduct the Park Service's blitzkrieg. "I imagine that the decision was made at the highest levels of Park Service leadership, in co-operation with the White House," she told NRO. ...

Certified leftist Peter Beinart says the media has the results of the shutdown fight all wrong.

... Most of the press is missing this because most of the press is covering the current standoff more as politics than policy. If your basic question is "which party is winning?" then it's easy to see the Republicans as losing, since they're the ones suffering in the polls. But the partisan balance of power and the ideological balance of power are two completely different things. The Nixon years were terrible for the Democratic Party but quite good for progressive domestic policy. The Clinton years were, in important ways, the reverse. The promise of the Obama

presidency was not merely that he'd bring Democrats back to power. It was that he'd usher in the first era of truly progressive public policy in decades. But the survival of Obamacare notwithstanding, Obama's impending "victory" in the current standoff moves us further away from, not closer to, that goal.

It's not just that Obama looks likely to accept the sequester cuts as the basis for future budget negotiations. It's that while he's been trying to reopen the government and prevent a debt default, his chances of passing any significant progressive legislation have receded. Despite overwhelming public support, gun control is dead. Comprehensive immigration reform, once considered the politically easy part of Obama's second term agenda, looks unlikely. And the other items Obama trumpeted in this year's state of the union address—climate change legislation, infrastructure investment, universal preschool, voting rights protections, a boost to the minimum wage—have been largely forgotten.

Democrats keep holding out hope that losing yet more public support will break the ideological "fever" that grips the Republican Party and help GOP moderates regain power. The problem, as the last few weeks have shown, is that the GOP keeps defining moderation down. For instance, the Washington GOP's plummeting approval ratings may well boost the presidential prospects of New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, just as the Gingrich Congress paved the way for the comparatively moderate George W. Bush. Like Bush, Christie is described as moderate because he has Democratic allies in his home state and because his rhetoric is not as harsh on cultural issues. But in the White House, Bush's economic policies were hardly moderate. To the contrary, from taxes to social security to regulation, he governed well to the right of Ronald Reagan. Christie likely would as well. As governor, after all, he's vetoed a hike in the minimum wage, cut the earned income tax credit, vetoed a millionaires' tax three times and adopted basically the same attitude towards public sector unions as Wisconsin's Scott Walker.

Yet for the next three years, the press will likely describe Christie as "moderate" for the same reason it now describes a "clean" CR as Republican surrender: Because the GOP keeps moving the ideological goalposts and the press keeps playing along.

Michael Graham agrees with Beinart.

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Or Team "I Voted to Shut Down the Government Rather Than Change Obamacare or Spend Less Money"?

I know what you're thinking, Democrats. "They're Republicans. They'll find a way to screw this up."

And two months ago, you'd be right. But Tea Party politicians are still, in the end, politicians.

And to quote U.S. Rep. Trey Gowdy (R-S.C.), a former prosecutor and current Tea Party fave: "I didn't lose many cases in court, and I haven't won many cases here in Congress. It's time to re-evaluate my tactics."

NY Times reports on changes to basic assumptions about early humans that grew out of discoveries in Georgia in 2005.

After eight years spent studying a 1.8-million-year-old skull uncovered in the Republic of Georgia, scientists have made a discovery that may rewrite the evolutionary history of our human genus Homo.

It would be a simpler story with fewer ancestral species. Early, diverse fossils — those currently recognized as coming from distinct species like Homo habilis, Homo erectus and others — may actually represent variation among members of a single, evolving lineage.

In other words, just as people look different from one another today, so did early hominids look different from one another, and the dissimilarity of the bones they left behind may have fooled scientists into thinking they came from different species.

This was the conclusion reached by an international team of scientists led by David Lordkipanidze, a paleoanthropologist at the Georgian National Museum in Tbilisi, as reported Thursday in the journal Science.

The key to this revelation was a cranium excavated in 2005 and known simply as Skull 5, which scientists described as “the world’s first completely preserved adult hominid skull” of such antiquity. Unlike other Homo fossils, it had a number of primitive features: a long, apelike face, large teeth and a tiny braincase, about one-third the size of that of a modern human being. This confirmed that, contrary to some conjecture, early hominids did not need big brains to make their way out of Africa.

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Metal Floss posts on why baseball players chew sunflower seeds.

National Review

Grilling the Park Service Bullies

The House Oversight Committee wants to find out why the Park Service behaved so bizarrely.

by John Fund

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wanted to know why Jarvis had allowed “pot-smoking” Occupy Wall Street protesters to camp overnight illegally in Washington’s McPherson Square park for 100 days, yet put up barricades to keep veterans out of war memorials on the first day of the shutdown. By not issuing a single citation to the Occupy campers, Gowdy argued, the Park Service was treating them better than the nation’s military veterans. “Can you cite me the regulation that required you to erect barricades from accessing a monument that they built?” he demanded.



Erecting barriers at the National WWII Memorial.

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“Who were they to declare it to? A barricade?” Gowdy sniffed. Representative Darrell Issa was equally stern with Jarvis, noting that, since the Park Police weren’t furloughed during the shutdown, “an open-air monument was guarded by the same number of people to prevent Americans from getting in as would allow them to safely go in and out.”

Then Jarvis had to contend with Representative Pat Meehan of Pennsylvania, another former prosecutor. Meehan was irked that 20 of his constituents had been handed \$100 tickets for jogging through the Valley Forge National Historical Park in his district. Cars were still allowed to drive through the park but no one was allowed onto the jogging trail adjacent to the road. Jarvis said he had no discretion that would allow him to waive prosecution of the joggers.

How did the National Park Service, the well-loved stewards of everything from the Grand Canyon to Yellowstone, become a villain? Gale Norton, the Interior secretary for President George W. Bush, explained to NRO’s Andrew Stiles last week that the Park Service’s reality is a bit more complicated. They “often choose the most dramatic type of action in order to get their message across,” she said. “It’s something I had to guard against when I was secretary — not letting them play budget games.”

Dramatic doesn't even begin to describe some of the horror stories of the last two weeks:

- The Park Service closed the Claude Moore Colonial Farm near Washington, D.C., even though it is privately funded and operated and relies on Fairfax County police protection.
- When closing Yellowstone National Park, the Park Service confined four dozen elderly foreign tourists in a hotel on park property for two days, and also blocked them from taking photos on the grounds. Rangers then prevented their bus from stopping for a restroom break when they were finally thrown off park property.
- At Mount Rushmore in South Dakota, the Park Service closed turn-offs along a state highway so that tourists couldn't pull over to enjoy the view and take photos.
- The Park Service closed the City Tavern in Philadelphia, a meeting place for those who signed the Declaration of Independence, even though the tavern, at Independence National Historical Park, opens directly onto two major city streets. Myron Ebell of the Competitive Enterprise Institute joked to Representative Issa's committee, "had King George III's ministers in the colonies had the authority and the foresight to close [the tavern] down, they might have prevented the American Revolution."

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Politically, the shutdown ended on President Obama's terms. The administration's attitude was clear from Day One. "We are winning," a senior administration official told the *Wall Street Journal* on the fourth day of the impasse. "It doesn't really matter to us how long the shutdown lasts."

But now that the shutdown is over, it's important for Chairman Issa and others to figure out how it was manipulated politically. Because if the Park Service can become a pawn in the Obama administration's political wars, does anyone doubt that the integrity of other even more vital agencies wouldn't be at risk in any future budget showdown?

Daily Beast

Why the Shutdown is a Republican Victory

Thanks to the shutdown, the press and the public can't stand the GOP. But, Republican ideological influence is increasing.

by Peter Beinart

The news from Washington is all about President Obama's impending triumph in the government shutdown/debt ceiling standoff. "Boehner Blinks," declared a [recent headline](#) in The Washington Post. "Republicans," [explained](#) ABC's Jonathan Karl, "are working out the terms of their surrender."

If this is Republican surrender, I hope I never see Republican victory.

To understand how upside down the current media analysis is, you need to go back a couple of years. In 2011, with Republicans threatening to provoke a debt default, President Obama signed the Budget Control Act of 2011, which cut government spending by \$917 billion over 10 years. The agreement also created a congressional “supercommittee” charged with finding additional cuts. If the committee failed to do so, cuts totaling \$1.2 trillion over ten years would kick in automatically at the end of 2012, via a process called “sequestration.”

Traditionally in Washington, budget compromises had meant Democrats agreeing to cut domestic spending and Republicans agreeing to raise taxes. But by raising the specter of default, Republicans had changed the equation. In the Budget Control Act, taxes weren’t raised a dime. Democrats compromised by cutting spending and Republicans “compromised” by agreeing not to let America default on its debt and provoke a global financial crisis.

Not surprisingly, conservatives liked the deal more than liberals. In the House, Republicans backed it by a margin of [almost three to one](#) while Democrats split evenly. “Is this the deal I would have preferred? No,” Obama admitted. By contrast, House Speaker John Boehner [boasted](#), “I got 98 percent of what I wanted.”

Fast forward to the beginning of this year. Despite months of negotiations, the supercommittee failed to reach an agreement, and so this March, automatic sequester cuts kicked in. (In between, Congress did raise some revenue by not extending the Bush tax cuts for individuals making over \$400,000 a year). If Democrats disliked the 2011 Budget Control Act, they disliked its bastard stepchild, the sequester, even more. In his 2013 State of the Union address, Obama calls the sequester cuts: “harsh” and “arbitrary” and [warned](#) that they would “devastate priorities like education, energy and medical research” and “cost us hundreds of thousands of jobs.”

Republicans, being less supportive of federal spending on things like “education, energy and medical research,” were more supportive of the sequester. Indeed, as recently as last month, GOP leaders described locking in the sequester cuts—via a “clean” continuing resolution (CR) that extended them into 2014—as a major victory. In a memo to fellow Republicans on September 6, House Majority Leader Eric Cantor [boasted](#) that by “signing a CR at sequester levels, the President would be endorsing a level of spending that wipes away all the increases he and Congressional Democrats made while they were in charge and returns us to a pre-2008 level of discretionary spending.”

For their part, Democrats bristled at the prospect of a “clean” CR. Four days after Cantor’s memo, the Democratic-aligned Center for American Progress warned that by extending the sequester, Republicans were “trying to lock these additional spending cuts into place and create a new baseline from which future negotiations must begin.” CAP [added](#) that “It’s easy to see why this approach would be attractive to Speaker Boehner; it is much harder to understand why any progressive or centrist would support such an approach.”

Let’s pause for a moment to underscore the point. In early September, a “clean” CR—including sequester cuts—that funded the government into 2014 was considered a Republican victory by both the Republican House Majority Leader and Washington’s most prominent Democratic think tank. Now, just over a month later, the media is describing the exact same deal as Republican “surrender.”

Partly, that's because of Ted Cruz. Starting last month, as we all know, the Texas Senator—in conjunction with his fellow Tea Partiers in the House—forced GOP leaders to abandon the very “clean” CR proposal they had once championed. The new Republican position became no funding for the government and no increase in the debt ceiling without the defunding (or at least delaying) of Obamacare.

Now that Republicans are backing off those demands, the press is saying they've caved. But that's like saying that the neighborhood bully has caved because after demanding your shoes and bike, he's once again willing to accept merely your lunch money.

Most of the press is missing this because most of the press is covering the current standoff more as politics than policy. If your basic question is “which party is winning?” then it's easy to see the Republicans as losing, since they're the ones suffering in the polls. But the partisan balance of power and the ideological balance of power are two completely different things. The Nixon years were terrible for the Democratic Party but quite good for progressive domestic policy. The Clinton years were, in important ways, the reverse. The promise of the Obama presidency was not merely that he'd bring Democrats back to power. It was that he'd usher in the first era of truly progressive public policy in decades. But the survival of Obamacare notwithstanding, Obama's impending “victory” in the current standoff moves us further away from, not closer to, that goal.

It's not just that Obama looks likely to accept the sequester cuts as the basis for future budget negotiations. It's that while he's been trying to reopen the government and prevent a debt default, his chances of passing any significant progressive legislation have receded. Despite overwhelming public support, gun control is dead. Comprehensive immigration reform, once considered the politically easy part of Obama's second term agenda, looks unlikely. And the other items Obama trumpeted in this year's [state of the union address](#)—climate change legislation, infrastructure investment, universal preschool, voting rights protections, a boost to the minimum wage—have been largely forgotten.

Democrats keep holding out hope that losing yet more public support will break the [ideological “fever”](#) that grips the Republican Party and help GOP moderates regain power. The problem, as the last few weeks have shown, is that the GOP keeps defining moderation down. For instance, the Washington GOP's plummeting approval ratings may well boost the presidential prospects of New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, just as the Gingrich Congress paved the way for the comparatively moderate George W. Bush. Like Bush, Christie is described as moderate because he has Democratic allies in his home state and because his rhetoric is not as harsh on cultural issues. But in the White House, Bush's economic policies were hardly moderate. To the contrary, from taxes to social security to regulation, he governed well to the right of Ronald Reagan. Christie likely would as well. As governor, after all, he's vetoed a hike in the minimum wage, cut the earned income tax credit, [vetoed a millionaires' tax](#) three times and adopted basically the same attitude towards [public sector unions](#) as Wisconsin's Scott Walker.

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Boston Herald

In '14, GOP to get last laugh

by Michael Graham

"No SOB ever won a war by dying for his country. He won it by making the other poor, dumb SOB die for his." — **George C. Scott, as □ General George S. Patton**

Who else but Republicans would give a standing ovation to the coach who just led them into a humiliating defeat?

It happened Wednesday, as some Republicans saluted U.S. House Speaker John Boehner and patted themselves on the back for being willing to lose a fight over principle. "We won a moral victory," one GOP lawmaker said.

And what do you call a politician who just won a "moral" victory?

A "loser."

Which is why good ol' □ "Bipartisan Barack" relished the chance to mock the GOP yesterday with his comment: "Don't like a particular policy? ... Go out there and win an election."

Enjoy the moment, Mr. President. If the GOP is dumb enough to lose on purpose, you deserve it.

But I predict that — like the phrase "If you like your health coverage, you can keep it. Period." — this will come back to haunt him.

At this moment, the GOP is at its lowest point and the Democrats are at their highest. President Obama is gloating over a political win handed to him by Republicans who picked a stupid fight (ending Obamacare immediately) and used stupid tactics (tying it to the debt ceiling).

But what did Democrats actually *win*? Did the president get a blank check? Is Obama-care beyond the reach of this Congress or the next?

Those two fights are ideal political territory for the GOP.

I don't even have to write about how dismally awful the Obamacare rollout is going. hilariously, Democrats are telling themselves that, by next spring, it's going to look much better.

Uh...□guys? You haven't even started forcing people to buy it yet. And already, according to Kaiser Public Opinion, 54 percent of Americans have a "very unfavorable" view of the individual mandate.

And guess which specific part of Obamacare the Republicans just forced every Democrat in the House and Senate to explicitly vote in support of?

Bingo.

Between now and next November, millions of Americans are going to find out that a) they've lost coverage they like; b) their premiums are going up; or c) both. Even the "Friends of Obama" will be getting bad news that their special-interest delays and exemptions are ending.

To paraphrase P.J. O'Rourke: If you think people hate Obama-care now, wait until they have to write a check for it.

Then there's the debt and spending. Polls show that a majority of Americans would rather bust the debt ceiling and default than add to Obama's record-setting deficits. Do they really *mean* it? No, but it shows how much Americans hate this debt — hate it at the political cellular level.

Hey, didn't members of one party just spend weeks outraged over their inability to get a "clean" debt ceiling increase? Doesn't one party truly own the "borrow more to spend more" mantle today in a way they didn't just a few weeks ago?

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NY Times

Skull Fossil Suggests Simpler Human Lineage

by John Noble Wilford

After eight years spent studying a 1.8-million-year-old skull uncovered in the Republic of Georgia, scientists have made a discovery that may rewrite the evolutionary history of our human genus *Homo*.

It would be a simpler story with fewer ancestral species. Early, diverse fossils — those currently recognized as coming from distinct species like *Homo habilis*, *Homo erectus* and others — may actually represent variation among members of a single, evolving lineage.

In other words, just as people look different from one another today, so did early hominids look different from one another, and the dissimilarity of the bones they left behind may have fooled scientists into thinking they came from different species.



The 1.8-million-year-old skull was found during a dig in the Republic of Georgia.

This was the conclusion reached by an international team of scientists led by David Lordkipanidze, a paleoanthropologist at the Georgian National Museum in Tbilisi, as [reported Thursday in the journal Science](#).

The key to this revelation was a cranium excavated in 2005 and known simply as Skull 5, which scientists described as “the world’s first completely preserved adult hominid skull” of such antiquity. Unlike other Homo fossils, it had a number of primitive features: a long, apelike face, large teeth and a tiny braincase, about one-third the size of that of a modern human being. This confirmed that, contrary to some conjecture, early hominids did not need big brains to make their way out of Africa.

The discovery of Skull 5 alongside the remains of four other hominids at Dmanisi, a site in Georgia rich in material of the earliest hominid travels into Eurasia, gave the scientists an opportunity to compare and contrast the physical traits of ancestors that apparently lived at the same location and around the same time.



Skull 5, which was discovered alongside the remains of four other hominids in Dmanisi, Georgia.

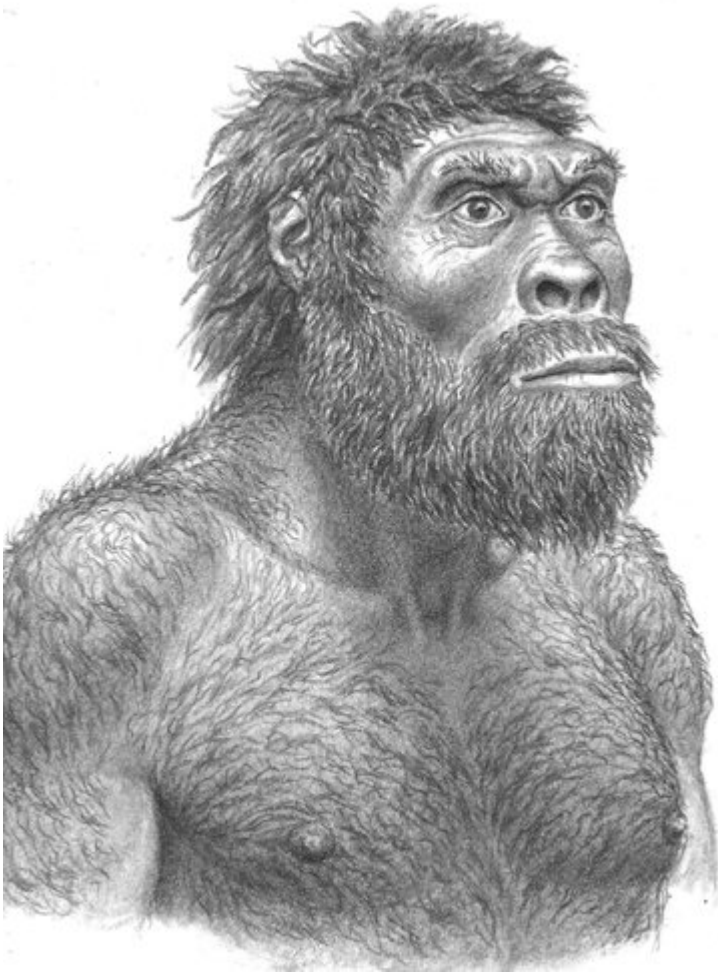
Dr. Lordkipanidze and his colleagues said the differences between these fossils were no more pronounced than those between any given five modern humans or five chimpanzees. The hominids who left the fossils, they noted, were quite different from one another but still members of one species.

“Had the braincase and the face of Skull 5 been found as separate fossils at different sites in Africa, they might have been attributed to different species,” a co-author of the journal report, Christoph Zollikofer of the University of Zurich, said in a statement. Such was often the practice of researchers, using variations in traits to define new species.

Although the Dmanisi finds look quite different from one another, Dr. Zollikofer said, the hominids who left them were living at the same time and place, and “so could, in principle, represent a single population of a single species.” He and his Zurich colleague, Marcia Ponce de León, conducted the comparative analysis of the Dmanisi specimens.

“Since we see a similar pattern and range of variation in the African fossil record,” Dr. Zollikofer continued, “it is sensible to assume that there was a single *Homo* species at that time in Africa.” Moreover, he added, “since the Dmanisi hominids are so similar to the African ones, we further assume that they both represent the same species.”

But what species? Some team members simply call their finds “early *Homo*.” Others emphasized the strong similarities to *Homo erectus*, which lived between two million and less than one million years ago. Tim D. White, a paleoanthropologist at the University of California, Berkeley, called it “the most primitive *H. erectus* yet known,” noting that “it is more similar than any other yet found to early *Homo* from eastern Africa,” a group of hominids estimated to have lived 2.3 million years ago.



All five of the skulls and skeletal bones were found in underground dens, suggesting grisly scenes from the perilous lives these early Homos led. They resided among carnivores, including saber-toothed cats and an extinct giant cheetah. All five of the individuals had probably been attacked and killed by the carnivores, their carcasses dragged into the dens for the after-hunt feast, with nothing left but dinner scraps for curious fossil hunters.

Dr. White and other scientists not involved in the research hailed the importance of the skull discovery and its implications for understanding early Homo evolution. In an article analyzing the report, *Science* quoted Ian Tattersall of the American Museum of Natural History in New York as saying that the skull “is undoubtedly one of the most important ever discovered.”

A few scientists quibbled that the skull looks more like *Homo habilis* or questioned the idea that fossils in Africa all belong to *Homo erectus*, but there was broad recognition that the new findings were a watershed in the study of evolution. “As the most complete early Homo skull ever found,” Dr. White wrote in an e-mail, “it will become iconic for Dmanisi, for earliest *Homo erectus* and more broadly for how we became human.”

Dr. White, who has excavated hominid fossils in Ethiopia for years, said he was impressed with “the total evidentiary package from the site that is the really good news story here.” Further, he said, he hoped the discovery would “now focus the debate on evolutionary biology beyond the

boring ‘lumpers vs. splitters’ ” — a reference to the tendencies of fossil hunters to either lump new finds into existing species or split them off into new species.

In their report, the Dmanisi researchers said the Skull 5 individual “provides the first evidence that early Homo comprised adult individuals with small brains but body mass, stature and limb proportions reaching the lower range limit of modern variation.”

Skeletal bones associated with the five Dmanisi skulls show that these hominids were short in stature, but that their limbs enabled them to walk long distances as fully upright bipeds. The shape of the small braincase distinguished them from the more primitive *Australopithecus* genus, which preceded Homo and lived for many centuries with Homo in Africa.

Mental Floss

When Did Baseball Players Start Chewing Sunflower Seeds?

by Alex Watt



Sunflower seeds—which as any botany fan will tell you, are not seeds, but achenes—are eaten around the world in various forms. In the United States, they’re mostly seen as an alternative to chewing tobacco for baseball players and other bored people with a penchant for spitting. From Little League to the majors, it’s rare to see a single pitch thrown without at least one emptied shell being orally expelled by someone. But when did players start taking them out to the ballpark?

Hall of Famers Enos Slaughter and Stan Musial were known to chew sunflower seeds back in the 1950s. But it wasn't until 1968, when fellow baseball legend Reggie Jackson started using them, that their popularity began to sprout.

Who knows whether it was because of the success Reggie had on the field, the attention he got for chewing sunflower seeds off of it, an increased awareness of the dangers of tobacco use, or simply the satisfaction one gets from removing the nutritious kernel from its salty hull, but players started following Jackson's lead. Which was much to the chagrin of Major League grounds crews, who found the discarded shells difficult to clean up. By 1980, then–St. Louis Cardinals pitching coach Claude Osteen was calling it ["the era of birdseed."](#)

Though the "era of birdseed" moniker doesn't seem to have taken root, sunflower seeds remain a prevalent part of the game. Just ask anyone who's had to sweep the floor of a dugout.





A. Payne

"LET'S DESIGN A PRODUCT THAT DOESN'T WORK,
THEN FORCE EVERYONE TO BUY IT!"

