

February 10, 2014

This coming June is the ninth anniversary of the infamous Kelo decision where the Supreme Court said it was perfectly OK for a government body to take land from one person and give it to another who promised to develop the property for a purpose deemed preferable. The land in question still lies vacant because the City of New London cannot find a developer. [National Review](#) has a look.

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**[Seth Mandel](#) calls 'Kelo' the "shame of a nation."**

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*... Respect for private property rights is an essential foundation for a free society—and our Founders knew it and said so. The court's decision in Kelo looks worse with every passing year, and we shouldn't forget it for a moment.*

**Charles Krauthammer** with amazing counterintuitive facts about health care.

*Swedish researchers report that antioxidants make cancers worse in mice. It's already known that the antioxidant beta-carotene exacerbates lung cancers in humans. Not exactly what you'd expect given the extravagant — and incessant — claims you hear made about the miraculous effects of antioxidants.*

*In fact, they are either useless or harmful, conclude the editors of the prestigious Annals of Internal Medicine: “Beta-carotene, vitamin E and possibly high doses of vitamin A supplements are harmful.” Moreover, “other antioxidants, folic acid and B vitamins, and multivitamin and mineral supplements are ineffective for preventing mortality or morbidity due to major chronic diseases.” So useless are the supplements, write the editors, that we should stop wasting time even studying them: “Further large prevention trials are no longer justified.”*

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**George Will** says we don't have a president bystander. We have president ‘magic words.’

*Barack Obama, the first president shaped by the celebratory culture in which every child who plays soccer gets a trophy and the first whose campaign speeches were his qualification for the office, perhaps should not be blamed for thinking that saying things is tantamount to accomplishing things, and that good intentions are good deeds. So, his presidency is useful after all, because it illustrates the perils of government run by believers in magic words and numbers.*

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**Chicago Magazine** profiles Valerie Jarrett.

*What exactly does Valerie Jarrett—the Chicagoan often described as a big sister or mother figure to the Obamas—do in the White House? The instant histories of the Obama White House tend to portray her as the Obamas' pit bull, a woman loyal only to the president, first lady and her own image. In a recent book on the 2012 campaign, Jonathan Alter writes that Rahm Emanuel, on agreeing to become Obama's chief of staff, recognized that Jarrett would wield such outsized power that he tried unsuccessfully to finesse her into Obama's senate seat. (Alter also speculates that Valerie Jarrett was one reason why Rahm hightailed it out of DC in late 2010 into the relative ease of the Fifth Floor.)*

*Others in media and Washington circles portray Jarrett, who held top positions in Chicago government and business, as a brilliant strategist and thinker who practically runs both wings of the White House and who did as much or more than anyone to put the Obamas there. In 1991, Jarrett, then Mayor Rich Daley's deputy chief of staff, offered Michelle Robinson a job in City Hall. Before Michelle accepted, she insisted that Jarrett meet with Michelle's fiancé Barack Obama. Jarrett promptly took both under her wing and, over the years, introduced Barack to the inner Daley circle, to wealthy business people, and to the people who mattered in her enclave, Hyde Park—all of which helped Obama as he moved up from community organizer to Springfield to Washington.*

*So which is it? Here are six pieces of conventional wisdom about Valerie Jarrett, 57, followed by, in my opinion, the reality. ...*

**... 4. Jarrett is a mother figure to other White House staffers, especially women.**

*She's certainly that to Barack and Michelle: "I can count on someone like Valerie to take my hand and say, You need to think about these three things," Michelle [told](#) the New York Times' Jodie Kantor. "Like a mom, a big sister, I trust her implicitly."*

*And she's certainly that in her own [mind](#): "And I try very hard to make sure that I am available to people here, particularly, I think, women often come to me. I am older than most of the people here, so I try to be a resource."*

*Jonathan Alter's reporting [revealed](#) someone quite different: "Staffers feared her, but didn't like or trust her. At meetings she said little or nothing, instead lingering afterwards to express her views directly to the President, creating anxiety for her underlings and insulting them by saying, 'I don't talk just to hear myself talking.'"*

*Derogatory nicknames abound for Jarrett: "Keeper of the Essence," "Night Stalker" (because of her access after hours to the Obamas in their private quarters), "personal custodian of the president's lofty motives and gifts." The latter comes from This Town author Mark Leibovich, who [quotes](#) from an apparently leaked memo titled "Magic of Valerie," its 33 talking points circulated to White House staffers ahead of a New York Times Jarrett profile. ...*

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**National Review**

**[Nine Years after Kelo, the Seized Land Is Empty](#)**

by Alex Torres

Nine years after the Supreme Court's *Kelo* decision gutted the right of American property owners to resist eminent-domain seizures, the neighborhood at the center of the case remains a wasteland.

Fort Trumbull in New London, Conn., was bulldozed to fulfill the vision of politicians and developers eager to create a New Urbanist mixed-use "hub" for upscale living in the depressed town near the mouth of Long Island Sound.

But after nearly a decade, the land is nothing but vacant urban prairie. After homeowners were forced off their property for the sake of "economic development," the city's original development deal fell apart, and the urban-renewal corporation that ordered the destruction has not found a developer to use the land.



In January, *The Weekly Standard's* Charlotte Allen reported on the horizontal blight that was Fort Trumbull, a neighborhood made famous by *Kelo v. City of New London* (2005), wherein the Supreme Court ruled that government may forcibly transfer property from one private owner to another if the government believes the latter will generate greater economic activity.

Traditionally, these transfers of property, or eminent domain, had only allowed governments to acquire private lands in order to build a public structure like a school or highway. The Constitution permits seizures for such instances of “public use,” but the Supreme Court decision expanded that power to allow governments to acquire people’s land with “just compensation” for a “public purpose,” which in *Kelo* meant the government’s belief that a different owner might bring in more tax revenue.

Even that chilling premise has failed in New London. Instead of generating more economic activity, New London now has a massive plot of unused land.



New London's original plan was to raze homes in the neighborhood of Fort Trumbull to make way for a \$300 million Pfizer, Inc. research center as well as office buildings, luxury condos, hotels, a conference center, and high-end retail stores. Promising to lop 80 percent off the property-tax rate for a ten-year period, the struggling city hoped the new development would bring in jobs, more residents, and increased consumer spending.

However, in 2008, the construction company charged with developing the land, Corcoran Jennison, backed out due to insufficient capital. In 2009, Pfizer left New London, selling its new facility to a submarine manufacturer a year later.

Two later plans to develop the land likewise fell through. River Bank, a development firm, proposed a residential townhouse development in 2009 (after the city again promised tax abatement), only to have the project postponed and later cancelled due to inadequate funding. Then, in 2010, the Yale Design Workshop, at the request of the city, created plans for a large development that included restaurants, a hotel, offices, art galleries, bicycle lanes, water taxis, a pedestrian bridge to downtown, and more with the use of “private, local, state, and federal funds.” The project never came to fruition.

## Contentions

### “Kelo”: The Shame of a Nation

by Seth Mandel

When Sarah Palin was criticized for her inability to answer a series of questions in interviews after her selection as John McCain’s running mate, various commentators each had the one that bothered them the most. The one that caught and held my attention was when Palin was [asked](#) which Supreme Court decision—other than *Roe v. Wade*—she disagreed with. I wasn’t bothered so much by a supposed lack of judicial expertise but rather reminded that conservatives have been too negligent in their outrage at one ruling in particular: the 2005 *Kelo* decision.

That was when the Supreme Court shredded property rights by upholding a Connecticut town’s eminent domain seizure of private property to transfer to a developer under the guise of improving blighted neighborhoods and thus fulfilling the “public use” requirement under the Fifth Amendment. It’s bunk, of course. I would like to be able to expect conservatives not simply to mention *Kelo* when asked what non-*Roe* decision they oppose, but to hiss the words through gritted teeth, preferably with smoke rising from their ears. *Kelo* was indefensible, an assault not simply on the Constitution but on the pillars of a free society, and a nation that forgets or excuses the high court for its role in this travesty should be ashamed of itself.

I’ve been reminded of this yet again by two very good pieces on the upcoming ninth anniversary of *Kelo*, one on [National Review Online](#) and one in the [Weekly Standard](#), which recount the case and focus on the infuriating fact that the land in question lies empty, a flat monument to loathsome abuse of power and the toxic combination of governmental incompetence and contempt for the law. The essence of the case is that the government is able to forcefully purchase property if its new purpose is for the “public use.” For some time, this phrase was taken literally—land for a rail line, a public road, etc. Justice Stevens’s [decision](#) for the majority is a pristine example of how rights can be eroded over time by governmental discretion:

On the other hand, this is not a case in which the City is planning to open the condemned land—at least not in its entirety—to use by the general public. Nor will the private lessees of the land in any sense be required to operate like common carriers, making their services available to all comers. But although such a projected use would be sufficient to satisfy the public use requirement, this “Court long ago rejected any literal requirement that condemned property be put into use for the general public.” *Id.*, at 244. Indeed, while many state courts in the mid-19th century endorsed “use by the public” as the proper definition of public use, that narrow view steadily eroded over time. Not only was the “use by the public” test difficult to administer (e.g., what proportion of the public need have access to the property? at what price?), but it proved to be impractical given the diverse and always evolving needs of society. Accordingly, when this Court began applying the [Fifth](#)

[Amendment](#) to the States at the close of the 19th century, it embraced the broader and more natural interpretation of public use as “public purpose.”

The excuses! We once had a consensus on public use, which amounted to: words have meaning. The courts now admit that, well, words are pregnant with meaning, aren't they? A test of rights that would be “difficult to administer” becomes justification to discard those rights. Constitutional rights prove “impractical,” because of the “always evolving needs of society.” And who better than the government to interpret which rights go out the window when the “needs of society”—as divined by pompous politicians at the top of local political machines given unconscionable imprimatur of the United States Supreme Court—assert themselves?

I should like to know what other rights are “impractical.” The obvious response to this ridiculous display of state power is: if you think governing according to the Constitution and the God-given rights of a free people is too difficult, then *get out of government*. And don't let the door hit you on the way out. Instead, the court seems to sympathize. The state is taking from the poor and giving to the rich, in most cases and almost by definition of this interpretation. But according to the court, the victims here just don't understand that their further impoverishment and displacement so the government can give their property to those they prefer have it is really about the “always evolving needs of society.”

In 1999, the esteemed historian of Russia Richard Pipes took a break from his usual work to publish a book called [Property and Freedom](#). “The subject of this book differs from that of every book I have ever written, all of which (apart from a college textbook on modern Europe) have dealt with Russia, past and present,” Pipes wrote. “And yet it grows naturally out of my previous work. ... In the case of Russia, it is not the presence but the absence of property that is taken for granted.”

Pipes notes that the Western understanding of property has expanded from tangible assets to intellectual property. But it didn't stop there. He explains that “in Western thought during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it acquired a still more comprehensive meaning to include everything that one can claim as one's own, beginning with life and liberty. The whole complex of modern ideas connected with human rights has its source in such an extensive definition of property. This was noted two hundred years ago by James Madison.”

He goes on to quote Madison to that effect. Respect for private property rights is an essential foundation for a free society—and our Founders knew it and said so. The court's decision in *Kelo* looks worse with every passing year, and we shouldn't forget it for a moment.

## Washington Post

### [The health-care myths we live by](#)

by Charles Krauthammer

Swedish researchers report that antioxidants make cancers [worse in mice](#). It's already known that the antioxidant beta-carotene exacerbates lung cancers in humans. Not exactly what you'd expect given the extravagant — and incessant — claims you hear made about the miraculous effects of antioxidants.

In fact, they are either useless or harmful, conclude the editors of the prestigious [Annals of Internal Medicine](#): “Beta-carotene, vitamin E and possibly high doses of vitamin A supplements are harmful.” Moreover, “other antioxidants, folic acid and B vitamins, and multivitamin and mineral supplements are ineffective for preventing mortality or morbidity due to major chronic diseases.” So useless are the supplements, write the editors, that we should stop wasting time even studying them: “Further large prevention trials are no longer justified.”

Such revisionism is a constant in medicine. When I was a child, [tonsillectomies](#) were routine. We now know that, except for certain indications, this is grossly unnecessary surgery. Not quite as harmful as that once-venerable staple, bloodletting (which [probably killed George Washington](#)), but equally mindless.

After “first, do no harm,” medicine’s second great motto should be “above all, humility.” Even the tried-and-true may not be true. Take the average adult temperature. Everyone knows it’s 98.6 . Except that when some enterprising researchers actually did the measurements — rather than rely on the original 19th-century German study — they found that it’s [actually 98.2](#).

But if that’s how dicey biological “facts” can be, imagine how much more problematic are the handed-down verities about the workings of our staggeringly complex health-care *system*. Take three recent cases:

#### *Emergency room usage.*

It’s long been assumed that insuring the uninsured would save huge amounts of money because they wouldn’t have to keep using the emergency room, which is very expensive. Indeed, that was one of the [prime financial rationales](#) underlying both Romneycare and Obamacare.

Well, in a randomized study, [Oregon recently found](#) that when the uninsured were put on Medicaid, they *increased* their ER [usage by 40 percent](#).

Perhaps they still preferred the immediacy of the ER to waiting for an office appointment with a physician. Whatever the reason, this finding contradicted a widely shared assumption about health-care behavior.

#### *Medicaid’s effect on health.*

Oregon allocated by lottery scarce Medicaid slots for the uninsured. Comparing those who got Medicaid to those who didn’t yielded the following stunning result, published in the [New England Journal of Medicine](#): “Medicaid coverage generated no significant improvements in measured physical health outcomes in the first two years.”

To be sure, the Medicaid group was more psychologically and financially secure. Which is not unimportant (though for a \$425 billion program, you might expect more bang for the buck). Nevertheless, once again, quite reasonable expectations are overturned by evidence.

#### *Electronic records will save zillions.*

That’s why the federal government is forcing doctors to convert to electronic health records (EHR), threatening penalties for those who don’t by the end of 2014. All in the name of digital efficiency, of

course. Yet one of the earliest effects of the EHR mandate is to create a whole new category of previously unnecessary health workers. [Scribes](#), as they are called, now trail the doctor, room to room, entering data.

Why? Because the EHR are so [absurdly complex, detailed, tiresome and wasteful](#) that if the doctor is to fill them out, he can barely talk to and examine the patient, let alone make eye contact — which is why you go to the doctor in the first place.

Doctors rave about the scribes, reports the [New York Times](#), because otherwise they have to stay up nights endlessly checking off boxes. Like clerks. Except that these are physicians whose skills are being ridiculously wasted.

This is not to say that medical practice should stand still. It is to say that we should be a bit more circumspect about having central planners and their assumptions revolutionize by fiat the delicate ecosystem of American health care.

In the case of EHR, for example, doctors were voluntarily but gradually going digital anyway, learning through trial and error what best saves time and money. Instead, Washington threw [\\$19 billion](#) (2009 “stimulus” money) and a rigid mandate at the problem — and created a sprawling mess.

This is not to indict, but simply to advocate for caution grounded in humility. It’s not surprising that myths about the workings of the fabulously complex U.S. health-care system continue to tantalize — and confound — policymakers. After all, Americans so believe in their vitamins/supplements that they [swallow \\$28 billion](#) worth every year.

## **Washington Post**

### **[President Obama’s magic words and numbers](#)**

by George F. Will

Barack Obama, the first president shaped by the celebratory culture in which every child who plays soccer gets a trophy and the first whose campaign speeches were his qualification for the office, perhaps should not be blamed for thinking that saying things is tantamount to accomplishing things, and that good intentions *are* good deeds. So, his presidency is useful after all, because it illustrates the perils of government run by believers in magic words and numbers.

[The last progressive president](#) promised Model Cities, with every child enjoying a Head Start en route to enjoying an Upward Bound into a Great Society. Today’s progressive president also uses words — and numbers — magically emancipated from reality.

Thirty months have passed since [Obama said](#): “The time has come for President Assad to step aside.” Today, James Clapper, director of national intelligence, says Bashar al-Assad’s grip on power has “[strengthened](#).” In last month’s [State of the Union address](#), Obama defined success down by [changing the subject](#): “American diplomacy, backed by the threat of force, is why Syria’s chemical weapons are being eliminated.” If saying so makes it so, all is well.

Assad, however, seems tardy regarding this elimination, perhaps because the threat of force was never actually made. The Democratic-controlled Senate nullified the threat by its emphatic reluctance to authorize force. [Reuters recently reported](#) that Assad had surrendered “4.1 percent of the roughly 1,300 tonnes of toxic agents” he supposedly has. The “.1” is an especially magical number, given the modifier “roughly” attached to 1,300 tons.

The English Civil War was not finally ended by negotiations between Oliver Cromwell and Charles I; Cromwell seized power and Charles lost his head. America’s Civil War ended when Robert E. Lee capitulated to U.S. (“Unconditional Surrender”) Grant. Russia’s civil war ended when Leon Trotsky’s Red Army defeated the White forces. Spain’s civil war ended with Francisco Franco in Madrid and remnants of the loyalist forces straggling across the Pyrenees into France. China’s civil war ended when Chiang Kai-shek skedaddled to Formosa (now Taiwan), leaving the mainland to Mao. But Syria’s civil war — after the massacres, torture, chemical weapons — supposedly will be resolved by a negotiated regime change: with words. Next, words will supposedly result in Iran ending the decades-old and hugely expensive nuclear weapons program that it says is nonexistent, and will proceed.

[The magic number 8 percent](#) identified the level above which Obama’s administration said unemployment would not rise, thanks to the 2009 stimulus. [Seven dollars is the figure](#), plucked from the ether, that Obama says will be saved by every dollar spent on “high quality” universal preschool, which is probably defined, with tidy circularity, as preschool that saves seven dollars for every dollar spent on it.

Forests continue to be felled to produce the paper on which are printed the continuing studies demonstrating that the United States, which has [more than 2 million miles](#) of natural gas pipelines and about 175,000 miles of hazardous-liquid pipelines, would not be menaced by the [1,179 miles of Keystone XL](#). The [new State Department study](#) says [construction](#) “would support approximately 42,100 jobs (direct, indirect, and induced).” Obama, of course, has his own number. In a July 24, 2013, interview with the New York Times, he said construction “might create maybe 2,000 jobs.”

[The workforce participation rate](#) is at a 36-year low; in the second half of the fifth year of the recovery, a smaller fraction of the population is employed or looking for work than was when the recovery began. Nevertheless, the administration is cheerful about the [Congressional Budget Office’s conclusion](#) that the Affordable Care Act (ACA) will substantially slow the growth of employment and compensation over the next decade.

The decrease is projected to be nearly three times larger than the CBO had previously predicted. The ACA’s insurance subsidies, which decline with rising income and increase with falling income, will cause many people to choose to stop working, or to work less, or to stop looking for work, thereby reducing the number of hours worked by the equivalent of 2.3 million full-time jobs by 2021.

An administration spokesman did not dispute the CBO’s key finding [but hailed it](#) as evidence that the ACA is increasing Americans’ choices. Really.

Many of the words and numbers bandied by Obama and his administration may reflect an honest belief that the world *is* whatever well-intentioned people like them say about it. So, Obama’s critics should reconsider their assumption that he is cynical. It is his sincerity that is scary.

## Chicago Magazine

### The Truth About Valerie Jarrett, Mystery Woman of the White House

*The close adviser and friend of the Obamas is one of DC's most powerful people—but what exactly does she do?*

by Carol Felsenthal

What exactly does Valerie Jarrett—the Chicagoan often described as a big sister or mother figure to the Obamas—do in the White House? The instant histories of the Obama White House tend to portray her as the Obamas' pit bull, a woman loyal only to the president, first lady and her own image. In a recent book on the 2012 campaign, Jonathan Alter [writes](#) that Rahm Emanuel, on agreeing to become Obama's chief of staff, recognized that Jarrett would wield such outsized power that he tried unsuccessfully to finesse her into Obama's senate seat. (Alter also speculates that Valerie Jarrett was one reason why Rahm hightailed it out of DC in late 2010 into the relative ease of the Fifth Floor.)

Others in media and Washington circles portray Jarrett, who held top positions in Chicago government and business, as a brilliant strategist and thinker who practically runs both wings of the White House and who did as much or more than anyone to put the Obamas there. In 1991, Jarrett, then Mayor Rich Daley's deputy chief of staff, offered Michelle Robinson a job in City Hall. Before Michelle accepted, she insisted that Jarrett meet with Michelle's fiancé Barack Obama. Jarrett promptly took both under her wing and, over the years, introduced Barack to the inner Daley circle, to wealthy business people, and to the people who mattered in her enclave, Hyde Park—all of which helped Obama as he moved up from community organizer to Springfield to Washington.

So which is it? Here are six pieces of conventional wisdom about Valerie Jarrett, 57, followed by, in my opinion, the reality.

#### **1. Valerie Jarrett's power in Obama's White House stems from her position as senior adviser to the president.**

Yes, she holds a conventional power position in the administration, carrying a portfolio that covers such issues as how the administration can boost business in a down economy, implement programs to improve the lives of women and girls, develop better communication with state and local governments and other constituency groups.

The reality is that her power stems from friendship with the first couple, forged by after-hour access, total trust that her only motive is to protect the first couple's images and advance their interests. Valerie Jarrett is not powerful because she creates and implements policy, but because she's the last person the president and/or first lady talk to, sometimes over dinner in their private dining room. It was [reportedly](#) the Obamas who persuaded Jarrett not to pursue appointment to the President-Elect's vacated U.S. senate seat, but instead to keep close to them in the White House.

She vacations with the first couple in Hawaii and on the Vineyard, and she can sometimes sound like their flac: Michelle is ["fabulous at 50."](#) Barack is "just too talented to do what ordinary people do" (as quoted in David Remnick's *The Bridge*). She decides who's invited to small White House parties and state dinners.

Jarrett can save the jobs of people she likes, such as Attorney General Eric Holder, who faced calls for his ouster when he announced his decision to bring Kahlid Sheikh Mohammad to trial in New York. In advocating for Holder, she protected not just a personal favorite but one close to the Obamas as well—after she'd earlier announced that the couple wasn't making new friends in DC. He kept his job, and is one of only two cabinet secretaries who will likely serve two full terms. Jarrett acquired the nickname "[Eric's appeals court.](#)"

## **2. Jarrett has a record of success working for the President in the White House.**

There's always the historical analysis to come, but so far she is considered to have a spotty record, especially on the key portfolio item—serving as the administration's liaison to business. Jarrett came to the White House with some impressive Chicago business credentials: CEO of The Habitat Company, a Chicago developer of housing ranging from luxury to public; chairman of the CTA; chairman of the board of the Chicago Stock Exchange; a director of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. Yet, as the *Washington Post's* Dana Milbank has [written](#), "current and former White House officials ... raised questions about Jarrett's effectiveness and judgment."

*Politico's* Mike Allen and Jim VandeHei [write](#) that Obama's "... relations with business leaders could hardly be worse."

*Politico's* Jeanne Cummings and Ben White have [characterized](#) the Obama White House's "...relationship with the corporate world" as having "a sort of Mars-Venus quality to it. Business leaders say Obama simply doesn't get them and has no one in the White House with corporate experience or who is steeped in the daily challenges of operating in a global economy."

Jason Horowitz, then writing about Jarrett for the *Washington Post*, [described](#) "disgruntled Obama donors in the financial industry... [who] have cast Jarrett as insufficiently sophisticated on economic issues and incapable of brooking any dissent about Obama. 'I have always thought she was a liability,' said one prominent investor and donor.... 'I've talked to people in the White House about it, and they have agreed with me, but they are scared to say anything.'"

It was, well, conventional wisdom, that Bill Daley was brought in as Rahm's successor as chief of staff to clean up the administration's messy relationships with business; perhaps understandably, Jarrett did not warm to Daley—and, according to *Politico's* Glenn Thrush, "frequently shared her unflattering assessments with Obama." Daley's tenure as COS was [short](#).

## **3. In Chicago, before the Obama presidency, Jarrett was widely admired for her skills in government and business.**

In his latest book, Jonathan Alter [writes](#) that the oft-told story of Obama insisting on interviewing Jarrett before allowing his girlfriend to take a job in Daley's administration did not "amuse" Rich Daley. According to Alter, Daley was no fan of Jarrett, finding her "indecisive as city planning commissioner" and refusing to promote her to chief of staff. Alter also writes that a CEO who visited the White House remarked, "When we go to the White House we talk to people we wouldn't hire."

In their book on the 2012 campaign, Mark Halperin and John Heilemann [write](#) that Wall Streeters "disparaged Obama's team for lacking anyone with a meaningful background in the private sector."

When Jarrett would huff, 'Well I have one,' they rolled their eyes; they considered her a political hack, ineffectual and entitled."

#### **4. Jarrett is a mother figure to other White House staffers, especially women.**

She's certainly that to Barack and Michelle: "I can count on someone like Valerie to take my hand and say, You need to think about these three things," Michelle [told](#) the *New York Times*' Jodie Kantor. "Like a mom, a big sister, I trust her implicitly."

And she's certainly that in her own [mind](#): "And I try very hard to make sure that I am available to people here, particularly, I think, women often come to me. I am older than most of the people here, so I try to be a resource."

Jonathan Alter's reporting [revealed](#) someone quite different: "Staffers feared her, but didn't like or trust her. At meetings she said little or nothing, instead lingering afterwards to express her views directly to the President, creating anxiety for her underlings and insulting them by saying, 'I don't talk just to hear myself talking.'"

Derogatory nicknames abound for Jarrett: "Keeper of the Essence," "Night Stalker" (because of her access after hours to the Obamas in their private quarters), "personal custodian of the president's lofty motives and gifts." The latter comes from *This Town* author Mark Leibovich, who [quotes](#) from an apparently leaked memo titled "Magic of Valerie," its 33 talking points circulated to White House staffers ahead of a *New York Times* Jarrett profile.

The memo cites as her "magic" qualities, "her intellect and her heart. She is an incredibly kind, caring and thoughtful person with a unique ability to pinpoint the voiceless and shine a light on them and the issues they and the President care about.... Valerie has an enormous capacity for both empathy and sympathy. She balances the need to be patient and judicious with the desire to get things done and work as hard as possible for the American people from the White House... Valerie is tapped in to people's experiences, their good times and bad. .... Single mother, woman working to the top in a competitive male dominated world, African-American, working for change from the grassroots to big business.... Valerie is someone here who other people inside the building know they can trust. (need examples.)"

#### **5. Jarrett's dual role as the first couple's best friend and their adviser is not particularly unusual in White House history.**

The only White House adviser who comes close, personally and professionally, to matching Jarrett's influence with both the President and First Lady is the FDR administration's Louis Howe. Unlike Jarrett, Howe lived in the White House, but by then his power as an adviser had waned. He remained extremely close to both Franklin and Eleanor until his death in 1936 before Roosevelt finished his first term. According to University of Chicago political science professor Charles Lipson, "[Jarrett's] position in the White House is unprecedented. No one has ever been a best friend *and* top adviser."

#### **6. On 1/20/17 Jarrett will hold the senior-adviser longevity record; she'll turn off the lights in the White House and move on to another chapter in her life.**

Jarrett will continue to harness her future to the Obamas'. Just as she helped with their transition to the White House, she'll help with their transition out of it. She'll be a key player in every aspect of the Obama Library and Museum, from pushing for it to be located at the University of Chicago, where she has deep ties, to helping to choose an architect, to raising money, to articulating and polishing the details of Barack Obama's legacy.

As Jodie Kantor [told me](#), "I don't think Valerie's ever leaving [the Obamas]. ....She has thrown her entire life into their cause, and she's made it very clear that she would happily run in front of a speeding truck for them.... She has taken the president's and First Lady's success as the defining mission of her being."

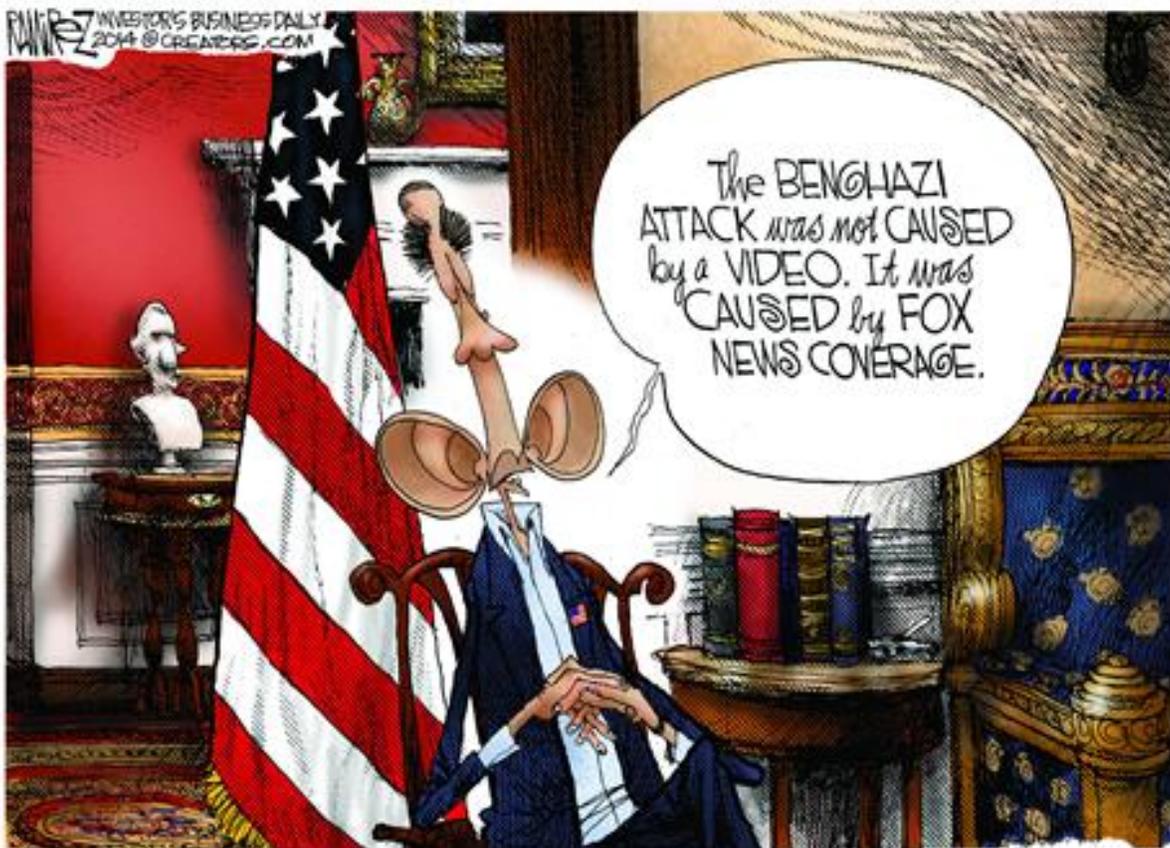
*Carol Felsenthal a lifelong Chicagoan and self-proclaimed political junkie. She is a regular blogger for [The Hill](#) and [The Huffington Post](#) and has written several books, including [Clinton in Exile: A President Out of the White House](#). Among her many stories for Chicago are memorable profiles of [Michelle Obama](#) and [Rod Blagojevich](#).*



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