

February 25, 2014

Another *Pickings* day without items on DC creeps. First an ode to Elm trees showed up in [Sunday's NY Times](#). Although the writer was primarily concerned with the trees along Fifth Ave. the accompanying picture was of Pickerhead's favorite site in New York, the Literary Walk in the Southeast corner of Central Park. That picture, which was too large a file for *Pickings*, led to a "seasons" of pics of the Walk starting with winter. Then a couple of impressionist paintings are included.

THEY looked, at first glance, like trees in a paint-by-number picture, snow outlining branches in idiot-proof chiaroscuro — a child's "Winter Scene." Yet as I stood in a recent wet snowstorm on 110th Street, looking down Fifth Avenue along Central Park, I saw that the elms flanking the sidewalk had an aspect in winter less observable in other seasons, when their branches are cloaked in leaves.

Joined overhead, the topmost limbs rose airily to form a long vaulted corridor stretching to 59th Street and the park's southern perimeter. It was as if on this west side of Fifth Avenue there existed a chamber, a "tabernacle of the air," to use a purplish phrase the 19th-century orator and abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher favored when describing groves of elm.

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Thomas Wolfe writes for *The Atlantic* on another Thomas' abuse of stuff shirts from Europe. This starts slowly. Stick with it. You'll be rewarded. Wolfe was asked to write on the origin of the "American Idea."

Since you asked ... the American idea was born at approximately 5 p.m. on Friday, December 2, 1803, the moment Thomas Jefferson sprang the so-called pell-mell on the new British ambassador, Anthony Merry, at dinner in the White House. Oh, this was no inadvertent faux pas. This was faux pas aforethought. Jefferson obviously loved the prospect of dumbfounding the great Brit and leaving him speechless, furious, seething, so burned up that smoke would start coming out of his ears. And all that the pell-mell did.

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... The Jefferson frame of mind, product of one of the most profound political insights of modern history, has had its challenges in the two centuries since the night Jefferson first sprang the pell-mell upon the old European aristocratic order. But today the conviction that America's limitless freedom and opportunities are for everyone is stronger than ever. Think of just one example from the late 20th century: Only in America could immigrants of many colors from a foreign country with a foreign language and an alien culture—in this case, Cubans—take political control pell-mell via the voting booth of a great metropolis—Miami—in barely more than one generation.

America remains, as it has been from the very beginning, the freest, most open country in the world, encouraging one and all to compete pell-mell for any great goal that exists and to try every sort of innovation, no matter how far-fetched it may seem, in order to achieve it. It is largely this open invitation to ambition that accounts for America's military and economic supremacy and absolute dominance in science, medicine, technology, and every other intellectual pursuit that can be measured objectively. And it is absolute.

Yet from our college faculties and "public intellectuals" come the grimmest of warnings. The government has assumed Big Brother powers on the pretext of protecting us from Terror, and the dark night of fascism is descending upon America. As Orwell might have put it, only an idiot or an intellectual could actually believe that.

Der Spiegel examines reports on DNA retrieved from a child who died in Montana 12,000 years ago.

It must have been a pretty special child, otherwise the two-year old wouldn't have been buried in such a ceremonious manner. The boy was sprinkled with celebratory red dust and given distinctive stone artifacts for

his last journey. The characteristic fluting of the stone weapons serve as archeological evidence that the boy, who died some 12,600 years ago, came from the Clovis culture. It was one of the earliest New World groups, disappearing mysteriously a few centuries after the child's burial in present day Montana. From the summit of a hill towering over the burial site near the Yellowstone River, the boy's Ice Age contemporaries could monitor their hunting grounds for mammoth and bison.

Now a team of scientists led by the Danish geneticist Eske Willerslev has analyzed the boy's origins and discovered that he descends from a Siberian tribe with roots tracing back to Europe. Some of the boy's ancestors are likely even to have lived in present-day Germany.

Their findings go even further: More than 80 percent of all native peoples in the Americas -- from the Alaska's Aleuts to the Maya of Yucatan to the Aymaras along the Andes -- are descended from Montana boy's lineage.

Surprising Similarities

Last week, the scientists published the results of sequencing the child's DNA in the scientific journal Nature. Late last year, the same team published the decoded genome of another early human: A juvenile buried near Lake Baikal in Siberia some 24,000 years ago. Their genomes showed surprising ancestral similarities.

Ever wonder where GDP numbers come from? **Tyler Cowen**, George Mason econ prof with a bent towards free markets, reviews two books that try to answer that question.

'May my children grow up in a world where no one knows who the central banker is' is a wise saying. One also can hope for a world where arguments about measuring GDP (gross domestic product, the sum total of the goods and services produced within a nation) or the inflation rate are rare. In good economic times, we tend to take reported economic numbers for granted, but more recently, conspiracy theories have run wild. It is sometimes claimed that "real GDP" or "true inflation" is much higher or lower than what is officially proclaimed. For instance, both Ron Paul and Sen. Tom Coburn have mistakenly charged that inflation is actually running at or above 8 percent a year, which would mean Social Security benefits are not indexed upward enough and real GDP is plummeting, both implausible conclusions.

Fortunately, the popular economics book sector has come to the rescue with two new and useful entries on what our economic statistics mean and why we should (mostly) trust them. This topic is no longer for wonks only.

If you are going to read only one book on GDP, Diane Coyle's "GDP: A Brief but Affectionate History" should be it. More important, you should read a book on GDP, as many of the political debates of our time revolve around this concept. Can we afford our current path of entitlement spending? Was the Obama fiscal stimulus worth it? When will China overtake the United States as the world's largest economy?

The answers all depend on GDP. In 140 pages of snappy text, Coyle lays out what GDP numbers measure, what roles they play in economic policymaking and forecasting, and how GDP numbers can sometimes mislead us, albeit not in the way many current critics suggest. ...









NY Times

[In the Treetops, a Winter Gift](#)

by Guy Trebay

THEY looked, at first glance, like trees in a paint-by-number picture, snow outlining branches in idiot-proof chiaroscuro — a child’s “Winter Scene.” Yet as I stood in a recent wet snowstorm on 110th Street, looking down Fifth Avenue along Central Park, I saw that the elms flanking the sidewalk had an aspect in winter less observable in other seasons, when their branches are cloaked in leaves.

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So it seemed to me in the snowy stillness of that recent storm. Or it did until an M3 bus rounded the corner by Duke Ellington Circle, nailing me with its slush wake and banishing all sentimental thoughts from mind.

It was not until the next snow, or the next, that I returned to check out the elms, to have a proper look at a civic treasure so little noted that hardly anyone I know seems conscious of its existence. By treasure I mean specifically a 2.5-mile tunnel formed by the American elms along Fifth Avenue, a continuous stand that, as it happens, may be the longest in the world.

“You can’t say categorically, but it’s a good bet it’s one of the longest,” Neil Calvanese, the vice president for operations at the Central Park Conservancy, said when I called him. He added that a decades-long assault on the trees by a European elm bark beetle, which carries the spore of Dutch elm fungus, had left American elms everywhere in a state so parlous that “there are very few stands left like we have here.”

He meant Manhattan, where they exist on Fifth Avenue; and lined up in the middle of a park the size of Monaco in a closely guarded stand planted — in some cases — as saplings in the 1860s to flank Literary Walk; and at the south end of the East Meadow, where rises a single elm easily ranking among the most elegant and venerable giants of New York.

“There are other places where there are elms of greater stature,” John P. Hansel, founder of the Elm Research Institute in Keene, N.H., said. “But in number it would be hard to equal” the American elms of Central Park.

When I called Thomas J. Campanella, author of “Republic of Shade: New England and the American Elm,” he said: “I’m really quite astonished at how intelligent people don’t even notice there is even a tree out there. We know where our trash goes. We know what goes into our foods. We’re much more aware of the environment than we were, and yet the trees in front of our homes are curiously invisible to us.”

Certainly most New Yorkers pass them by — on foot, on wheels or, lately, on skis — sparing the trees little thought. I am, of course, one of those people, bumbling around generally heedless of what E. B. White once termed “the prettiest fairy tale in the city’s wonderbook.”

White was referring to some other elms, specifically 70 mature specimens planted in stealth one long-ago night at Rockefeller Center, to the shock of morning commuters bustling to work. Yet the point holds that, in that particular imaginary ledger, proof of other wonders is easy enough to come by; that the American elms here remain among the glories “of world urbanism,” as the architect Andrés Duany once said; that the elms on Fifth Avenue stand as unacknowledged reminders of a civic culture in which elms played an important role, since settlers first hauled them from forests to plant as the tree of choice on New England town commons; and that these sentinel giants embody, as Charles Dickens noted, “a kind of compromise between town and country; as if each had met the other half-way, and shaken hands upon it.”

Dickens was writing about New Haven, a city whose 19th-century appearance was in large part defined by the arcades of venerable elms that arched above its streets. So crucial a part of New Haven’s identity were the elms, as Mr. Campanella notes in “Republic of Shade,” that they merited a column in *The New Haven Daily Morning Journal and Courier*.

The column was written by an antiquarian named Henry Howe, whose essays, while addressing sundry subjects, repeatedly looped back to the elms. “Many of those who were born here do not fully appreciate their heritage in our elms and Green,” Howe once wrote. Let them live away from New Haven for 30 years, as Howe himself had, and “their indifference may vanish,” he added.

While a rupture like that is one way to appreciate what’s standing in front of your eyes, it seems an impractical means of getting at the awe those like Olmsted experienced in the presence of the most graceful, symmetrical and elegant of American trees.

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Guy Trebay is a Styles reporter for The New York Times.

The Atlantic

Pell-Mell

by Tom Wolfe

Since you asked ... the American idea was born at approximately 5 p.m. on Friday, December 2, 1803, the moment Thomas Jefferson sprang the so-called pell-mell on the new British ambassador, Anthony Merry, at dinner in the White House. Oh, this was no inadvertent faux pas. This was faux pas aforethought. Jefferson obviously *loved* the prospect of dumbfounding the great Brit and leaving him speechless, furious, seething, so burned up that smoke would start coming out of his ears. And all that the pell-mell did.

Jefferson had already tenderized the ambassador three days earlier. Merry was the first foreign diplomat to take up residence in Washington. Accompanied by Secretary of State James Madison, he shows up at the White House wearing a hat with a swooping plume, a ceremonial sword, gold braid, shoes with gleaming buckles—in short, the whole aristocratic European ambassadorial getup—for his formal introduction to the president of the United States. He is immediately baffled. Jefferson doesn't come to greet him in the grand reception hall. Instead, Merry and Madison have to go looking for him ... Bango! All at once they bump into the American head of state in some tiny tunnel-like entryway to his study. What with three men and a sword in it all at once, the space is so congested that Merry has to back himself and his sword out of it just to have room to shake hands. When he shakes hands, he's stunned, appalled: The president of the United States is a very Hogarth of utter slovenliness from his head ... to his torso, clad in a casual workaday outfit thrown together with a complete indifference to appearances and a negligence so perfectly gross, it has to have been actually studied ... down to his feet, which are stuffed, or mostly stuffed, into a pair of down-at-the-heels slippers, literally slippers and literally worn down at the heels in a way that is sheer Gin Lane. "Utter slovenliness," "negligence actually studied," "indifference to appearances," and "down at the heels" were Merry's own words in the first of what would become a regular jeremiad of complaints and supplications to Lord Hawkesbury, the foreign secretary, all but coming right out and begging him to break off relations with the United States to protest such pointed insults toward His Majesty's representative. Merry was ready to bail out ... and his wife, a notably not-shy woman née Elizabeth Death (yes), even more so.

The introductory insult was on November 29. Merry and his wife were invited to dinner at the White House on the fateful day, December 2. Merry accepted ... warily ... under the impression that he and his wife would be the guests of honor and that this would be Jefferson's opportunity to make up for his lapse in protocol. The Merrys arrived at 4:30. Along with the other guests, they were assembled for a reception in a drawing room across the hall from the dining room. The Merrys were left flabbergasted and aghast when Jefferson ignored Mrs. Merry and gave his arm to Dolley Madison, who often served as White House hostess for the widowed president. James Madison gave his arm to an already furious Mrs. Merry. The dining room seems to have had a single large, round table. Jefferson took a seat and gave Dolley Madison the ladies' seat of honor on his right. James Madison didn't give Elizabeth Death Merry the seat on the president's other side, however. That went to the Spanish ambassador's wife. The already insulted Mrs. Merry, guest of honor presumptive, took it like a kick in the shin when Madison showed her to an obviously back- of-the-pack seat.

Meantime, her husband's dignity was taking an even worse beating. He was part of an undifferentiated haunch-to-paunch herd of the titled, the untitled, the eminences, and the not-muches entering the doorway. They had no choice but to take their seats pell- mell ... *any* seat—first come, first served. Literally *pell-mell* referred to a confused, disorderly crowd in a headlong rush, and that was exactly what it felt like to His Majesty's Ambassador Merry. An outrageous insult was now in progress, but he had only two choices: take a seat or make a scene. So he headed for a chair next to the Spanish ambassador's wife. But before he could get to it, some crude savage who bore the title "Congressman" lunged past him and took it for himself.

Foreign dignitaries, even the Spanish ambassador, were flashing loaded glances at each other—*these Americans—savages!*—and muttering behind the backs of their hands. Merry and his wife vowed never to dine at the White House again—and never did. They did accept an invitation from Secretary of State Madison, who had been the good guy in Jefferson's good-guy/bad-guy team—only to get pell-melled all over again *chez* Madison. For a time, at least, they refused all invitations from Jefferson's Cabinet members, too. In due course they officially protested their treatment. But Jefferson had such an aristocratic bearing and presence, was from such a prominent family—in America they didn't come any better than the Randolphs of Virginia—was so filthy land-rich, so learned—he spoke Latin as well as French and could read classical Greek as easily as Plato and Aristotle ever did—was so sophisticated and urbane, in fact so cosmopolitan—he had been ambassador to France at the court of Louis XVI—no one could very well write him off as one of ... "these Americans."

In addition to being seven or eight other species of the genus Genius, Jefferson proved to be a psychological genius at least a century before all the *-ology* adjectives entered the English language. He realized that you could write every conceivable radical new freedom into a constitution—freedom of the press and freedom

from the heavy hand of an official state religion were very radical notions 218 years ago—and install a democracy with foolproof guarantees, and that still wouldn't be enough to save Americans from the plight of the masses of Europe. After a thousand years or more of rule by kings who were believed to possess divine rights and by hereditary aristocrats believed to possess demigodly rights at least, ordinary citizens in Europe had been irreparably damaged psychologically and would never recover from it. They had lived their lives as if the fix were in, as if there would forever be a certain class of people above them who were predestined to dominate government, industry, all influential forms of intellectual life, and, needless to say, society.

Even today, in the 21st century, an era of political democracies throughout the West, the great mass of ordinary citizens in Europe remain resigned to their ordinariness because they still feel the presence of “that certain class,” that indefinable but nevertheless eternal status stratum forever destined to be their superiors. In England, France, Italy, Germany, rare are the parents who urge their children to live out their dreams and rise as far above their station as they possibly can. As a result, such dreams, if any, don't last long. Only in America do visitors to other people's homes routinely ask their hosts' children, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” In every other country on Earth the question would seem fatuous, since it implies that the child might have a world of choices.

Fortunately for America, as Jefferson saw it, British aristocracy had never taken root here in the colonies. Most British toffs didn't have the faintest urge to depart their country estates and London clubs, their coaches-and-four, their tailors, valets, butlers, ballrooms, peruke-makers, and neck-cloth launderers for a wilderness full of painted bow-and-arrow-bearing aborigines ... and no desirable women, unless one were a rather twisted toff who had a thing for granola girls with honest calves and forearms and hands thick as a blacksmith's from hoeing the corn and black-eyed peas. From the very beginning of his political career, Jefferson was determined to make sure no aristocracy, European- or American-born, would ever be established here. *Aristocracy* literally means rule by the best, but he knew the proper word was *plutocracy*, rule by the rich, in this case big landowners who maintained their lordly, demigodly, hereditary rank only by passing their estates down generation after generation—intact—courtesy of the law of entail and the right of primogeniture. As soon as the Revolution was won, Jefferson launched a successful campaign to abolish both. Too bad he couldn't have lived another hundred years to see just how efficient his strategy was. In America, rare is the plutocrat whose family wields power and influence beyond the second generation. One need only think of the Vanderbilts, Goulds, Astors, Carnegies, and Mellons. Where are they now? On the letterheads of charitable solicitations, at best. They don't even rise to the eminence of gossip-column boldface any longer. The rare ones have been the Bushes, who have wielded power—a lot of it—into the third generation, and the Rockefellers, who have made it into the fourth ... by a thread, the thread being Senator Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia. But the odds are 2-to-5—you'll have to bet \$5 to win \$2—that within 10 years the last, best hope of even these exceptional families' next generations will be to start climbing the white cliffs of the disease-charity letterheads.

Jefferson created a radically new frame of mind. In a thousand different ways he obliterated the symbols and deferential manners that comprise aristocracy's cardiovascular system. Led by Jefferson, America became a country in which every sign of aristocratic pretensions was systematically uprooted and destroyed. The round table where the Merrys suffered their intolerable humiliation? It has been recorded that Jefferson insisted on round tables for dining because they had no head and no foot, removing any trace of the aristocratic European custom of silently ranking dinner guests by how close to the head of the table they sat. “That certain class” does not exist here psychologically.

Jefferson's pell-mell gave America a mind-set that has never varied. In 1862, 36 years after Jefferson's death, the government began the process of settling our vast, largely uninhabited western territories. Under the terms of the Homestead Act, they *gave it away* by inviting people, *anybody*, to head out into the open country and claim any plot they liked—*Gloriously pell-mell! First come, first served!* Each plot was 160 acres, and it was *yours, free!* By the time of the first Oklahoma Land Rush, in 1889, it had become a literal pell-mell—a confused, disorderly, headlong rush. People lined up on the border of the territory and rushed out into all that free real estate at the sound of a starter gun. Europeans regarded this as more lunacy on the part of ... these Americans ... squandering a stupendous national asset in this childish way on a random mob of nobodies.

They could not conceive of the possibility that this might prove to be, in fact, a remarkably stable way of settling the West, of turning settlers into homeowners with a huge stake in making the land productive ... or that it might result, as the British historian Paul Johnson contends, in “the immense benefits of having a free market in land—something which had never before occurred at any time, anywhere in the world.” So long as you had made certain required improvements, after five years you could sell all or part of your 160 acres to other people, *any* other people. It’s hard to be absolutely sure, but where else in the world could ordinary citizens go out and just like that—*how much you want for it?*—buy themselves a piece of land?

The Jefferson frame of mind, product of one of the most profound political insights of modern history, has had its challenges in the two centuries since the night Jefferson first sprang the pell-mell upon the old European aristocratic order. But today the conviction that America’s limitless freedom and opportunities are for everyone is stronger than ever. Think of just one example from the late 20th century: Only in America could immigrants of many colors from a foreign country with a foreign language and an alien culture—in this case, Cubans—take political control pell-mell via the voting booth of a great metropolis—Miami—in barely more than one generation.

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Der Spiegel

[Montana Boy: Bones Show Ancestral Links to Europe](#)

Despite general resistance, representatives of tribes in the US recently gave their blessing for DNA analysis of the remains of a Stone Age child. Research conducted on the boy's genes indicate that Native Americans have European roots.

By Rex Dalton

It must have been a pretty special child, otherwise the two-year old wouldn't have been buried in such a ceremonious manner. The boy was sprinkled with celebratory red dust and given distinctive stone artifacts for his last journey.

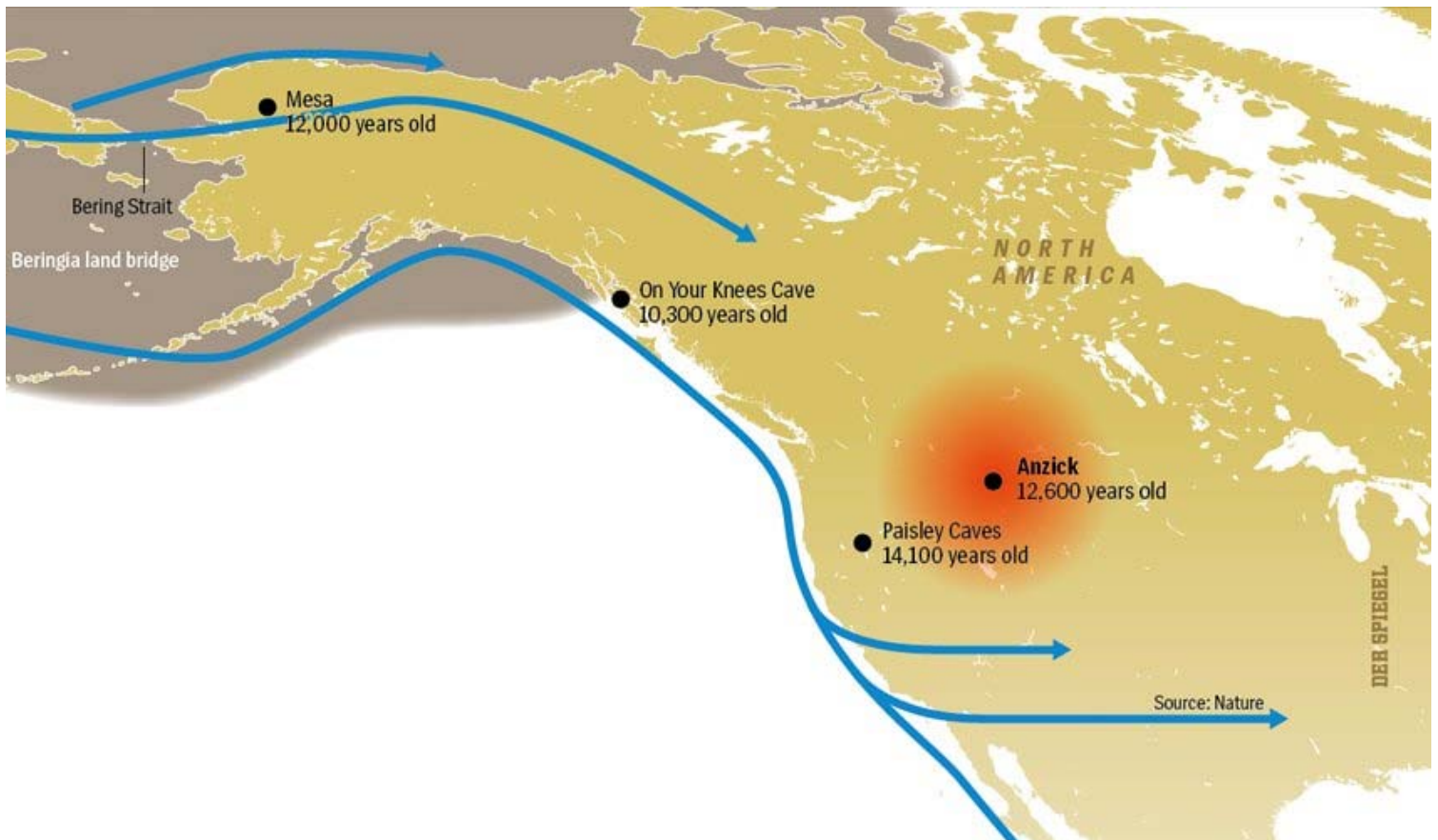
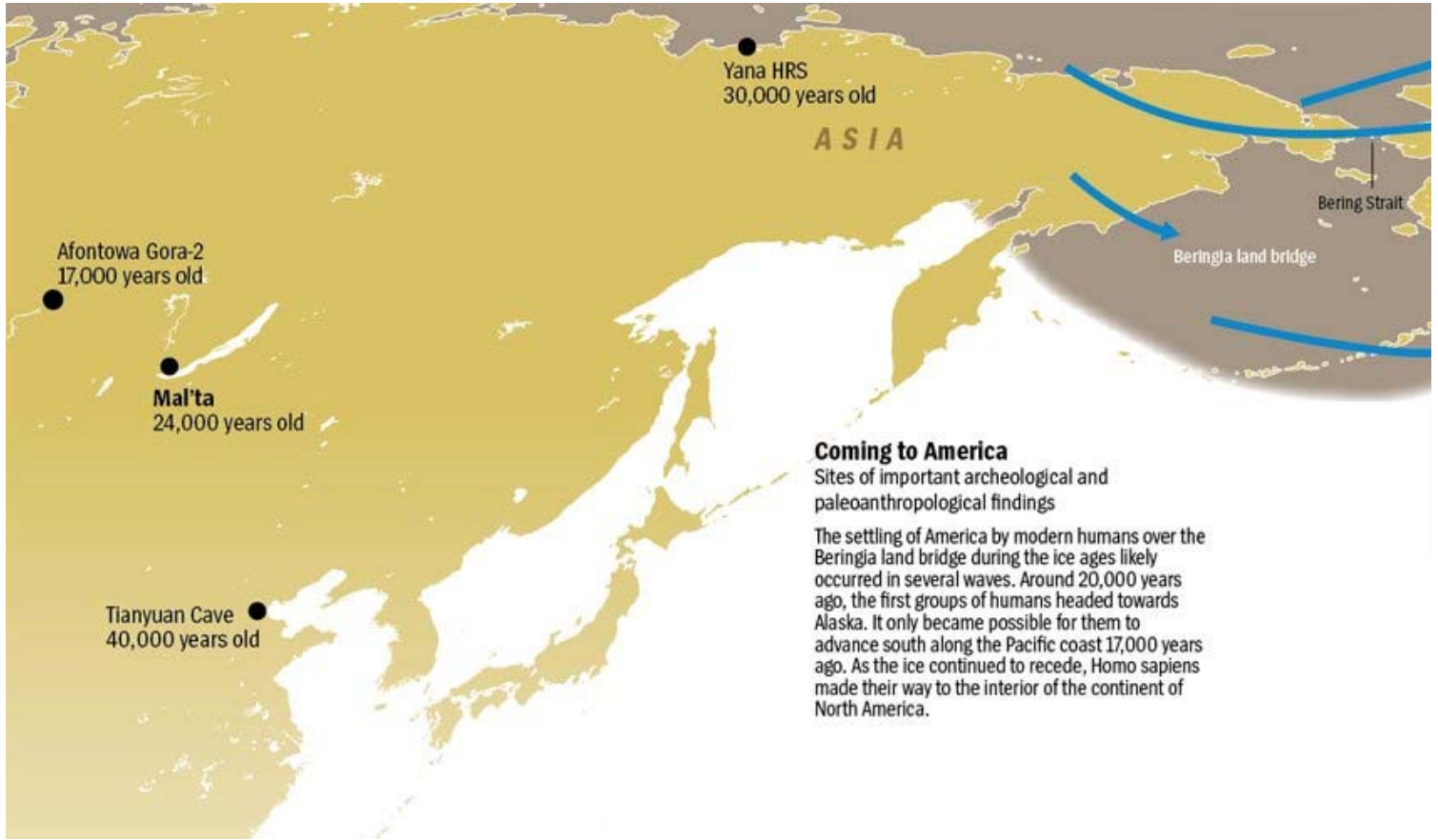
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Now a team of scientists led by the Danish geneticist Eske Willerslev has analyzed the boy's origins and discovered that he descends from a Siberian tribe with roots tracing back to Europe. Some of the boy's ancestors are likely even to have lived in present-day Germany.

Their findings go even further: More than 80 percent of all native peoples in the Americas -- from the Alaska's Aleuts to the Maya of Yucatan to the Aymaras along the Andes -- are descended from Montana boy's lineage.

Surprising Similarities

Last week, the scientists [published the results](#) of sequencing the child's DNA in the scientific journal *Nature*. Late last year, the same team published the decoded genome of another early human: A juvenile buried near Lake Baikal in Siberia some 24,000 years ago. Their genomes showed surprising ancestral similarities.



This earned Willerslev's team an astounding publishing achievement in just 100 days: The decoding of the genomes of the oldest analyzed members of homo sapiens in both the Old and the New Worlds. This has allowed them to reconstruct the settlement of the Americas via the Beringia land bridge during the ice ages -- when what is now the Bering Strait between Russia and Alaska was frozen over -- in greater detail than ever before.

A third of both juveniles' DNA can be traced to the earliest European. Physical evidence also supports this European origin: Archeologists discovered 30 ivory pendants at Mal'ta, the Stone Age settlement site near Lake Baikal where the remains were found. The pendants show great similarity to ones found at Hohle Fels cave, an important Paleolithic site in southern Germany's Swabian Jura mountains.

The results of the finds in Montana and Siberia now provide the scientists the opportunity to trace metabolic characteristics, susceptibility to disease and other properties during the intercontinental migrations.

Overcoming Resistance to Research

The analysis of the Montana probe is important for still another reason: It may signal a new era for genetic analysis of such ancient remains, overcoming a tradition of resistance from Native-American communities. Although American museums house the remains of many pre-historic inhabitants of North America, DNA analysis of them has largely been blocked by resistance from their descendants.

But this time, the relevance of the Willerslev team's studies was appreciated by representatives of the Crow, the Northern Cheyenne, the Flathead and the Blackfoot Nations. None of the leaders representing these nations near the burial site resisted the publication of the DNA data. "This is righteous science," Shane Doyle, a member of the Crow Nation, said after learning of Willerslev's project in September.

This success would not have been possible without the family that owned the land on which the remains were found in 1968. Years ago, the owners of the ranch, Mel and Helen Anzick, had the idea to have the bones' DNA analyzed. The challenge was later picked up by the couple's daughter, Sarah, herself a molecular biologist who worked on decoding the human genome in the late 1990s. She is a co-author of the Clovis publication in *Nature*.

Sarah had considered extracting DNA samples from the Clovis bones while working on the initial human genome project. But the technology was not mature enough at the time, and her plan faced resistance from some Native Americans.

Enthusiastic about the new findings, she said: "When I saw the results, I almost jumped out of my skin I was so excited." The Anzicks' 35 hectare (86 acre) property is located approximately 150 kilometers (93 miles) north of Yellowstone National Park, set amid undulating prairie. In past centuries the ranch's lookout hill served as a bison trap: Hunters could drive the animals over a cliff to more easily kill them for food.

At the same time the hill offered early inhabitants shelter from the fierce winds. The gales also blow the snow off the grasslands, thereby attracting foraging game that natives could hunt. Indeed year-round feed was the reason that Mel Anzick bought the land as pasture for his horses.

The boy's remains and the artifacts were uncovered by a tractor moving earth. Over subsequent years, portions of the collection were sent to various scientific groups for study across the United States. Some bones went to Arizona, others to Washington DC's Smithsonian Institution.

For decades, Native Americans were outraged by what they see as disrespectful treatment of remains -- their link to "the ancient ones" -- which were displayed in museums and shipped around like baggage. They fought tenaciously for their rights, earning in 1990 a federal law allowing for repatriation of human remains along with funerary artifacts.

However, the legislation only affected finds from government-owned land. The Montana boy's bones were found on private land. Thus it was up to the Anzick family to make the only known Clovis bones available to scientists for DNA sequencing.

An Explosive Issue

Such genetic analysis of Native American bones is highly controversial. It is a sacrilege to some. Others fear it could link their ancestors to Europeans, as this study has done. And some worried it could be misused in tribal disputes over who shares in the economic bounty from casinos that operate on the sovereign reservations.

An ongoing federal court case shows just how explosive the issue is. University of California archeologists are fighting for the right to conduct DNA analysis on a pair of 9,300 year-old skeletons found on the San Diego campus. If the scientists lose the case, many such human remains could be repatriated to the tribes.

The sequencing plans first materialized when Willerslev took on the project four years ago. In addition to being a renowned authority in decoding ancient DNA, Willerslev also has experience in negotiating with indigenous peoples on such sensitive projects. In 2011, he sequenced the first Aborigine genome from DNA in hair samples held in a British museum. This enabled him to show that Australia's original inhabitants descended from peoples who had left Africa a full 70,000 years ago.

Willerslev sought Aboriginal leaders' permission to publish the results. He remembers arriving in the Outback after a long drive, exasperated by his driver's assertions' that he would not get consent. "They will never agree, never agree", the driver repeated. After meeting Aborigine leaders, Willerslev won their endorsement for publication, even securing a written proclamation from the governing council.

Understanding Sensitivities

After starting the Clovis project about four years ago, Willerslev and colleagues planned to follow the same course and seek permission from Montana tribes for publication. The first meeting was organized by 70-year-old Montana archeologist Larry Lahren, who has helped the Anzicks to look after their collection for decades. He knew well the sensitivities, too. "Historically, the US government has treated Native Americans like livestock. It was always white man's rule," he said.

On a blue-sky September afternoon last year, the scientists finally were to meet Doyle of the nearby Crow Nation. Willerslev and some members of his team waited anxiously on the Anzick ranch for Doyle to arrive. Doyle knew nothing about the bones, but from the hill he could point to landmarks of more than a century of his family's history. While Doyle grew up amid poverty on the Crow reservation, he now has a doctorate and teaches at Montana State University in Bozeman.



Shane Doyle of the Crow Nation gave permission for the DNA analysis of the 12,600 year old bones.

Gathered at the burial site, Willerslev revealed the team's results: the remains' age, the boy's ancestry to native tribes of the Americas and the links to Siberia and Europe. Doyle's reaction would determine whether or not Willerslev's study could be published or not because the scientist had promised to destroy it if he didn't obtain permission.

After learning the results, Doyle was emotionally overcome. But then, with the tension relaxed, he joked with Willerslev about wondering if he would be told he himself was of Danish ancestry. Finally Doyle proclaimed: "This boy is my cousin."

Doyle fetched a drum from his van, conducted a short ceremony and sang to his newfound relative. Afterward, Doyle agreed to introduce Willerslev to the other Montana tribes, with the group setting off that week for reservation visits.

As a result of these discussions, plans are underway to rebury the bones at their discovery site on the Anzick ranch. There also is to be a roadside monument for all Native Americans to visit -- just like the white man's cemetery across the highway in the tiny hamlet of Wilsall.

Washington Post

['GDP: A Brief But Affectionate History' by Diane Coyle and 'The Leading Indicators: A Short History of the Numbers That Rule Our World' by Zachary Karabell](#)

by Tyler Cowen

'May my children grow up in a world where no one knows who the central banker is' is a wise saying. One also can hope for a world where arguments about measuring GDP (gross domestic product, the sum total of the goods and services produced within a nation) or the inflation rate are rare. In good economic times, we tend to take reported economic numbers for granted, but more recently, conspiracy theories have run wild. It is sometimes claimed that "real GDP" or "true inflation" is much higher or lower than what is officially proclaimed. For instance, both Ron Paul and Sen. Tom Coburn have mistakenly charged that inflation is actually running at or above 8 percent a year, which would mean Social Security benefits are not indexed upward enough and real GDP is plummeting, both implausible conclusions.

Fortunately, the popular economics book sector has come to the rescue with two new and useful entries on what our economic statistics mean and why we should (mostly) trust them. This topic is no longer for wonks only.

If you are going to read only one book on GDP, Diane Coyle's "GDP: A Brief but Affectionate History" should be it. More important, you *should* read a book on GDP, as many of the political debates of our time revolve around this concept. Can we afford our current path of entitlement spending? Was the Obama fiscal stimulus worth it? When will China overtake the United States as the world's largest economy?

The answers all depend on GDP. In 140 pages of snappy text, Coyle lays out what GDP numbers measure, what roles they play in economic policymaking and forecasting, and how GDP numbers can sometimes mislead us, albeit not in the way many current critics suggest.

If you need to be convinced of the importance of good GDP numbers, look to sub-Saharan Africa. We don't know how well a lot of those nations are really doing. In 2010, as Coyle notes, Ghana made its GDP go up 60 percent overnight just by changing its measurement conventions. That's not a good sign for the accuracy of either the old or the new numbers. One reason the United States responded better to the recent financial crisis than to the crash of 1929 was that 21st-century policymakers had better and more timely numbers about the true health of the economy.

The main problem with GDP is that in popular discourse and in the financial press, it tends to displace other indicators of how the economy is doing, much as the Dow and the S&P 500 tend to crowd out other indicators of the stock market. I, for one, would welcome the advent of a new economic statistic — call it "GDP revised." Coyle notes, "We might move toward a different approach in time."

In my vision of such a revision, at least one version of revised GDP would no longer count spending on defense or domestic security, because each of those is geared toward avoiding destruction rather than providing enjoyable goods and services; as an intermediate good, the value of security will be picked up in any case by the production of the other goods and services it enables. I also would not count education, another intermediate good; we spend more and more on it, and our GDP measures are valuing how much we spend and not how much we learn. Let's also consider that perhaps one-third or more of U.S. health-care spending is wasteful, and chop that off, too. With such a number in hand, the narrative of recent U.S. economic history probably would look less promising. It might help explain, for instance, why the income for the median or typical household has risen only slightly since 1973.

Yet markets are developing new innovations whose benefits probably are undervalued by the GDP concept. This is the potential revision to GDP that commands the most attention from Coyle. For instance, consumers attach great value to Facebook, Google and Wikipedia, all of which are absolutely free to their users and do not enter directly into GDP calculations. I would go further yet, noting that the modern world also better matches plans and goals. Perhaps you can meet your ideal spouse on Match.com or at least pick up cheaper collectibles, better suited to your taste, on eBay. Who makes mistaken purchases of music these days, when you can hear a lot of the songs in advance online? Just about everything is reviewed online, which helps us spend with greater effectiveness. These gains are not well-represented by the older methods of calculating GDP.

I sometimes call myself a happiness optimist but a revenue pessimist. Think of a world where life feels a lot better than what the economic numbers are suggesting but your ability to pay the bills is not improving.

Zachary Karabell's "The Leading Indicators" I found somewhat less useful than Coyle's book. It covers more ground, but the wonk in me believes that some of the topics included — say, the unemployment rate, the inflation rate and "Gross National Happiness" — warrant an entire book to themselves. The content is good, but at the end one feels one has learned a variety of points rather than gained a comprehensive understanding. It's the kind of expansive writing that works well for sweeping historical narratives but less so for these nuts-and-bolts topics. Nonetheless, like "GDP," it demystifies a lot of current debates, explains its

subject matter clearly and shows that the major published macroeconomic statistics are neither nonsense nor conspiracy. Most people could read this book with enjoyment and profit.

Karabell devotes more time to the topic of happiness than does Coyle, but here I wished for a more systematic look at attempts to measure societal happiness, as done by Ed Diener, Angus Deaton, Daniel Kahneman, Betsey Stevenson, Justin Wolfers and other social scientists. “Time use” studies can ask people how happy they are in a given moment, and polls and questionnaires can ask people about their overall life satisfaction. Wealth seems to matter more when we measure overall happiness rather than the short-term variety. Perhaps higher earners are more harried and stressed from moment to moment, but over time they have a greater chance of achieving status and their lifetime goals, and thus their reflective judgments about their lives are more positive. Most likely the happiness concept isn’t so simple after all, which is one reason the more statistically precise concept of GDP has shown such staying power, in spite of its limitations.

I do not agree with Karabell’s claim that “Bhutan is now routinely described as one of the happiest nations in the world.” The prime minister of Bhutan, Tshering Tobgay, has moved away from talk of “Gross National Happiness,” perhaps because he has realized that his country has relatively little of it. Most of the population is engaged in subsistence farming and has only a minimal chance of performing rewarding or creative labor. The prime minister instead [wishes](#) to focus on concrete goals such as “a motorized rototiller for every village and a utility vehicle for each district.” For all the talk of being content with less, external debt has soared to 90 percent of GDP. If anything, Bhutan may show that measures of GDP get at happiness more clearly than does focusing on happiness more directly. Just look at where immigrants wish to move — it is almost always wealthier countries.

As the age of big data comes upon us, it remains to be seen what we will do with all those numbers. The danger is that we will measure imperfect concepts such as GDP and inflation with ever-increasing accuracy rather than reexamine what such measures are good for. The big gains from economic statistics may instead come from teaching the public some of the most basic truths about these concepts. For instance, most Americans still confuse inflation, as it refers to a proportionally higher nominal level of prices and wages, with a lower standard of living. When estimating what is the rate of price inflation, people also seem to overweight gasoline prices and other frequent, everyday purchases and underrate a lot of the items that are becoming cheaper. Thus, even though we live in a time when inflation rates are relatively low, and many economists think they should be somewhat higher, the public perceives inflation as already intolerably high.

Coyle points out that the word “statistics” has the same etymological root as “state,” and thus it is no surprise that an increasing mistrust of the state has led to an increasing mistrust and misunderstanding of economic statistics. These two books will help put a dent in that problem.

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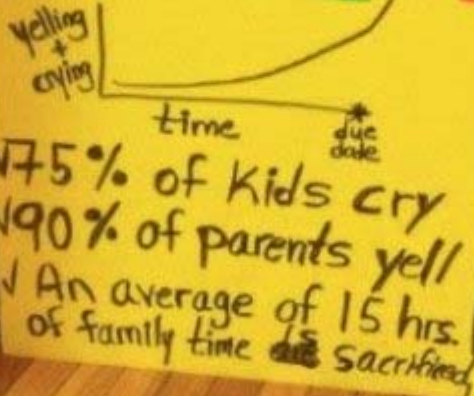
“Simple rule of thumb; if it tries to eat us, serve with red. If it runs away from us, serve with white.”

How Much **Turmoil** Does the Science Project Cause Families?

Materials

- At least 1 Kid
- At least 1 grudging parent
- Half-baked idea of very dubious merit
- Procrastination

Results



Findings

Everyone **HATES** the science fair
by Susan Messia

