

February 9, 2014

Andrew Malcolm looks over the last five years of speeches.

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Well, that's what we've done. We went back 1,818 days to one of the first speeches Barack Obama gave as the 44th president. Back to Feb. 12, 2009, less than a month from his first morning in office when he grandly announced the imminent closing of the Guantanamo Bay Detention Facility.

There he was in East Peoria, Ill., at the massive Caterpillar factory, selling his then-\$879 billion stimulus spending plan wending its way through the two Democrat-controlled houses of Congress. But you know what struck us as we read down memory lane?

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Malcolm says this time lets get a real president by looking to the deep bench of the ranks of the GOP governors.

Don't be fooled into thinking that the 2016 presidential race and its main competitors will be determined in Washington.

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Which is why politics junkies should keep their eyes elsewhere these days. Places like Texas and Florida and even California. There, quietly without much notice beyond local news outlets, several of the GOP's impressively deep bench of state chief executives are chatting up the big money folks.

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Jennifer Rubin posts on presidential pipeline paralysis.

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As the former energy secretary put it, this is not a scientific question; it is a political one. You'd think it would be a slam dunk. He should want to show that he, unlike those Republicans, you know, "believes in science." He is forever pivoting to jobs, worrying aloud about the inequality gap and fretting about low wages. All of these factors lean in favor of approving the pipeline. Yet in this White House the left must be soothed. The temperature of Hollywood and Silicon Valley elites must be monitored around the clock. This is the White House (and increasingly the party) of university professors, glossy fashion magazine editors, racial and ethnic advocacy leaders and, of course, public employees (who don't get anything much out of the pipeline). The money and the energy in the party is with the anti-pipeline forces. Hence, the president is conflicted.

I suspect the president will eventually have to capitulate to reason — and/or to the tears of red-state Democrats. However, the difficulty he is having and the agonizing process he is going through should suggest a fundamental conflict between his elite loyalty and his working-man appeal on inequality. This is how the Democratic Party faltered in the 1970s — the elites of the Democratic Party wound up offending what then became known as the "Reagan Democrats." ...

Roger Simon posts on the New York Observer take down of the NY Times opinion pages.

... I certainly agree about the mind-bending banality of the Times opinion page and the windiness (at best) of Friedman. But I think the reporters are off the mark on the cause. They can blame it on Rosenthal if they wish — I have no opinion, not working there — but the real problem is far greater than any one editor.

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The Times reporters complained of the page's uniformly negative tone, but not even S.J. Perelman or P.G. Wodehouse could write with verve in the service of modern liberalism. You can't bring a dead horse to life. No writer is that good — at least on a regular basis.

How, for example, do you write an eloquent defense of Obamacare or justify the administration's actions in Benghazi without resorting to the kind of obfuscation that makes for convoluted, or at best tedious, writing? How do you advocate for yet more government programs in a country already so mired in debt it's hard to see how it will ever get out? It's Keynesian economics itself that's the problem, not Paul Krugman.

Although I admire many of the writers at the Wall Street Journal, let's admit they have a lot more to work with, a plethora of easy targets for a man or woman with even a modicum of wit. We live in an era when readers are distrusting big government more than ever. Where does that leave the NYT, that great tribune of ever-expanding government? With a bunch of grumps on their hands. ...

Here's the article from [The Observer](#).

IT'S WELL KNOWN AMONG THE SMALL WORLD of people who pay attention to such things that the liberal-leaning reporters at The Wall Street Journal resent the conservative-leaning editorial page of The Wall Street Journal. What's less well known—and about to break into the open, threatening the very fabric of the institution—is how deeply the liberal-leaning reporters at The New York Times resent the liberal-leaning editorial page of The New York Times.

The New York Observer has learned over the course of interviews with more than two-dozen current and former Times staffers that the situation has “reached the boiling point” in the words of one current Times reporter. Only two people interviewed for this story agreed to be identified, given the fears of retaliation by someone they criticize as petty and vindictive.

The blame here, in the eyes of most Times reporters to whom The Observer spoke, belongs to Andrew Rosenthal, who as editorial page editor leads both the paper's opinion pages and opinion postings online, as well as overseeing the editorial board and the letters, columnists and op-ed departments. Mr. Rosenthal is accused of both tyranny and pettiness, by the majority of the Times staffers interviewed for this story. And the growing dissatisfaction with Mr. Rosenthal stems from a commitment to excellence that has lifted the rest of the Times, which is viewed by every staffer The Observer spoke to as rapidly and dramatically improving.

“He runs the show and is lazy as all get-out,” says a current Times writer, and one can almost hear the Times-ness in his controlled anger (who but a Timesman uses the phrase “as all get-out” these days?). Laziness and bossiness are unattractive qualities in any superior, but they seem particularly galling at a time when the Times continues to pare valued staffers via unending buyouts.

The Times declined to provide exact staffing numbers, but that too is a source of resentment. Said one staffer, “Andy's got 14 or 15 people plus a whole bevy of assistants working on these three unsigned editorials every day. They're completely reflexively liberal, utterly predictable, usually poorly written and totally ineffectual. I mean, just try and remember the last time that anybody was talking about one of those editorials. You know, I can think of one time recently, which is with the [Edward] Snowden stuff, but mostly nobody pays attention, and millions of dollars is being spent on that stuff.”

Asked by The Observer for hard evidence supporting a loss of influence of the vaunted editorial page, the same Times staffer fired back, "You know, the editorials are never on the most emailed list; they're never on the most read list. People just are not paying attention, and they don't care. It's a waste of money." ...

James Pethokoukis has a preliminary look at the January Jobs Report.

I will write up the January jobs report — lousy (establishment survey), pretty good (household survey) — later, but I wanted to toss something out there. The recent CBO report on the labor market effects of Obamacare has raised the general issue of whether the US is moving away from work.

Here is a stat, reflected in the above chart, to think about: Before the Great Recession, there were 122 million full-time jobs in America. Now 4 1/2 years after its end, there are still just 118 million full-time jobs in America despite a labor force that is 1.6 million larger and a nonjailed, nonmilitary adult working-age population that is 14 million larger.

Investor's Business Daily

[Five years of Obama promises: What's changed?](#)

by Andrew Malcolm

Did you ever find an old high school yearbook and shake your head at what's changed since then? Not just the obvious clothing and hairstyles. But so many of the plans and promise of so many people.

Well, that's what we've done. We went back 1,818 days to one of the first speeches Barack Obama gave as the 44th president. Back to Feb. 12, 2009, less than a month from his first morning in office when he grandly announced the imminent closing of the Guantanamo Bay Detention Facility.

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His State of the Union last week to a Congress with only one Democrat-controlled chamber was more than 7,000 words long, 65 full minutes. Which seemed like 95 because we've heard the same things over and over. And over. And over.

Also, as a two-term Obama refers to himself a lot more now. He says "I" all the time, usually 40 or more per speech. In Peoria it was "just" 20.

But otherwise it's the same stuff. See if any of this sounds familiar after five years:

"Please, everybody have a seat....We come together today at a difficult moment for our country....All across this country, folks are losing their jobs and their health care and their homes that were their footholds on the American Dream...we're not building new homes and offices, or rebuilding crumbling schools and failing infrastructure.

"In short, it means we're standing still. And in this new global economy, standing still is the surest way to end up falling behind. Standing still is not an option. It's not who we are; it's not who we have to be...



I speak, therefore, I am. (Or as Descartes would say, "Je parle, donc je suis.")

(My plan will) "create jobs. And not just any jobs -- not just make-work jobs, but putting people to work doing the work that America needs done: repairing our infrastructure, modernizing our schools and our hospitals, promoting the clean alternative energy sources that will finally help us declare independence from foreign oil...a new wave of innovation, activity and construction will be unleashed all across America.

"We'll put people to work building wind turbines and solar panels and fuel-efficient cars. We'll upgrade our schools, creating 21st century classrooms and libraries and labs for millions of children across America.

"We'll computerize our health care system to save billions of dollars and countless lives; lay down broadband Internet lines to connect rural schools and small businesses so they can

compete with their counterparts anywhere in the world; rebuilding our crumbling roads and bridges; repairing our dangerous dams and levees so we don't face another Katrina.

"Think about all the work out there to be done...Everybody's got to chip in, everybody's got to pull together. Politics has to stop and we've got to get the job done."

There was one other area Obama talked about in Peoria 259 weeks ago: fiscal restraint.

It almost seems ludicrous now after his four straight years of trillion-dollar-plus deficits and another contentious debate looming this month over raising the national debt limit yet again, well above the current fiscal hole that's \$17 trillion deep.

"We've got to get serious about starting to live within our means," said Democrat Barack Obama. No, really. He said that. You can see on the C-SPAN video below.

"Instead of leaving debt for our children and our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren," said the Great Spender, who's created more debt than any other modern-day president. "That's not the responsible way. That's not how folks here in Peoria operate in their own lives, and they should expect the government is equally responsible."

Unfortunately, Americans have come to expect so much less from this man and his government.

IBD

[It's time for a real executive as our chief executive](#)

by Andrew Malcolm



Scott Walker

Don't be fooled into thinking that the 2016 presidential race and its main competitors will be determined in Washington.

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Think Scott Walker. Chris Christie. Jeb Bush. Bobby Jindal. Rick Perry. Mike Huckabee, maybe John Kasich. Probably another hopeless try for sanctimonious Santorum, who was a senator crushed in a reelection bid.

On the Democrat side, term-limited Gov. Martin O'Malley of Maryland thinks of himself as a contender. Andrew Cuomo sits in an Albany tree awaiting a Clinton stumble, assuming his own reelection this fall.

Not everyone is convinced Hillary's a lock for her party's nomination. Her shadow campaign is growing impressively. Some kind of political message will presumably come in her book.

But do Americans really want a Clinton redux? Seriously, what of significance did she accomplish as senator?

She flew around a lot as Obama's secretary of State, convinced Obama to oust Libyan strongman Gadhafi. That worked out well, didn't it? Libya's now an Afghanistan-style terrorist-safe-haven-in-the-making. Can you say Benghazi? And video tripe?

Walker has a reelection campaign before 2016. And none of these people is crazy enough to have already decided about a run or to let that be known and make themselves a long-term target. But in these days of the perpetual campaign, you have to prepare long before you have to decide.



Gov. Bobby Jindal

At this point in the cycle, that preparation is honing a post-Obama message ("Restore America"?), but mainly working on building money relationships. Christie had a big reelection win.

But he's been soiled for now by the alleged bridge-blocking "scandal," which so fascinates New York media, although four Americans did not die un-rescued in that lane closure.

But Christie's also chair of the Republican Governors Assn., as was Perry. And that's a prime perch to meet and greet every main Republican money person nationally. These are the folks whose money can launch and sustain a bid.

Walker was in Dallas this week for a major fundraiser courtesy of real estate billionaire Harlan Crow, who also introduced Christie around last year. Walker [raised \\$8.6 million](#) in 2013. And you can bet his new best Texas friends will get sincere thank-you's and personal calls in coming days.

Put together continued successful fundraising, based on his ongoing conservative record in Wisconsin. Add a convincing election win Nov. 4. And that's the same scenario as propelled George W. Bush from Austin to Washington.

In Austin, Perry's quietly built an expert fundraising staff as his Lone Star gubernatorial days dwindle. Jindal was in California recently meeting with prominent party donors at a desert retreat.

And so it goes quietly out of sight across the country. But you won't see any of this on those Sunday Washington shows that reap their fatigued insights from the likes of senatorial sages Chuck Schumer and John McCain.

Right Turn

[The president's pipeline paralysis](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

The XL Pipeline has become the Democrats' version of immigration reform. In both cases, the common-sense policy — yes to both — is widely popular in the country at large. In both cases, a significant portion of the party as yet undecided is in favor of going forward. In some cases — Big Labor for the Democrats; pipeline and business interests for the GOP — key interest groups are extremely invested in moving ahead. Yet in both cases a loud element, nearly irrational on the topic, refuses to give way. They produce a series of ever-changing, a-factual excuses. Whether it is an easily debunked anti-immigration study on Hispanics' IQ or, as [The Post editorial board](#) puts it, “a series of unlikely assumptions” from environmental advocates, the opponents come across looking like the worst caricature of themselves. (Republicans are nativists, Democrats are anti-growth.)

There is a major difference between the two, of course. In the case of the XL Pipeline the president can act alone, without Congress and without horse-trading or compromise. In fact, he's required to act (one way or another). On immigration reform, one sees the tricky business of legislating, even if there is a positive reaction to the policy effort. Some proponents don't agree it is a top priority. Others think the timing isn't right. It is easy, even after the policy merits are largely agreed upon, to get hung up. (For one thing, it is not a binary policy choice but a question of what sort of policy the GOP wants to embrace.)

In the case of the XL Pipeline, the president seems oddly paralyzed. For a guy who unilaterally changed his signature health-care law multiple times and rewrote immigration law without Congress, he has on the pipeline gone to the State Department not once but twice looking for cover. So why the angst?

As the former energy secretary put it, this is not a scientific question; it is a political one. You'd think it would be a slam dunk. He should want to show that he, unlike those Republicans, you know, “believes in science.” He is forever pivoting to jobs, worrying aloud about the inequality gap and fretting about low wages. All of these factors lean in favor of approving the pipeline. Yet in this White House the left must be soothed. The temperature of Hollywood and Silicon Valley elites must be monitored around the clock. This is the White House (and increasingly the party) of university professors, glossy fashion magazine editors, racial and ethnic advocacy leaders and, of course, public employees (who don't get anything much out of the pipeline). The money and the energy in the party is with the anti-pipeline forces. Hence, the president is conflicted.

I suspect the president will eventually have to capitulate to reason — and/or to the tears of red-state Democrats. However, the difficulty he is having and the agonizing process he is going through should suggest a fundamental conflict between his elite loyalty and his working-man appeal on inequality. This is how the Democratic Party faltered in the 1970s — the elites of the Democratic Party wound up offending what then became known as the “Reagan Democrats.” The latter on a slew of issues (on welfare, crime, abortion, the misery index, U.S. decline in the world, etc.) felt ill-served by their party. Luckily for the GOP in the 1980s, Ronald Reagan was there to scoop up the disaffected Democrats with an optimistic message that offered economic and cultural refuge from the liberal wrecking ball that had swung through these voters lives.

So too, then, should the XL Pipeline, even if the president eventually capitulates to reason, be a signal to the GOP. A pro-energy, pro-jobs, pro-growth agenda aimed squarely at the squeezed middle class may come very much in handy. *Obama wants to give health care to people who don't want to work?* Then the GOP can be the party that wants to create energy jobs, allow your kids to go to good schools and champion 2-year accreditation programs.

The GOP might think about that — and hope the Democrats in 2016 run a darling of the [hedge funds, Hollywood actors and foreign royals](#). It would be quite a match up.

Roger L. Simon

[Seinfeld, the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times: Scenes from the Culture War](#)

“The fact of the matter is the Wall Street Journal editorial page just kicks our editorial page’s ass. I mean there’s just no contest, from top to bottom, and it’s disappointing.”

So said a *New York Times* reporter quoted in a much talked about *New York Observer* column Tuesday (“[The Tyranny and Lethargy of the Times Editorial Page](#)”). In the article, a passel of Timesmen vented anonymously about how embarrassingly dull their opinion pages were, dumping on the tired and windy Thomas Friedman as a particular repetitive offender and pointing fingers at opinion editor Andrew Rosenthal as the mini-despot responsible for the mess.

I certainly agree about the mind-bending banality of the *Times* opinion page and the windiness (at best) of Friedman. But I think the reporters are off the mark on the cause. They can blame it on Rosenthal if they wish — I have no opinion, not working there — but the real problem is far greater than any one editor.

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How, for example, do you write an eloquent defense of Obamacare or justify the administration’s actions in Benghazi without resorting to the kind of obfuscation that makes for convoluted, or at best tedious, writing? How do you advocate for yet more government programs in a country already so mired in debt it’s hard to see how it will ever get out? It’s Keynesian economics itself that’s the problem, not Paul Krugman.

Although I admire many of the writers at the *Wall Street Journal*, let’s admit they have a lot more to work with, a plethora of easy targets for a man or woman with even a modicum of wit. We live in an era when readers are distrusting big government more than ever. Where does that leave the NYT, that great tribune of of ever-expanding government? With a bunch of grumps on their hands.

Speaking of liberal grumps, I was shocked to learn on the same day that they have turned on one of their icons — Jerry Seinfeld — who opined [in a BuzzFeed interview](#):

Funny is the world I live in. You're funny, I'm interested. You're not funny, I'm not interested. I have no interest in gender or race or anything like that. But everyone else is kind of, with their calculating — is this the exact right mix? I think that's — to me it's anti-comedy. It's more about PC-nonsense.

PC nonsense??? The *bien pensant* are now jumping on Seinfeld because he had only white people on his show. Of course, the comic was right about political correctness. It's not only the enemy of comedy. It's the enemy of human life — no more than fascism with a phony egalitarian face. And Seinfeld, who is being accused of being a racist (natch), is less of a racist than any of his detractors. But that's par for the course these days.

Both of these seemingly minor media dust-ups are yet more indications that our society is at a tipping point. A critical mass may be welling up against the tyranny of modern liberalism. The next few years will be interesting — culturally and politically.

New York Observer

[The Tyranny and Lethargy of the Times Editorial Page](#)

Reporters in 'semi-open revolt' against Andrew Rosenthal

by Ken Kurson



IT'S WELL KNOWN AMONG THE SMALL WORLD of people who pay attention to such things that the liberal-leaning reporters at *The Wall Street Journal* resent the conservative-leaning editorial page of *The Wall Street Journal*. What's less well known—and about to break into the

open, threatening the very fabric of the institution—is how deeply the liberal-leaning reporters at *The New York Times* resent the liberal-leaning editorial page of *The New York Times*.

The *New York Observer* has learned over the course of interviews with more than two-dozen current and former *Times* staffers that the situation has “reached the boiling point” in the words of one current *Times* reporter. Only two people interviewed for this story agreed to be identified, given the fears of retaliation by someone they criticize as petty and vindictive.

The blame here, in the eyes of most *Times* reporters to whom *The Observer* spoke, belongs to Andrew Rosenthal, who as editorial page editor leads both the paper’s opinion pages and opinion postings online, as well as overseeing the editorial board and the letters, columnists and op-ed departments. Mr. Rosenthal is accused of both tyranny and pettiness, by the majority of the *Times* staffers interviewed for this story. And the growing dissatisfaction with Mr. Rosenthal stems from a commitment to excellence that has lifted the rest of the *Times*, which is viewed by every staffer *The Observer* spoke to as rapidly and dramatically improving.

“He runs the show and is lazy as all get-out,” says a current *Times* writer, and one can almost hear the *Times*-ness in his controlled anger (who but a *Times*man uses the phrase “as all get-out” these days?). Laziness and bossiness are unattractive qualities in any superior, but they seem particularly galling at a time when the *Times* continues to pare valued staffers via [unending buyouts](#).

The *Times* declined to provide exact staffing numbers, but that too is a source of resentment. Said one staffer, “Andy’s got 14 or 15 people plus a whole bevy of assistants working on these three unsigned editorials every day. They’re completely reflexively liberal, utterly predictable, usually poorly written and totally ineffectual. I mean, just try and remember the last time that anybody was talking about one of those editorials. You know, I can think of one time recently, which is with the [Edward] Snowden stuff, but mostly nobody pays attention, and millions of dollars is being spent on that stuff.”

Asked by *The Observer* for hard evidence supporting a loss of influence of the vaunted editorial page, the same *Times* staffer fired back, “You know, the editorials are never on the most emailed list; they’re never on the most read list. People just are not paying attention, and they don’t care. It’s a waste of money.”



Andrew Rosenthal

Multiple attempts to reach Mr. Rosenthal were rebuffed, and emails directly to him were responded to instead by the *Times* publicity operation. A *Times* spokesperson defended the page, telling *The Observer*, “The power of the editorial page is in the strength of the ideas it expresses. Some editorials are read more widely than others, but virtually all generate discussion and response among our readers, policy-makers and thought leaders. Recently, [the editorial series on STEM Education](#) and [the editorial on Mr. Snowden](#) sparked a great deal of discussion among readers and policy-makers.” Asked for data, she added, “We do not share statistics or traffic numbers at the individual article or section level.” In a list of [2013’s most read stories](#) the *Times* sent over, no editorials or columnists appeared (two guest editorials, from Angelina Jolie and Vladimir Putin, did make the cut).

Another sign of a loss of influence may have been revealed this past fall. A member of then Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s inner circle who remained in City Hall until the end of Mr. Bloomberg’s term told *The Observer* that the entire administration was “shocked” by the *Times*’ inability to drag its endorsed candidates over the goal line, referring to Christine Quinn in the mayoral primary and Dan Garodnick in the City Council speaker race. “When was the last time *The New York Times* lost both? Those are both essentially Democratic primaries, and the *Times* couldn’t carry any water.” The *Times* also [endorsed Dan Squadron](#) for advocate; he was defeated by Letitia James.

This charge was amplified by a different member of Mr. Bloomberg’s kitchen cabinet who left the administration a few years ago. He reports that Ms. Quinn’s political team viewed the *Times* endorsement as “critical” to her cementing the nomination, which led them to allow the *Times* to follow Ms. Quinn around making a documentary. What resulted was *Hers To Lose*, a [behind-the-scenes look](#) that was clearly supposed to show the historic win of an out lesbian but instead

turned into an awkward and sometimes excruciating look at a campaign that finished in third place, despite the *Times* endorsement.

According to this source, “Chris worked very hard to get the endorsement. Ask yourself: Why did she allow the *Times* movie? Why would any campaign ever do that? They were so focused on the editorial [endorsement] that when Executive Editor Jill Abramson personally called over and asked Chris to do the movie, it was seen within the Quinn campaign as something they’d better say ‘yes’ to in order to get the endorsement.”

As for the charges that Mr. Rosenthal is a despot, one writer provided a funny example that others interviewed for this story immediately recognized. “Rosenthal himself is like a petty tyrant, like anytime anyone on the news pages uses the word ‘should’ in their copy, you know, he sends nasty emails around kind of CCing the world. The word ‘should’ belongs to him and his people.”

Also coming in for intense criticism were the opinion-page columnists, always a juicy target. Particularly strong criticism, to the point of resentful (some might say jealous), was directed at Thomas Friedman, the three-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize who writes mostly about foreign affairs and the environment.

One current *Times* staffer told *The Observer*, “Tom Friedman is an embarrassment. I mean there are multiple blogs and Tumblrs and Twitter feeds that exist solely to make fun of his sort of blowhardy bullshit.” (Gawker has been particularly hard on Mr. Friedman, with Hamilton Nolan memorably skewering him in a column entitled “Tom Friedman Travels the World to Find Incredibly Uninteresting Platitudes,” as a “mustachioed soothsaying simpleton”; another column was titled “Tom Friedman Does Not Know What’s Happening Here,” and the @firetomfriedman Twitter account has more than 1,800 followers.)



From left, Joe Nocera, Thomas L. Friedman, Arthur Sulzberger Jr., Carmen Reinhart, Andrew Rosenthal, Paul Krugman.

Another *Times* reporter brought up Mr. Friedman, unsolicited, toward the end of a conversation that was generally positive about the editorial page: “I never got a note from Andy or anything like that. But I will say, regarding Friedman, there’s the sense that he’s on cruise control now that he’s his own brand. And no one is saying, ‘Hey, did you see the latest Friedman column?’ in the way they’ll talk about ‘Hey, Gail [Collins] was really funny today.’”

Asked if this stirring resentment toward the editorial page might not just be garden variety news vs. edit stuff or even the leanings of a conservative news reporter toward a liberal editorial page, one current *Times* staffer said, “It really isn’t about politics, because I land more to the left than I do to the right. I just find it ...”

He paused for a long time before continuing and then, unprompted, returned to Mr. Friedman. “I just think it’s bad, and nobody is acknowledging that they suck, but everybody in the newsroom knows it, and we really are embarrassed by what goes on with Friedman. I mean anybody who knows anything about most of what he’s writing about understands that he’s, like, literally mailing it in from wherever he is on the globe. He’s a travel reporter. A joke. The guy gets \$75,000 for speeches and probably charges the paper for his first-class airfare.”

Another former *Times* writer, someone who has gone on to great success elsewhere, expressed similar contempt (and even used the word “embarrass”) and says it’s longstanding.

“I think the editorials are viewed by most reporters as largely irrelevant, and there’s not a lot of respect for the editorial page. The editorials are dull, and that’s a cardinal sin. They aren’t getting any less dull. As for the columnists, Friedman is the worst. He hasn’t had an original thought in 20 years; he’s an embarrassment. He’s perceived as an idiot who has been wrong about every major issue for 20 years, from favoring the invasion of Iraq to the notion that green energy is the most important topic in the world even as the financial markets were imploding. Then there’s Maureen Dowd, who has been writing the same column since George H. W. Bush was president.”

Yet another former *Times* writer concurred. “Andy is a wrecking ball, a lot like his father but without the gravitas. What strikes me about the editorial and op-ed pages is that they have become relentlessly grim. With very few exceptions, there’s almost nothing light-hearted or whimsical or sprightly about them, nothing to gladden the soul. They’re horribly doctrinaire, down the line, and that goes for the couple of conservatives in the bunch. It wasn’t always like that on those pages.”

THIS VIEW IS NOT unanimous. Joe LaPointe, who spent 20 years covering sports for the *Times* before taking a buyout in 2010, views the page and its maestro more positively. “The editorial page certainly has changed. It used to be bland, wishy-washy. Now it’s strident. It has more energy and bite. Rosenthal’s voice rings very loud, and I read it closer than I ever had. It’s definitely a left-wing, progressive page, but I find the editorials very interesting. And my brief dealings with Andy have been very pleasant.”



Arthur Sulzberger Jr.

Timothy L. O'Brien, the publisher of Bloomberg View and a former *New York Times* editor and reporter, also has nice things to say about an institution that is now a competitor. "While all opinion pages have hard work to do to stand out on the digital landscape, the *Times* is still a very singular and weighty player and never easily discounted."

So just how widespread is the impression of laziness and tyranny within the opinion section?

One former business reporter remarked that the entire business section viewed the editorial page as "irrelevant" and went on to say, "Their business editorials were relatively rare and really bad. Floyd Norris went up there to make the business editorials better and eventually just left because he got tired of trying to explain economics to them."

A veteran reporter brought up the Sunday Review section, which falls under Mr. Rosenthal's purview. "When it stopped being called Week in Review, I don't know anyone in the newsroom who thinks it got better, and almost everyone thinks it got worse. Everyone I know thinks it's less fun and more pointless. It just reaffirms the idea that he's an empire builder. He wanted this expanded authority and Arthur's giving it to him. He's not the least bit answerable to Jill. Even as the newsroom has cut its staff and budget, Andy's has grown."

One current staffer pointed to the lack of diversity on the editorial page—the exact kind of charge for which one could imagine the *Times* filleting another institution. She declined to be quoted, even anonymously, but noted that Mr. Rosenthal seemed to view the editorial board akin to the way the Supreme Court was once viewed: There was a "minority seat" and a "female seat." Of the 32 people who are either columnists or members of the editorial board, 26 are white, and 23 are male; 19 are—egad!—white males. (During the race for City Council speaker,

NY1 Noticias reporter Juan Manuel Benítez tweeted at *Times* columnist Michael Powell, “Are there any Latinos in the edit board?” Mr. Powell replied, “Just looking, appears none.”)

Another current staffer blamed the same lack of imagination for a recent *Times* loss. When *Times* writer Catherine Rampell was [snatched by *The Washington Post*](#) to become an op-ed columnist, this reporter emailed *The Observer*, “It would never even occur to [Andy] to take a 33-year-old economics reporter and make her an op-ed columnist, but it’s just the kind of jolt his page needs.”

Another reporter told a story in which he had a “scared-y cat editor who had been so frightened by the vitriol that Andy spews around the newsroom about the word ‘should’ that [the editor] literally took it out of my copy every time I used the word when it was applied to an entity or a government institution, as opposed to something an individual should do. She literally just removed it so I didn’t have an opportunity to get into it with them, because she just wouldn’t allow it in my copy.”

Yet another reporter described the exact same obsession with “should” by saying of Mr. Rosenthal, “You know, I think he literally had a Google alert for the word ‘should’ and, like, goes reading through the entire newspaper for it, and that’s what he does all day instead of improving his section.”

The resentment extends beyond the policing of words and into a fight over resources.



Jill Abramson

“They continue to own the top right of the home page, even in the redesign, which is a really, really important place for eyeballs. That probably translates into a lot of readers, but it’s only because they have that guaranteed placement, which they do not deserve, so it’s just a source

of real annoyance. At a time when resources are diminished and people fight over them, it's also a source of aggravation."

Given the near universality of the view within the *Times* that the opinion pages have grown tired and irrelevant, it's a wonder that nothing has been done to address the problem, especially as the paper has trimmed and restructured in every department. (The *Times* has made cuts to its [roster of columnists](#), including [Clyde Haberman](#) and Verlyn Klinkenborg). According to the *Times* spokesperson, "We have a relatively small editorial staff that has remained steady over the past 10 years."

The difficulty comes in part from the way the *Times* is structured. Andrew Rosenthal reports not to Executive Editor Jill Abramson but directly to publisher Arthur Ochs Sulzberger Jr. One source claims that Mr. Sulzberger is "afraid" of Mr. Rosenthal, possibly because of a perceived debt that the Sulzberger family owes to Mr. Rosenthal's father, A. M. "Abe" Rosenthal, for the elder Mr. Rosenthal's half century of service to the Sulzberger family.

Andrew Rosenthal now inhabits perhaps the most important opinion perch in the world, at a time in which the media is awash in opinion. During his long career at the *Times*—a career that has included stints as assistant managing editor and foreign editor, as well as some time at the Associated Press—he has consolidated hold on that perch and answers only to Mr. Sulzberger, himself facing the challenge of filling his father's big shoes.

One veteran reporter who has been at the paper for more than 20 years said, "'Bullying' and 'petty' are Andy's middle name. He's very smart, he's very funny. But any place he's gone where he's had a position of authority, he's bullying and petty. For a time in 2000, he was essentially running the Washington bureau, though I don't think he had the title of bureau chief. Dean Baquet was the national editor and left for the *L.A. Times*, and they put Andy in as sort of acting national editor for the duration of the 2000 coverage. During the 2000 campaign, he developed a very personal, gut-level animus toward Al Gore. And it showed in our coverage. And then he was the assistant managing editor under Howell [Raines], and the consensus was that as he rose he became nastier. He had the reputation as Howell's hatchet man. When Howell was tossed out and Andy was sent to the editorial page, there were a lot of people breathing a sigh of relief that they didn't have to deal with Andy anymore. That's not an exaggeration. He had made himself extremely unpopular."

There is suddenly evidence that the festering dissatisfaction with the edit page has broken into what one reporter dubbed "semi-open revolt." One reporter says that he literally will not allow Mr. Rosenthal to join their lunch table in the cafeteria.

The Observer heard from two different sources about a posting created by respected health reporter Catherine Saint Louis and shared among her friends that pointed out a bevy of bad thinking made by the editorial page in a recent editorial related to the Affordable Care Act. In it, Ms. Saint Louis detailed the many errors in the piece's coverage and asserted that "the basic premise is wrong." (*The Observer* agreed not to share the post itself, since the person who shared it with *The Observer* did not have permission from Ms. Saint Louis to do so.)

Confronted with the charge that the reporters might simply be envious that resources don't seem to be bleeding from the edit page the way they have throughout the rest of the institution, one reporter hit back hard at that notion.

“It’s so obvious that people on the news side find what the people on the opinion side are doing to be less than optimal. And it’s not that we want their money; we want them to be awesome. The fact of the matter is the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page just kicks our editorial page’s ass. I mean there’s just no contest, from top to bottom, and it’s disappointing. You know, we hold ourselves to incredibly high standards on the news side, and we meet them more often than not. Methodically, for the last 10 years, you’ve seen various editors march through and dispatch with mediocrity in many places where it had been allowed to fester for years, from the book review to the feature pages. And so to see it persist and persist and persist on the editorial page with nobody having the guts to retire some of the people or things that are not only not working but have become caricatures of themselves is just a huge bummer.”

UPDATE: After this piece was published on Tuesday afternoon, several New York Times reporters The Observer had not originally interviewed have been in touch. One texted the author simply, “Thank you.” Another emailed to say, “I saw opinion people storming around the newsroom. ... Especially nice to see Andy get the focus.” Finally, Catherine Saint Louis, whose post critical of the editorial page’s take on health care was cited in the story, contacted The Observer to take issue with the characterization of the impact of her post: “I think these paragraphs err in leaving the impression that a single Facebook post by me constitutes ‘evidence that the festering dissatisfaction with the edit page has broken into ... ‘semi-open revolt.’ ” It does not. Such a post would at most constitute evidence that one reporter disagreed with a single editorial. As it happens, I have no objection to the way op-ed conducts business.”

American.com

There are still 4 million fewer full-time jobs in America than before the Great Recession

by James Pethokoukis



I will write up the January jobs report — lousy (establishment survey), pretty good (household survey) — later, but I wanted to toss something out there. The recent CBO report on the labor market effects of Obamacare has raised the general issue of whether the US is moving away from work.

Here is a stat, reflected in the above chart, to think about: Before the Great Recession, there were 122 million full-time jobs in America. Now 4 1/2 years after its end, there are still just 118 million full-time jobs in America despite a labor force that is 1.6 million larger and a nonjailed, nonmilitary adult working-age population that is 14 million larger.





ObamaCare DEATH PANEL

Let's START
with JOBS.



**WHEN YOU BELIEVE THAT RAISING
TAXES AND THE MINIMUM WAGE
CREATES JOBS, THAT'S CALLED...**



IMAGINATION