

March 18, 2014

Seth Mandel says Romney's vindication is now complete.

In the summer of 2012, Politico broke the news that Mitt Romney was planning to travel abroad to make a series of speeches intended to earn some foreign-policy credibility in his effort to defeat Barack Obama. One item on the itinerary was expected to be “a public address in Poland, a steadfast American ally during the Bush years and a country that shares Romney’s wariness toward Russia.” It made perfect sense: Russia had been causing trouble in its near abroad and in the Middle East, and allies who had been ignored (or worse) by the Obama administration were justifiably nervous.

To Obama-era Democrats, however, obsessed with erasing the Cold War from memory, countries like Poland stopped existing the moment they became independent from Moscow. Obama, in one of his trademark leaden attempts at humor, even dipped into junior-high parlance and taunted Romney that “the 1980s are now calling to ask for their foreign policy back.” (Perhaps he was all out of knock-knock jokes.) Hence all the nonsense about blaming NATO enlargement for Vladimir Putin’s actions, as if the countries themselves should have no say in their own affairs but still be subject to Russia’s veto.

The idea of blaming NATO has been discredited of course, thoroughly refuted by events: Obama froze NATO expansion long before Russia invaded Ukraine, for example. But the idea of even recognizing those countries’ existence is generally treated as preposterous by the left, and so Romney’s proposed itinerary was received in the media as though he were visiting another planet. Laura Rozen tweeted that “his reported itinerary only seems 25 [years] out of date”—a sign that she was a better presidential stenographer than humorist. She followed that up later that month by devoting an entire story to various Obama administration officials’ equally ignorant snarking about Romney’s trip.

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George Will on how government makes inequality worse.

Someone who is determined to disbelieve something can manage to disregard an Everest of evidence for it. So Barack Obama will not temper his enthusiasm for increased equality with lucidity about the government’s role in exacerbating inequality.

In the movie “Animal House,” Otter, incensed by the expulsion of his fraternity, says: “I think that this situation absolutely requires a really futile and stupid gesture.” Such thinking gives us minimum-wage increases that do very little for very few. Meanwhile, there are farm bills, like the one Obama signed last month at Michigan State University.

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agriculture. The legislation Obama lavishly praised redistributes wealth upward by raising prices consumers pay. Vincent Smith of Montana State University says small non-farm businesses are almost 30 times more likely to fail than farms, partly because the \$956 billion farm legislation continues agriculture's thick safety net. The geyser of subsidies assures that farm households will continue to be 53 percent more affluent than average households. ...

WSJ OpEd on the hidden rot in the job numbers.

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Although it is often overlooked, a key statistic for understanding the labor market is the length of the average workweek. Small changes in the average workweek imply large changes in total hours worked. The average workweek in the U.S. has fallen to 34.2 hours in February from 34.5 hours in September 2013, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. That decline, coupled with mediocre job creation, implies that the total hours of employment have decreased over the period.

Job creation rose from an initial 113,000 in January (later revised to 129,000) to 175,000 in February. The January number frightened many, while the February number was cheered—even though it was below the prior 12-month average of 189,000.

The labor market's strength and economic activity are better measured by the number of total hours worked than by the number of people employed. An employer who replaces 100 40-hour-per-week workers with 120 20-hour-per-week workers is contracting, not expanding operations. The same is true at the national level. ...

Peter Wehner posts on the left's slandering of Paul Ryan.

If you want to know how fearful the left is of Paul Ryan, consider the efforts they make to slander him. In the past, they've portrayed him as someone eager to (literally) throw grandma over a cliff. The reason? Ryan wanted to make eminently sensible and absolutely necessary changes to Medicare.

Then came Barack Obama, who, when describing Ryan's budget, made recklessly untrue assertions, saying (among other things) that Republicans want the elderly and autistic and Down syndrome children to "fend for themselves."

And now, as Jonathan Tobin has written, comes the latest attempted mugging of Ryan, this time for what he said on Bill Bennett's "Morning in America" program last week. When discussing his forthcoming effort to combat poverty, the House Budget Committee chairman and 2012 GOP vice presidential candidate said this:

We have got this tailspin of culture, in our inner cities in particular, of men not working and just generations of men not even thinking about working or learning the value and the culture of work, and so there is a real culture problem here that has to be dealt with.

The left immediately attacked. Some, like Representative Barbara Lee, accused Ryan of mounting a “thinly veiled racial attack”—one that “cannot be tolerated.” Others, like New York Times columnist Paul Krugman, wrote that Ryan’s words amounted to a “racial dog whistle.” ...

Proving he is one of the left's most decent men, Andrew Sullivan comes to Paul Ryan's defense. And in the process, defends Charles Murray too.

One of the worst traits of some left-liberals is their easy resort to calling those who disagree with them bigots or racists or worse. There are some sites on the web that seem almost entirely devoted to patrolling the discourse for any sign of sin. This one’s a homophobe; this one’s a racist; so-and-so said this and that could be – shock! – prejudiced. It can sometimes be a way to avoid engaging arguments rather than tackling them. And so, on cue, Paul Ryan is taking heat for these remarks:

"We have got this tailspin of culture, in our inner cities in particular, of men not working and just generations of men not even thinking about working or learning the value and the culture of work, and so there is a real culture problem here that has to be dealt with."

He noted that “Charles Murray or Bob Putnam over at Harvard – those guys have written books on this.” Cue liberal freakout. Josh Marshall focuses on the citation of Murray:

"When you start off by basing your arguments around the work of Charles Murray you just lose your credibility from the start as someone actually interested in addressing poverty or joblessness or really doing anything other than coming up with reasons to cut off what little assistance society provides for its most marginalized members or, alternatively, pumping up people with racial resentments against black people and giving them ersatz ‘scholarship’ to justify their racial antipathies. ..."

After all the noise about the missing jet comes an article from Wired that makes sense. Remember Occam's Razor - the simplest explanation is the best.

... We know the story of MH370: A loaded Boeing 777 departs at midnight from Kuala Lumpur, headed to Beijing. A hot night. A heavy aircraft. About an hour out, across the gulf toward Vietnam, the plane goes dark, meaning the transponder and secondary radar tracking go off. Two days later we hear reports that Malaysian military radar (which is a primary radar, meaning the plane is tracked by reflection rather than by transponder interrogation response) has tracked the plane on a southwesterly course back across the Malay Peninsula into the Strait of Malacca.

The left turn is the key here. Zaharie Ahmad Shah¹ was a very experienced senior captain with 18,000 hours of flight time. We old pilots were drilled to know what is the closest airport of safe harbor while in cruise. Airports behind us, airports abeam us, and airports ahead of us. They’re always in our head. Always. If something happens, you don’t want to be thinking about what are you going to do—you already know what you are going to do. When I saw that left turn with a direct heading, I instinctively knew he was heading for an airport. He was taking a direct route to Palau Langkawi, a 13,000-foot airstrip with an approach over water and no obstacles. The captain did not turn back to Kuala Lumpur because he knew he had 8,000-foot ridges to cross. He knew the terrain was friendlier toward Langkawi, which also was closer.

Take a look at this airport on Google Earth. The pilot did all the right things. He was confronted by some major event onboard that made him make an immediate turn to the closest, safest airport.

When I heard this I immediately brought up Google Earth and searched for airports in proximity to the track toward the southwest.

For me, the loss of transponders and communications makes perfect sense in a fire. And there most likely was an electrical fire. In the case of a fire, the first response is to pull the main busses and restore circuits one by one until you have isolated the bad one. If they pulled the busses, the plane would go silent. It probably was a serious event and the flight crew was occupied with controlling the plane and trying to fight the fire. Aviate, navigate, and lastly, communicate is the mantra in such situations. ...

Contentions

Romney's Vindication Is Complete

by Seth Mandel

In the summer of 2012, Politico [broke the news](#) that Mitt Romney was planning to travel abroad to make a series of speeches intended to earn some foreign-policy credibility in his effort to defeat Barack Obama. One item on the itinerary was expected to be “a public address in Poland, a steadfast American ally during the Bush years and a country that shares Romney’s wariness toward Russia.” It made perfect sense: Russia had been causing trouble in its near abroad and in the Middle East, and allies who had been ignored (or worse) by the Obama administration were justifiably nervous.

To Obama-era Democrats, however, obsessed with erasing the Cold War from memory, countries like Poland stopped existing the moment they became independent from Moscow. Obama, in one of his trademark leaden attempts at humor, even dipped into junior-high parlance and [taunted](#) Romney that “the 1980s are now calling to ask for their foreign policy back.” (Perhaps he was all out of knock-knock jokes.) Hence all the nonsense about blaming NATO enlargement for Vladimir Putin’s actions, as if the countries themselves should have no say in their own affairs but still be subject to Russia’s veto.

The idea of blaming NATO has been discredited of course, thoroughly refuted by events: Obama froze NATO expansion long before Russia invaded Ukraine, for example. But the idea of even recognizing those countries’ existence is generally treated as preposterous by the left, and so Romney’s proposed itinerary was received in the media as though he were visiting another planet. Laura Rozen [tweeted](#) that “his reported itinerary only seems 25 [years] out of date”—a sign that she was a better presidential stenographer than humorist. She followed that up later that month by devoting an [entire story](#) to various Obama administration officials’ equally ignorant snarking about Romney’s trip.

There were signs that the media had begun to figure out that they’d been had—that the Obama White House talking points they were parroting were making them look ridiculous. As Russia took center stage on world affairs in recent months, Romney began receiving respectful hearings on liberal cable news outlets and a refrain of “Romney was right” could be heard [bouncing around](#)

among the left. Now Vice President Joe Biden is visiting Poland on his own reassurance tour and Romney has taken to the pages of the *Wall Street Journal* to [describe](#) the strategic and diplomatic failures that led to this point. This morning, the *New York Times*'s Mark Landler [tweeted](#):

Sitting in Warsaw reading Mitt Romney on POTUS: I think we can all agree the 80's got its foreign policy back.

Romney's op-ed in the *Journal* is being discussed as a classic "I told you so," but Romney's far too polite to say it. It's also not necessary. Nonetheless, he certainly does criticize Obama's leadership, noting that each time a potential crisis turns into an actual crisis, the president throws up his hands and defensively demands just what he's supposed to do about it. There's a reason for that, Romney writes:

A large part of the answer is our leader's terrible timing. In virtually every foreign-affairs crisis we have faced these past five years, there was a point when America had good choices and good options. There was a juncture when America had the potential to influence events. But we failed to act at the propitious point; that moment having passed, we were left without acceptable options. In foreign affairs as in life, there is, as Shakespeare had it, "a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood leads on to fortune. Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries."

If anything, Romney is actually too charitable toward Obama when he writes:

When protests in Ukraine grew and violence ensued, it was surely evident to people in the intelligence community—and to the White House—that President Putin might try to take advantage of the situation to capture Crimea, or more. That was the time to talk with our global allies about punishments and sanctions, to secure their solidarity, and to communicate these to the Russian president. These steps, plus assurances that we would not exclude Russia from its base in Sevastopol or threaten its influence in Kiev, might have dissuaded him from invasion.

But in fact it's not clear the administration knew anything of the sort. The intelligence community leaked that there would surely be [no Russian invasion](#) on the eve of the Russian invasion. Romney assumes that because he understands Putin and is therefore able to predict his behavior with some accuracy, the president does as well. The evidence suggests, however, that this isn't the case. It remains to be seen if Obama finally gets it, now that Putin has made his point impossible to ignore.

Washington Post

[Democrats are making income inequality worse](#)

by George F. Will

Someone who is determined to disbelieve something can manage to disregard an Everest of evidence for it. So Barack Obama will not temper his enthusiasm for increased equality with lucidity about the government's role in exacerbating inequality.

In the movie "[Animal House](#)," Otter, incensed by the expulsion of his fraternity, says: "I think that this situation absolutely requires a really futile and stupid gesture." Such thinking [gives us](#)

[minimum-wage increases that do very little for very few](#). Meanwhile, there are [farm bills](#), like the one Obama signed last month at Michigan State University.

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Certain payments are, however, restricted. People making more than \$900,000 annually are ineligible.

Seventy percent of [Agriculture Department spending funds food services](#). Nearly 48 million people — almost as many live on the West Coast (in California, Oregon and Washington) — [receive food stamps](#). This dependency, inimical to upward mobility, is assiduously cultivated by government through “outreach initiatives” to “increase awareness” and “streamline the application process.”

Between 2000, when 17 million received food stamps, and 2006, [food stamp spending doubled](#), even though unemployment [averaged just 5.1 percent](#). A few states have [food stamp recruiters](#). An award was given to a state agency for a plan to cure “[mountain pride](#)” that afflicts “those who wished not to rely on others.”

Nearly two-thirds of households receiving food stamps qualify under “[categorical eligibility](#)” because they receive transportation assistance or certain other welfare services. We spend \$1 trillion annually on federal welfare programs, decades after [Daniel Patrick Moynihan](#) said that if one-third of the money for poverty programs was given directly to the poor, there would be no poor. But there also would be no unionized poverty bureaucrats prospering and paying dues that fund the campaigns of Democratic politicians theatrically heartsick about inequality.

The welfare state, primarily devoted to pensions and medical care for the elderly, aggravates inequality. Young people just starting up the earnings ladder and families in the child-rearing, tuition-paying years subsidize the elderly, who have had lifetimes of accumulation. Households headed by people age [75 and older have the highest median net worth](#) of any age group.

In this sixth year of near-zero interest rates, the government's monetary policy breeds inequality. Low rates are *intended* to drive liquidity into the stock market in search of higher yields. The resulting boom in equity markets — up [30 percent last year](#) alone — has primarily benefited the 10 percent who own 80 percent of all directly owned stocks. [Charles Wolf writes in the Weekly Standard](#): “The financial sector's profits rose from 18 percent of total corporate profits preceding the recession in 2007 to 23 percent in 2013.”

[Richard Fisher, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas](#), says the total reserves of depository institutions “have ballooned from a pre-crisis level of \$43 billion to \$2.5 trillion.”

And? “The store of bank reserves awaiting discharge into the economy through our banking system is vast, yet it lies fallow.” The result is a scandal of squandered potential:

“In fourth quarter 2007, the nation’s gross domestic product (GDP) was \$14.7 trillion; at year-end 2013 it was estimated to be \$17.1 trillion. Had we continued on the path we were on before the crisis, real GDP would currently be roughly \$20 trillion in size. That’s a third larger than it was in 2007. Yet the amount of money lying fallow in the banking system is 60 times greater now than it was at year-end 2007.”

The monetary base having expanded 340 percent in six years, there is abundant money for businesses. But, says Fisher, the federal government’s fiscal and regulatory policies discourage businesses from growing the economy with the mountain of money the Fed has created. This is why “the most vital organ of our nation’s economy — the middle-income worker — is being eviscerated.” And why the loudest complaints about inequality are coming from those whose policies worsen it.

WSJ

The Hidden Rot in the Jobs Numbers

Hours worked are declining, resulting in the equivalent of a net loss of 100,000 jobs since September.

by Edward Lazear

Most commentators viewed the February jobs report released on March 7 as good news, indicating that the labor market is on a favorable growth path. A more careful reading shows that employment actually fell—as it has in four out of the past six months and in more than one-third of the months during the past two years.

Although it is often overlooked, a key statistic for understanding the labor market is the length of the average workweek. Small changes in the average workweek imply large changes in total hours worked. The average workweek in the U.S. has fallen to 34.2 hours in February from 34.5 hours in September 2013, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. That decline, coupled with mediocre job creation, implies that the total hours of employment have decreased over the period.

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The labor market's strength and economic activity are better measured by the number of total hours worked than by the number of people employed. An employer who replaces 100 40-hour-per-week workers with 120 20-hour-per-week workers is contracting, not expanding operations. The same is true at the national level.

The total hours worked per week is obtained by multiplying the reported average workweek hours by the number of workers employed. The decline in the average workweek for all employees on private nonfarm payrolls by 3/10ths of an hour—offset partially by the increase in the number of people working—means that real labor usage on net, taking into account hours worked, fell by the equivalent of 100,000 jobs since September.

Here's a fuller explanation. The job-equivalence number is computed simply by taking the total decline in hours and dividing by the average workweek. For example, if the average worker was employed for 34.4 hours and total hours worked declined by 344 hours, the 344 hours would be the equivalent of losing 10 workers' worth of labor. Thus, although the U.S. economy added about 900,000 jobs since

September, the shortened workweek is equivalent to losing about one million jobs during this same period. The difference between the loss of the equivalent of one million jobs and the gain of 900,000 new jobs yields a net effect of the equivalent of 100,000 lost jobs.

The decline of 1/10th of an hour in the average workweek—say, to 34.2 from 34.3, as occurred between January and February—is like losing about 340,000 private nonfarm jobs, which is approximately 80% greater than the average monthly job gain during the past year. The reverse is also true. In months when the average workweek rises, the jobs numbers understate the amount of labor growth. That did occur earlier in the recovery, with a general upward trend in the average workweek between October 2009 and February 2012.

What accounts for the declining average workweek? In some instances—but not this one—a minor drop could be the result of a statistical fluke caused by rounding. Because the Bureau of Labor Statistics only reports hours to the nearest 1/10th, a small movement, say, to 34.449 hours from 34.450 hours, would be reported as a reduction in hours worked to 34.4 from 34.5, vastly overstating the loss in worked time. But the six-month decline in the workweek, to 34.2 from 34.5 hours, cannot be the consequence of a rounding error.

Was it the harsh winter in much of the United States? One problem with that explanation is that the numbers are already seasonally adjusted.

Imperfections in the adjustment method can result in weather effects, but the magnitude is far from clear, especially given that parts of the West, Midwest and South experienced milder-than-normal weather, with fewer business-reducing storms. Also, the shortening of the workweek began before the winter set in, with declines in hours from September to October.

Another possibility for the declining average workweek is the [Affordable Care Act](#). That law induces businesses with fewer than 50 full-time employees—full-time defined as 30 hours per week—to keep the number of hours low to avoid having to provide health insurance. The jury is still out on this explanation, but research by Luis Garicano, Claire LeLarge and John Van Reenen (National Bureau of Economic Research, February 2013) has shown that laws that can be evaded by keeping firms small or hours low can have significant effects on employment.

The improvement in average weekly hours worked was reason for celebration after the recovery began. The recent decline is cause for concern. It gives us a more accurate but dismal picture of the past two quarters.

Mr. Lazear, who was chairman of the president's Council of Economic Advisers from 2006-09, is a professor at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business and a fellow at the Hoover Institution.

Contentions

[The Liberal Slandering of Paul Ryan](#)

by Peter Wehner

If you want to know how fearful the left is of Paul Ryan, consider the efforts they make to slander him. In the past, they've [portrayed him](#) as someone eager to (literally) throw grandma over a cliff. The reason? Ryan wanted to make eminently sensible and absolutely necessary changes to Medicare.

Then came Barack Obama, who, when describing Ryan's budget, made recklessly untrue assertions, [saying](#) (among other things) that Republicans want the elderly and autistic and Down syndrome children to "fend for themselves."

And now, as Jonathan Tobin has [written](#), comes the latest attempted mugging of Ryan, this time for what he said on Bill Bennett's "Morning in America" program last week. When discussing his forthcoming effort to combat poverty, the House Budget Committee chairman and 2012 GOP vice presidential candidate said this:

We have got this tailspin of culture, in our inner cities in particular, of men not working and just generations of men not even thinking about working or learning the value and the culture of work, and so there is a real culture problem here that has to be dealt with.

The left immediately attacked. Some, like Representative Barbara Lee, [accused Ryan](#) of mounting a "thinly veiled racial attack"—one that "cannot be tolerated." Others, like *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman, [wrote](#) that Ryan's words amounted to a "racial dog whistle."

These charges, and there are plenty of others like them, are grotesquely false. I have known Ryan since he was a colleague at Empower America in the 1990s. One of the reasons he was so close to both Bennett and Jack Kemp is because Ryan had a deep concern for those living in the shadows of society, including in America's inner cities. He also believes Republicans have not focused enough on the problems plaguing the underclass. Both help explain his latest effort to offer conservative solutions to rising poverty.

It should matter that what Ryan told Bennett is true, as anyone who has spent time in America's inner cities and working with kids there can testify. The reasons for the hardships facing those living in America's inner cities are complicated and not simply cultural; they are economic as well. But to say that there isn't a problematic culture that has taken root in America's inner cities is a lie; and to attack those like Ryan who speak about it is to compound the lie.

Why are some liberals doing this? For one thing, they are intellectually exhausted. They know they cannot win the debate on the merits, and so they resort to *ad hominem* attacks. It is what some on the left instantaneously resort to. Mr. Krugman is a prime example of this. He is a man who seems to gain energy from nursing his political hatreds and takes delight in degrading political commentary. (The latter isn't an easy achievement.)

But as Jonathan points out, there's something more fundamental going on here. Liberals who have complicity in the problems plaguing America's inner cities are attempting to make an honest conversation about poverty impossible. They are signaling that they intend to try to take out Republicans who want to address some of the root causes, the behavioral causes, of poverty.

The danger here is two-fold. One is that by promiscuously invoking racism when it doesn't apply, they are draining the term of real meaning. Many people already have stopped, and many more will stop, paying attention when the term is so carelessly bandied about.

The other is that some on the left not only aren't focusing on the institutions, policies, and individuals who are responsible for exacerbating poverty; they are actually building a protective wall around them. For them the villain isn't, say, the ruinous public school systems in Chicago, Detroit, and D.C. that are destroying the lives and future of hundreds of thousands of kids; it's Paul

Ryan, who among other things supports school choice for inner-city parents. This is what large parts of liberalism have been reduced to: the praetorian guard of corrupt, poverty-creating institutions and organizations.

Paul Ryan is among the most decent and admirable politicians in America. He's also among the smartest. Which explains the obsession and hatred many on the left have with him. He's a threat to their ideas, to their policies, and ultimately to their power. The viciousness of their attacks is a testimony to his effectiveness. What was said by those who supported Franklin Roosevelt can also be said by those who admire Paul Ryan: We love you for the enemies you have made.

The Dish

The Smearing Of Ryan As A Racist

by Andrew Sullivan

One of the worst traits of some left-liberals is their easy resort to calling those who disagree with them bigots or racists or worse. There are some sites on the web that seem almost entirely devoted to patrolling the discourse for any sign of sin. This one's a homophobe; this one's a racist; so-and-so said this and that could be – shock! – prejudiced. It can sometimes be a way to avoid engaging arguments rather than tackling them. And so, on cue, Paul Ryan is [taking heat](#) for these remarks:

We have got this tailspin of culture, in our inner cities in particular, of men not working and just generations of men not even thinking about working or learning the value and the culture of work, and so there is a real culture problem here that has to be dealt with.

He noted that “Charles Murray or Bob Putnam over at Harvard – those guys have written books on this.” Cue liberal [freakout](#). Josh Marshall [focuses](#) on the citation of Murray:

When you start off by basing your arguments around the work of Charles Murray you just lose your credibility from the start as someone actually interested in addressing poverty or joblessness or really doing anything other than coming up with reasons to cut off what little assistance society provides for its most marginalized members or, alternatively, pumping up people with racial resentments against black people and giving them ersatz ‘scholarship’ to justify their racial antipathies.

That's because Murray's public career has been based on pushing the idea that black urban poverty is primarily the fault of black people and their diseased ‘culture.’ Relatedly, and more controversially, he has argued that black people are *genetically inferior to white people and other notional races with regards to intelligence*. Yes, that last part should be crystal clear: Murray is best known for attempting to marshal social science evidence to argue that black people are genetically not as smart as white people.

Sigh. Josh seems to be arguing that Murray blames all resilient urban black poverty on culture and then blames it all on genes! Pick one canard, would be my advice. And the truth is: in [The Bell Curve](#), Murray was concerned about the role of genes *and* environment in the resilient IQ differentials among different ethnic groups, as anyone who actually read his book (I did, most

liberals wouldn't) would know. As for the notion that Murray is useless in actually attempting to help urban poverty, has Josh ever heard of the book [Losing Ground](#)? It was the key text for the Clinton welfare reforms of the 1990s – which even Obama now concedes he dismissed too easily.

And it is simply untrue that Murray has argued that “black people are *genetically inferior to white people and other notional races with regards to intelligence*.” Murray’s work specifically insists that there are countless African-Americans with higher IQs than countless whites and Asians and Hispanics. (He has recently focused his efforts on [white poverty](#) as well – which would seem to disprove some of Josh’s claims.) It’s just that the bell curve (which was the title of the whole fricking book) starts at a slightly different place for different racial groupings – something that drives blank slate liberals nuts with cognitive dissonance. Years later, the differentials still exist. Why do you think there are de facto quotas to prevent brainy Asians from dominating the Ivy League? But of course, nothing drives ideologues nuts like reality.

One more thing: I’m sure Murray has gotten used to this distortion of his work. But it still strikes me as outrageous that a scholar like Murray is subjected to being called a racist of the worst sort and a dishonest scholar – simply because the resilient data support his core point, and because he dares to cite genetics. (It’s an old and great line that liberals believe nothing is genetic but homosexuality, while conservatives believe everything is genetic except homosexuality. For my part, it seems pretty damn obvious that almost all human behavior is a function of both – and the interaction between them.)

Josh [goes another round](#):

Weigel notes that it’s not necessarily clear that Ryan was referencing The Bell Curve. He might just as well have been talking about Losing Ground, the critique of liberal social policies, particularly welfare, which put Murray on the map in the 1980s or his [more recent work on the ‘white underclass’](#). To which I would say, maybe? Who knows? And really, who cares? At the risk of sounding wrenchingly corny, The Bell Curve is a bell you simply cannot un-ring.

As Joan Walsh [notes](#) here, in the years since publishing The Bell Curve, Murray has slightly softened his argument. He now refers to IQ and what he believes is the mental inferiority of African-Americans not as ‘genetic’ but rather as ‘intractable.’ By this Murray seems to mean that there are too many factors playing into intelligence to definitively say genetics are behind what he claims are the mental/intellectual shortcomings of black people. The deficit is simply ‘intractable’ – by which he means that whatever mix of genetics, culture and circumstance create it, nothing can be done to change it in any meaningful way.

But if Josh had read the original book, he would have seen that that was Murray’s argument all along! “Intractable” means a function of both culture and genes. Now I should make clear that I’m not entirely persuaded by Charles’ thesis. I think it’s too fatalist and gloomy. The plasticity of IQ is obvious, and culture may matter far more in the long run. If Murray’s thesis requires no government action to help the poor, I’m as opposed to it as David Frum. But Murray is an intellectual adventurer. He speaks things we only talk about in our own heads. And his original prediction – that modern, SAT-based, liberal economies will, over time, lead to greater and greater inequality has not exactly been proven unfounded, has it? And referencing Murray – along with Bob Putnam, one should add – is perfectly appropriate when talking about arguments about poverty and how to tackle it.

Michael Sean Winters [gives](#) Ryan the benefit of the doubt:

First, we on the left have been complaining that Republicans like don't give a hoot about the poor, and not without cause. I remember Cong. Ryan speaking at Georgetown in 2012 and talking about subsidiarity and federalism and how the federal government should not be the lead actor in anti-poverty efforts. I thought at the time: That would be credible if he could point to any single Republican governor or mayor who was actually attempting some innovative anti-poverty efforts, but he can't, so the invocation of subsidiarity in this regard is a smokescreen. It is obvious that Ryan has been trying to wrestle with the issue of poverty since then, and I think we have an obligation not to throw his words back in his teeth the second they are uttered. That is not the way to create a bipartisan consensus on the need for our nation to confront lingering poverty in our midst.

By the way, check out [Murray's responses](#) in our Ask Anything series to get his recent take on the *Bell Curve* criticism. A long thread on race and IQ is [here](#).

Wired

[A Startlingly Simple Theory About the Missing Malaysia Airlines Jet](#)

by Chris Goodfellow

There has been a lot of speculation about Malaysia Airlines Flight 370. Terrorism, hijacking, meteors. I cannot believe the analysis on CNN; it's almost disturbing. I tend to look for a simpler explanation, and I find it with the 13,000-foot runway at Pulau Langkawi.

We know the story of MH370: A loaded Boeing 777 departs at midnight from Kuala Lumpur, headed to Beijing. A hot night. A heavy aircraft. About an hour out, across the gulf toward Vietnam, the plane goes dark, meaning the transponder and secondary radar tracking go off. Two days later we hear reports that Malaysian military radar (which is a primary radar, meaning the plane is tracked by reflection rather than by transponder interrogation response) has tracked the plane on a southwesterly course back across the Malay Peninsula into the Strait of Malacca.

The left turn is the key here. Zaharie Ahmad Shah¹ was a very experienced senior captain with 18,000 hours of flight time. We old pilots were drilled to know what is the closest airport of safe harbor while in cruise. Airports behind us, airports abeam us, and airports ahead of us. They're always in our head. Always. If something happens, you don't want to be thinking about what are you going to do—you already know what you are going to do. When I saw that left turn with a direct heading, I instinctively knew he was heading for an airport. He was taking a direct route to Pulau Langkawi, a 13,000-foot airstrip with an approach over water and no obstacles. The captain did not turn back to Kuala Lumpur because he knew he had 8,000-foot ridges to cross. He knew the terrain was friendlier toward Langkawi, which also was closer.

[Take a look at this airport on Google Earth](#). The pilot did all the right things. He was confronted by some major event onboard that made him make an immediate turn to the closest, safest airport.

When I heard this I immediately brought up Google Earth and searched for airports in proximity to the track toward the southwest.

For me, the loss of transponders and communications makes perfect sense in a fire. And there most likely was an electrical fire. In the case of a fire, the first response is to pull the main busses and restore circuits one by one until you have isolated the bad one. If they pulled the busses, the plane would go silent. It probably was a serious event and the flight crew was occupied with controlling the plane and trying to fight the fire. Aviate, navigate, and lastly, communicate is the mantra in such situations.

There are two types of fires. An electrical fire might not be as fast and furious, and there may or may not be incapacitating smoke. However there is the possibility, given the timeline, that there was an overheat on one of the front landing gear tires, it blew on takeoff and started slowly burning. Yes, this happens with underinflated tires. Remember: Heavy plane, hot night, sea level, long-run takeoff. There was a [well known accident in Nigeria of a DC8](#) that had a landing gear fire on takeoff. Once going, a tire fire would produce horrific, incapacitating smoke. Yes, pilots have access to oxygen masks, but this is a no-no with fire. Most have access to a smoke hood with a filter, but this will last only a few minutes depending on the smoke level. (I used to carry one in my flight bag, and I still carry one in my briefcase when I fly.)

What I think happened is the flight crew was overcome by smoke and the plane continued on the heading, probably on George (autopilot), until it ran out of fuel or the fire destroyed the control surfaces and it crashed. You will find it along that route—looking elsewhere is pointless.



Ongoing speculation of a hijacking and/or murder-suicide and that there was a flight engineer on board does not sway me in favor of foul play until I am presented with evidence of foul play.

We know there was a last voice transmission that, from a pilot's point of view, was entirely normal. "Good night" is customary on a hand-off to a new air traffic control. The "good night" also strongly indicates to me that all was OK on the flight deck. Remember, there are many ways a pilot can communicate distress. A hijack code or even transponder code off by one digit would alert ATC that something was wrong. Every good pilot knows keying an SOS over the mike always is an option. Even three short clicks would raise an alert. So I conclude that at the point of voice transmission all was perceived as well on the flight deck by the pilots.

But things could have been in the process of going wrong, unknown to the pilots.

Evidently the [ACARS](#) went inoperative some time before. Disabling the ACARS is not easy, as pointed out. This leads me to believe more in an electrical problem or an electrical fire than a manual shutdown. I suggest the pilots probably were not aware ACARS was not transmitting.

As for the reports of altitude fluctuations, given that this was not transponder-generated data but primary radar at maybe 200 miles, the azimuth readings can be affected by a lot of atmospheric and I would not have high confidence in this being totally reliable. But let's accept for a minute that the pilot may have ascended to 45,000 feet in a last-ditch effort to quell a fire by seeking the lowest level of oxygen. That is an acceptable scenario. At 45,000 feet, it would be tough to keep this aircraft stable, as the flight envelope is very narrow and loss of control in a stall is entirely possible. The aircraft is at the top of its operational ceiling. The reported rapid rates of descent could have been generated by a stall, followed by a recovery at 25,000 feet. The pilot may even have been diving to extinguish flames.

But going to 45,000 feet in a hijack scenario doesn't make any good sense to me.

Regarding the additional flying time: On departing Kuala Lumpur, Flight 370 would have had fuel for Beijing and an alternate destination, probably Shanghai, plus 45 minutes—say, 8 hours. Maybe more. He burned 20-25 percent in the first hour with takeoff and the climb to cruise. So when the turn was made toward Langkawi, he would have had six hours or more hours worth of fuel. This correlates nicely with the [Inmarsat data pings being received](#) until fuel exhaustion.

Fire in an aircraft demands one thing: Get the machine on the ground as soon as possible.

The now known continued flight until time to fuel exhaustion only confirms to me that the crew was incapacitated and the flight continued on deep into the south Indian ocean.

There is no point speculating further until more evidence surfaces, but in the meantime it serves no purpose to malign pilots who well may have been in a struggle to save this aircraft from a fire or other serious mechanical issue. Capt. Zaharie Ahmad Shah was a hero struggling with an impossible situation trying to get that plane to Langkawi. There is no doubt in my mind. That's the reason for the turn and direct route. A hijacking would not have made that deliberate left turn with a direct heading for Langkawi. It probably would have weaved around a bit until the hijackers decided where they were taking it.

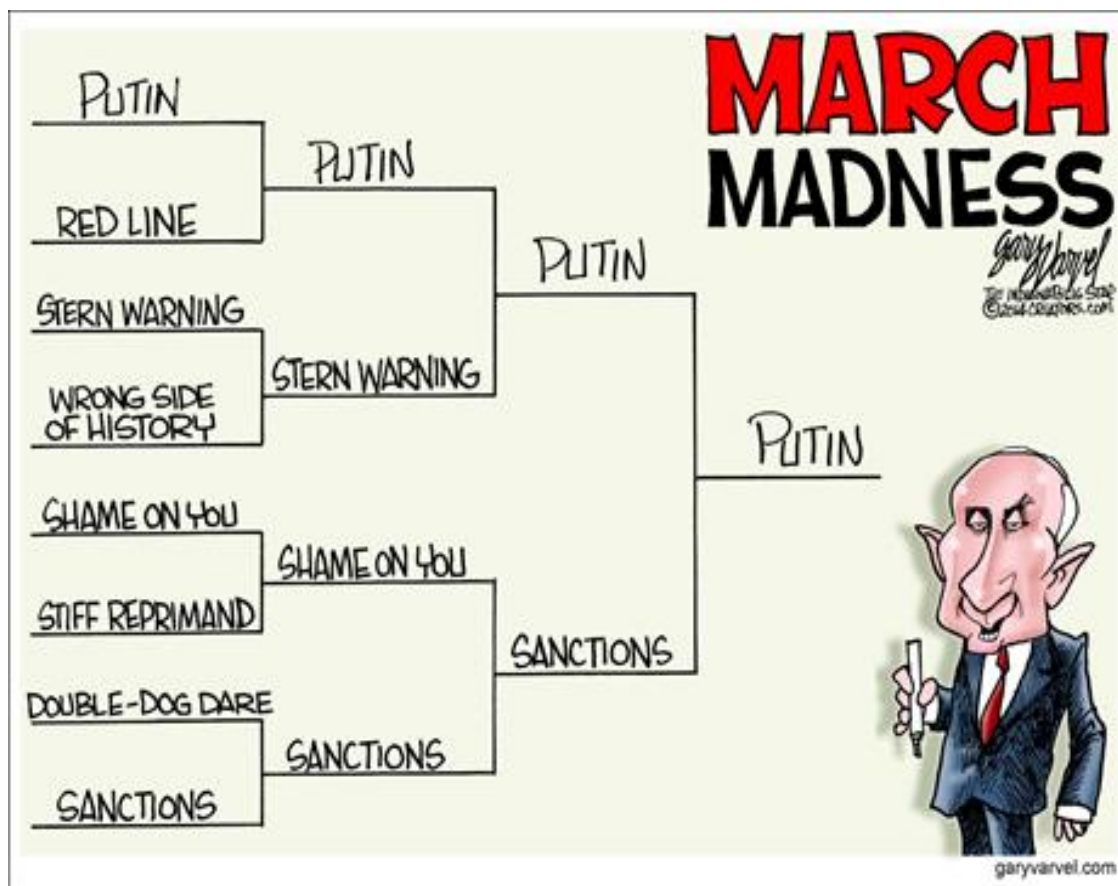
Surprisingly, none of the reporters, officials, or other pilots interviewed have looked at this from the pilot's viewpoint: If something went wrong, where would he go? Thanks to Google Earth I spotted Langkawi in about 30 seconds, zoomed in and saw how long the runway was and I just instinctively knew this pilot knew this airport. He had probably flown there many times.

Fire in an aircraft demands one thing: Get the machine on the ground as soon as possible. There are two well-remembered experiences in my memory. The AirCanada DC9 which landed, I believe, in Columbus, Ohio in the 1980s. That pilot delayed descent and bypassed several airports. He didn't instinctively know the closest airports. He got it on the ground eventually, but lost 30-odd souls. The 1998 crash of Swissair DC-10 off Nova Scotia was another example of heroic pilots. They were 15 minutes out of Halifax but the fire overcame them and they had to ditch in the ocean. They simply ran out of time. That fire incidentally started when the aircraft was about an hour out of

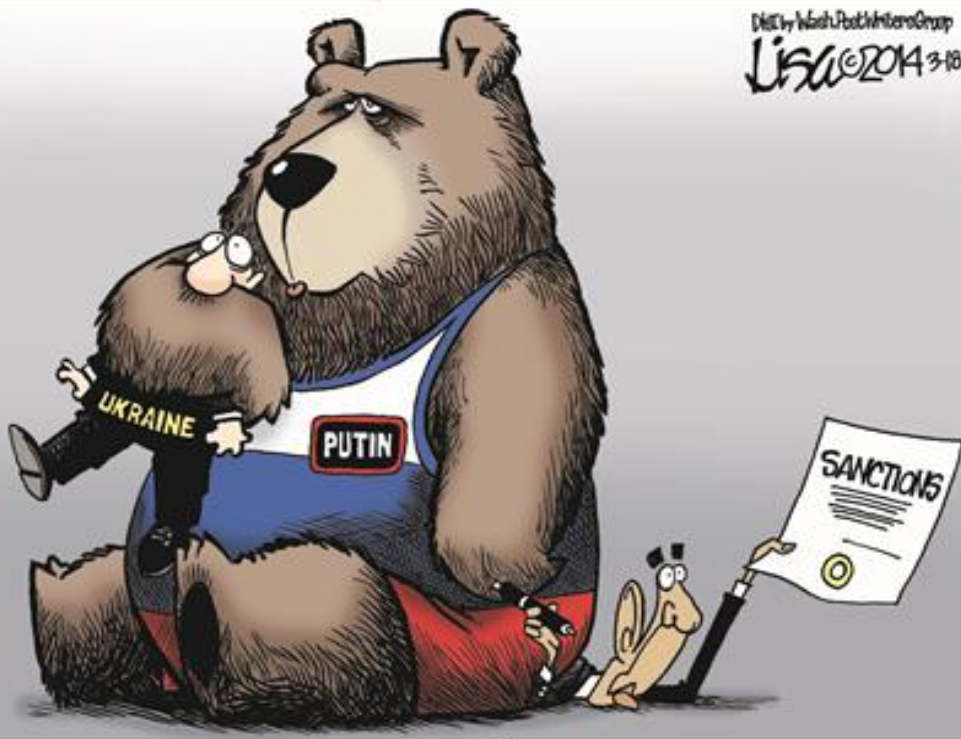
Kennedy. Guess what? The transponders and communications were shut off as they pulled the busses.

Get on Google Earth and type in Pulau Langkawi and then look at it in relation to the radar track heading. Two plus two equals four. For me, that is the simple explanation why it turned and headed in that direction. Smart pilot. He just didn't have the time.

Chris Goodfellow has 20 years experience as a Canadian Class-1 instrumented-rated pilot for multi-engine planes.



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