

December 25, 2014

Roger Simon, who was on the left and then found the error of his ways, posts on where he has experienced the most racism.

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Now we live in culture where there is considerably more black racism than white racism. Someone like Al Sharpton, clearly the equivalent of David Duke, is far more powerful than Duke ever was. No one pays attention to the execrable Duke, as they shouldn't. But they shouldn't pay attention to Sharpton either.

But he's only a part of the problem. ...

Charles Cooke says now, all of a sudden, liberals are learning you should not collectivize guilt. Joan Walsh's hypocrisy is on display; Eugene Robinson's too.

... Consider, if you will, the recent behavior of Salon's Joan Walsh, who yesterday suggested in earnest that the conservative-led condemnation of the “climate” that supposedly provoked the shootings in New York City represented the unconscionable “politicization” of murder. “To blame the peaceful movement against police brutality that's emerged nationwide,” Walsh wrote, is “the worst in demagoguery.” “Right wingers,” she added, “are using a terrible tragedy to make sure that no one can find middle ground.” Prima facie, I concur with Walsh, of course. But what, we might ask, has finally led her to this conclusion? After the shooting of Gabby Giffords in 2011, Walsh fretted dramatically about “the rhetoric of violence”; asked aloud, “Will any prominent conservatives denounce ‘reload’ and ‘crosshairs’ imagery?”; inquired dishonestly, “Is it really controversial to suggest that the overheated anti-government rhetoric of the last two years, with its often violent imagery, ought to be toned down?”; described Sarah Palin's pretty standard political-campaign map as “unconscionable”; hoped that Republicans would find it in their hearts to “listen to Pima County Sheriff Clarence Dupnik, who denounced ‘the vitriol that comes out of certain mouths about the government’ at a Saturday night press conference”; played a remarkably dishonest game of “But Anyway . . . ,” repeatedly noting that there was “no evidence” that Jared Loughner had reacted to any right-wing rhetoric before insinuating in the next breath that he must have; and,

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...

NY Post reports on calls for violence from CUNY grad students newspaper. A disturbing editorial in a CUNY grad-student newspaper calls for rioters protesting the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown to arm themselves and wage violent war with cops.

“The time for peace has passed,” says a revolutionary editorial titled “In Support of Violence” that was penned by editor-in-chief Gordon Barnes in the Dec. 3 issue of *The Advocate*.

“The problem with the protesters’ violence in Ferguson is that it is unorganized. If the violence was to be organized, and the protesters armed — more so than the few that sparingly are — then the brunt of social pressures would not be laid onto middling proprietors [of looted small businesses], but unto those deserving the most virulent response of an enraged populace,” Barnes writes in the CUNY Grad Center’s publication.

“The acts of looting, destruction of property and violence directed towards state representatives is not only warranted, it is necessary,” says Barnes, a doctoral student in history who once studied in Cuba. ...

Noemie Emery says it's been a bad year for liberal story-tellers.

It’s been a bad couple of weeks for the liberals’ narrative outlook on life. One after another of their favorite genres has blown up in their faces as they have been caught telling and promoting stories that were too good to be true.

There was the gender-based theme, as the Rolling Stone tale of the horrendous gang rape at the University of Virginia went the way of the Duke lacrosse story — an elaborate hoax put on by the self-styled victim with no connection whatever to fact. A feminist student complained that "to let fact-checking define the narrative" would be a "mistake." But a narrative without facts is simply a fiction and a lie that does damage to innocent people. ...

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You think it's just the IRS that's stonewalling investigators? **Kevin Williamson** writes that the federal government is starting to look like a criminal enterprise all the way down.

... Earlier this year, 47 inspectors general — the officials charged with fighting corruption, waste, and wrongdoing in federal agencies — sent a letter to Issa's committee complaining that organizations ranging from the EPA to the Justice Department were impeding their investigations by withholding information — despite the fact that federal law specifically forbids withholding that information. These are not a bunch of Republican operatives trying to score a few political points: Those 47 inspectors general comprise more than half of all such officials, and many who signed the letter were appointed by President Barack Obama. Their complaint is that the federal agencies treat them more or less like they do . . . members of Congress: thwarting them, withholding documents, obstruction investigations.

Michael Horowitz, the inspector general for the Justice Department, came to the Oversight Committee practically begging them for a means by which the DOJ — the federal law-enforcement department — might be forced to follow the laws that it is supposed to be enforcing. "It is very clear to me," he testified, "just as it is to the Inspectors General community, that the Inspector General Act of 1978 entitles inspectors general to access all documents and records within the agency's possession. Each of us firmly believes that Congress meant what it said in Section 6(a) of the IG Act: that Inspectors General must be given complete, timely, and unfiltered access to agency records." But under the leadership of Attorney General Eric Holder, the DOJ did no such thing. Horowitz notes that the DOJ specifically tried to withhold information related to the investigation of Operation Fast and Furious. ...

Joe Nocera has more on fracking and the falling price of oil.

... "The worst thing from the Saudi point of view would be to announce a production cut, and the prices keep falling," said Jason Bordoff, the founding director of the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University. It doesn't want to be seen as the emperor with no clothes.

*And then, of course, there is the effect of the shale revolution in the United States, where oil production has nearly doubled, to nine million barrels a day from five million a day, in the space of six years. The conventional wisdom holds that the Saudis "fear" the influx of shale oil onto the market — as *The Wall Street Journal* put it on Monday — and that they want to see the price go down in order to drive out some of that shale production.*

But the Saudis don't really fear shale oil. "I've heard officials in Saudi Arabia call shale a blessing," said Robert McNally, the founder and president of The Rapidan Group, who is also affiliated with

the Center on Global Energy Policy. “Shale oil is light,” he added. “Saudi oil is medium and heavy, and their real competitors are the Iraqis and the Iranians.” The Saudis can adjust to shale oil more easily than many other countries.

In effect, shale has the potential to play the role of the “swing supplier,” which is the role the Saudis used to play. At a certain price, it will be uneconomical to drill for shale oil, at which point the price will stabilize. But the shale revolution is still too new for anybody to know what that price is. In a sense, what is going on now is an effort to discover how low oil has to go before shale production declines and the floor is found for the price of oil. ...

Just in time for the holidays, [The Wall Street Journal](#) has some good news about auto fatalities.

Deaths in car crashes have fallen by about a quarter in the last decade, new federal data released on Friday show, as safety features built into the latest models have powered a drop in fatalities even as auto-safety recalls have surged.

The fall in deaths in newer cars has been especially sharp, a Wall Street Journal analysis of federal data shows. The number of fatalities in the latest model released each year has fallen by nearly two-thirds in the past decade. In 2013, new cars had a lower fatality rate than cars fresh off the line did just a few years earlier.

Overall, auto deaths fell 3.1% last year over the prior year and the number of people injured in auto crashes fell 2.1%, according to figures released Friday by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Safety improvements, in particular electronic stability control systems that make vehicles less likely to flip, are responsible for at least part of the drop in deaths, according to auto-safety and industry experts. ...

For a Christmas special we have a link to a video about ship-breakers in Bangladesh. [Click here to be happy you're not there.](#)

For another special, here's the [Air Force Band flash mobbing at the Smithsonian.](#)

Roger L. Simon
[Racism Right and Left: One Man's Opinion](#)

Because I am in New York for a short visit and, as the world well knows, the city of my birth is in a period of racial turmoil, I am going to say something I have been thinking about for a long time. And because I am one of the relative few to have spent long periods of his life on both the left and the right and because I was a civil rights worker in the sixties. I think — though it is purely personal and based only on observation — I have earned the right to an opinion. So here goes.

The left is vastly more racist than the right. It's not even close. Since I was publicly identified with the right, roughly from when I started blogging in 2003 (although it was actually several years earlier in private), I have personally witnessed not a single incident of racism from anyone who could be considered a right winger and heard only one racial slur — and that was from a Frenchman. In the seven years I was CEO of PJ Media, I came to know or meet literally dozens of people who identified with the Tea Party. I did not hear one word of anything close to racism from any of them even once. Not one, ever. This despite their being accused of racism constantly.

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But he's only a part of the problem. There's also the mayor of the city of New York, Bill de Blasio, the prototype of the leftwing fellow-traveler racist who assumes someone is more moral or better because he or she is “of color.” Of course this is condescending — and therefore racist — to the people he thinks are so pure. No one is. The whole theory of [“white skin privilege”](#) is racist and totalitarian to the core: actually it was invented by totalitarians. And while I'm ranting here, all racial identity organizations like the Congressional Black Caucus are inherently racist and dangerous, just as the White Citizens' Council was and would be.

You only end racism by ending it, not by talking about it. That only results in the reverse. If you keep talking about it, what you get are two dead cops in Brooklyn, the kind of guys who had been spending their lives largely defending the weak and the poor, “of color” or otherwise. The cops didn't care. They just did their jobs. Black, white and brown, we owe them our gratitude. They protect us and, as far as I can tell, almost all of them without racial bias.

But we live in a time when two black men, Barack Obama and Eric Holder, came into office clinging to racism more desperately than Obama said right-wingers cling to their guns and religion. Both of these men arrived at a moment when racism was truly beginning to disappear and did everything in their power, consciously or unconsciously, to reverse the trend. Now we are in a miserable situation when, as recently as 2008, things were looking pretty good. We have come to a point where Bill O'Reilly is doing more substantively for black people than the president of the United States, who is himself a black man. How crazy, and deeply sad, is that?

National Review

The Left Discovers You Shouldn't Collectivize Guilt

All of a sudden liberals are loath to blame crimes on "climate."

by Charles C. W. Cooke

Just minutes after it was made clear that the two dead New York City police officers had been assassinated in a revenge attack, the blame game began in earnest, and conservatives, who are typically reticent in this area, began a notable *volte face*. Twitter, that hotbed of instant reaction, immediately lit up with talk of culpability. "Anti-police rhetoric is what encouraged all of this," one user wrote. "If you don't think months of anti-police incitement played a role," another suggested, "you're lying." Meanwhile, Geraldo Rivera posed a popular question, inquiring as to whether "the harsh anti-police rhetoric from protestors & officials alike create climate where a scumbag terrorist felt justified to attack cops?" From the Right, the favorite answer to this query was, "Yes."

At its worst this reaction was self-serving and cathartic, representing an unlovely example of good old-fashioned political revenge. At its best, however, it has hinted at what is a coherent and congruous case. Of *all* the supposed instances in which a political group has been accused of "inciting" murder, the advocates of this view have argued, this one is the strongest. In addition to there having been an explicit instruction — a fringe element within the protest group having shouted the words, "What do we want? Dead cops! When do what them? Now!" — there was also a direct connection between the perpetrator and his alleged champions. Moreover, the killer not only traveled from a neighboring state in order to target cops in New York City — no casual act — but he had previously attended a Manhattan-based protest, the target of which was the NYPD. Given these facts, those of this persuasion charge, it is imperative to lay at least *some* responsibility at the agitators' feet.

As I recorded yesterday afternoon, I do not agree with this assessment. But I should note for the sake of fairness that it is at least consistent. What its exponents are contending, I suppose, is that there is a sliding scale at play here, and that while *most* ostensibly partisan charges of "incitement" do not come up to scratch, *this particular one* — because it is so explicit in nature — is materially different. If so, this all comes down to where exactly we draw the line. Because I am extremely jealous of protections for even vicious and unhelpful speech, and because I believe that individual responsibility is the most necessary of prerequisites to the maintenance of a free republic, I am reluctant to impose moral sanctions on those who indulge in even the most grotesque of idle chatter. Evidently, many of my interlocutors disagree, and are willing to collectivize guilt a touch sooner than am I. Fair enough. Your mileage may vary.

This being so, though, one has to wonder what can explain those among us who are making the *opposite* case — that is, those who are arguing that this incident, unlike almost every other, is not uniquely heinous but uniquely *irrelevant*. In the last few days, we have seen a panoply of commentators eschewing their usual rush to judgment and instead calling for calm, thereby effectively taking the position that previous, tangential cases were a legitimate cause for alarm, but that this more worrying incident is not. This, it strikes me, is untenable.

Consider, if you will, the recent behavior of *Salon's* Joan Walsh, who yesterday suggested in earnest that the conservative-led condemnation of the "climate" that supposedly provoked the shootings in New York City represented the unconscionable "politicization" of murder. "To blame the peaceful movement against police brutality that's emerged nationwide," Walsh wrote, is "the worst in demagoguery." "Right wingers," she added, "are using a terrible tragedy to make sure that no one can find middle ground." *Prima facie*, I concur with Walsh, of course. But what, we might ask, has finally led her to this conclusion? After the shooting of Gabby Giffords in 2011, Walsh

fretted dramatically about “the rhetoric of violence”; asked aloud, “Will any prominent conservatives denounce ‘reload’ and ‘crosshairs’ imagery?”; inquired dishonestly, “Is it really controversial to suggest that the overheated anti-government rhetoric of the last two years, with its often violent imagery, ought to be toned down?”; described Sarah Palin’s pretty standard political-campaign map as “unconscionable”; hoped that Republicans would find it in their hearts to “listen to Pima County Sheriff Clarence Dupnik, who denounced ‘the vitriol that comes out of certain mouths about the government’ at a Saturday night press conference”; played a remarkably dishonest game of “But Anyway . . .,” repeatedly noting that there was “no evidence” that Jared Loughner had reacted to any right-wing rhetoric before insinuating in the next breath that he must have; and, when her well was running dry, went so far as to suggest without any attestation at all that the shooter was a registered Republican.

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Walsh is alone only in the sheer scale of her audacity. In a column bluntly titled, “protesters aren’t to blame for NYPD officers’ execution,” the *Washington Post*’s Eugene Robinson yesterday confirmed his own evolution on the question of what constitutes verbal instigation. “It is absurd to have to say this,” Robinson lamented, “but New York Mayor Bill de Blasio, activist Al Sharpton and President Obama are in no way responsible for the coldblooded assassination of two police officers in Brooklyn on Saturday. Nor do the tens of thousands of Americans who have demonstrated against police brutality in recent weeks bear any measure of blame.” Rather, Robinson proposed, “a disturbed career criminal named Ismaaiyl Brinsley committed this unspeakable atrocity by himself, amid a spree of insane mayhem.” “Reasonable people,” Robinson explained, “understand this, of course.” “But,” he sighed knowingly, “we live in unreasonable times.”

Indeed so. In fact, I couldn’t have put it better myself. And yet, funnily enough, Robinson has not always been so “reasonable.” Indeed, back in 2011, when examining the conduct of another “disturbed man,” he came to *precisely the opposite conclusion*. “The accused gunman, 22-year-old Jared Lee Loughner, appears to be deranged,” Robinson proclaimed, “but this fact does not automatically absolve the politicians, partisan activists and professional loudmouths who spew apocalyptic anti-government rhetoric full of violent imagery.” And why not? Because, well . . . because, well it’s just *different* when conservatives do it. “Delusional right-wing crazy talk,” Robinson suggested in 2012, “is a special kind of poison that cannot be safely ignored.” Lest he be misunderstood, he spelled it out for all to see: “I’m saying that the extreme language we hear from the far right is qualitatively different from the extreme language we hear from the far left — and far more damaging to the ties that bind us as a nation.”

That’s convenient, then.

Robinson’s colleague at the *Post*, Paul Waldman, also seems to have had a conversion of sorts. This summer, after a pair of politically confused vagrants shot two police officers in Las Vegas, Waldman explained that it was “long past time for prominent conservatives and Republicans to do some introspection and ask whether they’re contributing to outbreaks of right-wing violence.” There are, Waldman contended, “some particular features of conservative political rhetoric today that help create an atmosphere in which violence and terrorism can germinate.” Evidently, this sentiment is popular at his blog. In 2011, his partner-in-crime, Greg Sargent, suggested that Sarah Palin ought to “be more mindful of the potential consequences of incendiary rhetoric” and

approvingly quoted Gabriel Giffords's condemnation of the "crosshairs map" that was apparently so central to Loughner's crime.

Today, Waldman has changed his tune, dismissing reactions such as these out of hand:

We regularly argue over not just the substance of issues but the way those issues are being discussed; both liberals and conservatives are convinced that their side presents its arguments in reasonable and logical ways, while the other side is prone to inflammatory, dishonest and demagogic rhetoric. When something like this shooting happens, the accusation that it occurred because of the words someone else spoke is almost inevitable. But it's also almost always wrong.

Now you tell us.

Also playing this game are Media Matters (2011: rhetoric is lethal; 2014: rhetoric is harmless); the NAACP (2011: civility is crucial; 2014: civility is irrelevant); and Al Sharpton (2011: our political discourse has real consequences; 2014: such thoughts are misguided). Elsewhere, the *Washington Post's* Wesley Lowery — a man who was quick to jump on Sarah Palin's map back in 2011 — yesterday mocked the notion that words and behavior might lead to murder, while *Politico's* Glenn Thrush pooh-poohed suggestions that he had once made himself. In 2011, his Twitter feed shows, Thrush treated Gabby Giffords's shooting as "a watershed moment that will immediately redefine current debate and view of pols embracing of extreme rhetoric." Yesterday, he shamed Governor Pataki for advancing the very same theory.

What a difference party identification makes.

Examiner

The more things change ...

by Noemie Emery

It's been a bad couple of weeks for the liberals' narrative outlook on life. One after another of their favorite genres has blown up in their faces as they have been caught telling and promoting stories that were too good to be true.

There was the gender-based theme, as the Rolling Stone tale of the horrendous gang rape at the University of Virginia went the way of the Duke lacrosse story — an elaborate hoax put on by the self-styled victim with no connection whatever to fact. A feminist student complained that "to let fact-checking define the narrative" would be a "mistake." But a narrative without facts is simply a fiction and a lie that does damage to innocent people.

Damage to innocents is seldom a problem for the drivers of narratives, but it is for the people they hope to win over. This is a loss for the sisters in their war on the war against women, coming on top of the midterm elections. We can call this strike one.

There was no fact-checking around Ferguson, Mo., in August, because the story itself was so good. A 300-pound thief who picked a fight with a cop was turned into a "child" who was cruelly gunned down by a Bull Connor cutout. The incident became the excuse to loot and burn buildings, and then the excuse for the underemployed in large urban centers to lie down in crosswalks and block major arteries.

Six academics set upon two cops on the Brooklyn Bridge on Dec. 13 and broke the nose of one officer, as Columbia University graduate student Cindy Gorn and Rutgers-educated Spanish instructor Zachary Campbell tried to prevent the arrest of one Eric Linsker, a Baruch College professor and poet who was trying to drop a 50-pound garbage can on the officers' heads. Isn't it nice when intellectuals take an interest in local community matters? They have so much to contribute, what with their perspective and all.

Alas, this narrative of a racist police force suppressing "the other" exploded for good on Dec. 20, when two officers, Hispanic and Asian, were shot in their patrol car, mourned by the police and most of the city, and memorialized in a press conference translated in Spanish and attended by people of varying colors whose demeanor was a lot more refined than that of the protest community. The narrative may now never recover, mourn the liberal bloggers, varied race hustlers and many people at NBC News.

This has happened before. In the late 1960s, the last time students and faculty were this full of themselves, they succeeded in electing a lot of Republicans. They gave their own bete noir, Richard M. Nixon, his long deferred and soon squandered wish to be president. As Michael Barone writes in his book *Our Country*, "Some cheered the springtime rebels as demonstrations broke out in April and May 1969 at Harvard, the City College of New York, and San Francisco State College. Others cheered San Francisco State's president, the beret-capped semanticist S.I. Hayakawa, as he climbed on the top of a student sound truck and pulled the plugs."

Steven F. Hayward quotes Diana Trilling expressing dismay at the boost the riots gave then-Gov. Ronald Reagan, whose approval ratings in 1969 would nearly reach 80 percent. "Every time he shakes his finger at one of those mobs," a supporter told Newsweek, "it gets him 10,000 votes." The next year, voters would re-elect him by a nice, healthy margin — and would elect Republicans as president for 20 of the next 24 years.

National Review

[The IRS: Just One of Dozens of Uncooperative Agencies](#)

Lots of other federal agencies are evading investigation, too, and IGs are livid.

by Kevin D. Williamson

Darrell Issa's leading role in the IRS investigation may have come to a close — he lost his chairmanship of the House Oversight Committee to term limits — but there is plenty of work left for his successor, Jason Chaffetz of Utah. None of these criminals has been punished; the maddening fact is that Lois Lerner is enjoying a six-figure pension at the expense of the very taxpayers against whom she conducted a corrupt political jihad. And even if that happy day should come when Lerner et al. are given one-way bus tickets to Florence, Colo., or some other suitable destination, Chaffetz and his colleagues still would have a tremendous amount of work to do; if Issa's time has taught us anything, it is that the federal agencies are in thrall to a culture of criminality, and that the most significant crime in the agencies' repertoire is the obstruction of federal investigations.

Earlier this year, 47 inspectors general — the officials charged with fighting corruption, waste, and wrongdoing in federal agencies — sent a letter to Issa's committee complaining that organizations ranging from the EPA to the Justice Department were impeding their investigations by withholding information — despite the fact that federal law specifically forbids withholding that information. These are not a bunch of Republican operatives trying to score a few political points: Those 47

inspectors general comprise more than half of all such officials, and many who signed the letter were appointed by President Barack Obama. Their complaint is that the federal agencies treat them more or less like they do . . . members of Congress: thwarting them, withholding documents, obstruction investigations.

Michael Horowitz, the inspector general for the Justice Department, came to the Oversight Committee practically begging them for a means by which the DOJ – the federal *law-enforcement* department — might be forced to follow the laws that it is supposed to be enforcing. “It is very clear to me,” he testified, “just as it is to the Inspectors General community, that the Inspector General Act of 1978 entitles inspectors general to access all documents and records within the agency’s possession. Each of us firmly believes that Congress meant what it said in Section 6(a) of the IG Act: that Inspectors General must be given complete, timely, and unfiltered access to agency records.” But under the leadership of Attorney General Eric Holder, the DOJ did no such thing. Horowitz notes that the DOJ specifically tried to withhold information related to the investigation of Operation Fast and Furious.

The law promises IGs far-ranging investigative power, including “access to all records, reports, audits, reviews, documents, papers, recommendations, or other material.” *All*, it says, not that which any given bureaucrat feels it in his interest to release. And just in case there’s some question about which agencies are subject, the statute makes it clear: “any Federal, State, or local governmental agency or unit thereof.”

Horowitz, an Obama appointee, was not alone in his complaint. The inspector general of the EPA detailed how he had to drag the Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigations Board (CSB) in front of the House Oversight Committee when they refused to comply with a document request. Issa gave the CSB a week to comply. The CSB did not comply. (The IG specifically said the CSB “complied . . . but not fully,” which in *Washingtonian* means “told us to bugger off.”)

The inspector general of the Peace Corps, Kathy Buller, tells a familiar tale. Just as the IRS cites taxpayer-privacy rules to protect its own agents from investigation for their crimes (among them, violating taxpayer-privacy rules), the Peace Corps cynically uses a law intended to protect the privacy of rape victims to thwart investigations into its handling of rape cases. The Kate Puzey Act is intended to protect sexual-assault victims in the Peace Corps, whose volunteers often are dispatched to places in which the ordinary horrors of rape are compounded by local conditions. (Kate Puzey was a volunteer murdered in Benin after reporting a sexual assault.) That law, as Buller notes, specifically requires that information be released to government officials when federal law mandates it — as in the case of an IG investigation. But the Peace Corps construes the law to mean the opposite of what it actually means, a position Buller calls, with restraint, “remarkable.” “There is no ambiguity in this language,” she writes. “IGs have access to all agency documents and information, and the legislative history to the IG Act leaves no room for doubt: the language ‘all records’ is expansive and is intended to include even confidential agency memoranda.” And the Peace Corps is institutionalizing this lawlessness, Buller reports: “Over the past two years the Peace Corps has developed and implemented policies and procedures denying us access to restricted reports.”

Which brings us back to the IRS scandal, in which agents of that fearsome organization committed the cardinal sin of democratic governance: They used the power of the state to persecute citizens because of their political beliefs. Using government power as a means to greater political power is ipso facto corruption. From the shenanigans involving “lost” e-mails to former commissioner Doug Schulman’s simply lying to Congress, the IRS has done everything in its power to obstruct investigation into its crimes — not errors, not mistakes: *crimes*. Issa’s last report identifies by name eight IRS officials who were involved in the political targeting or who had knowledge of the practice

and failed to disclose it. They include Lerner, of course; Schulman and his chief of staff, former acting commissioner Steven Miller; chief counsel William Wilkins; former acting commissioner Joseph Grant; and others. These are not minor figures.

Remember when this was all a couple of nobodies in Cincinnati?

The terrifying truth is that this is not a matter of a few bad apples. The IRS is institutionally corrupt in its dealings with everyone from Congress to the national archivist. Nobody can keep track of how many different versions of the “lost” e-mail stories the IRS’s operatives have told, though Issa has tried. Republicans tried to get a special prosecutor for the investigation, but were thwarted by the Democrats. There would be no need for a special prosecutor if the regular prosecutors — at the DOJ — were doing their jobs, but the Obama administration has no interest in pulling on any of these threads: Not when it knows that IRS agents were misusing public resources to campaign for Barack Obama. This is a criminal enterprise that goes all the way to the White House: Not because the IRS’s political persecution was coordinated by the Oval Office — it didn’t have to be — but simply because the attorney general and the president and those answerable to them empower it by their inaction, by their bad-faith toleration of lies, deceit, corruption, and the abuse of power.

Jason Chaffetz has his work cut out for him.

NY Times

Shale and the Falling Price of Oil

by Joe Nocera

Six years ago, the price of oil went on an incredible roller-coaster ride. In January 2008, oil hovered around \$90 a barrel. By July, it had reached \$147 a barrel. By the end of the year, it had plunged to under \$35 a barrel.

Saudi Arabia, and the other members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, hate that kind of volatility. When prices are too high, OPEC’s customers, the petroleum importing countries, suffer economically, which means they cut back on energy use and search for alternatives to oil. But if prices go too low, many exporting countries face enormous financial problems because their economies depend on oil staying in the \$100 to \$130 range, according to 2015 projections.

We tend to think of OPEC as a cartel whose goal is to set the price of oil — and set it high. But stability is also an important goal. Without a cartel controlling supply, oil can be the most volatile of commodities.

Which, of course, we are learning anew, as we’ve watched oil fall from \$115 a barrel to about \$60 in the last six months. In 2008, Saudi Arabia stepped in both when the price was rising rapidly and again when it dropped. And guess what happened? Nothing. Most of the rest of OPEC didn’t follow Saudi Arabia, and the Saudis were exposed as having lost their ability to single-handedly control the price of oil.

This time around, what has been most noticeable as the price of oil has dropped is that the Saudis seem completely uninterested in trying to prop it up. The Saudi oil minister, Ali al-Naimi, [gave an interview to CNN](#) in which he declared that Saudi Arabia would “never” cut production, despite the

steep drop this year. “We are going to continue to produce what we are producing,” he said. “We are going to continue to welcome additional production if customers come and ask for it.”

Part of the reason for this new Saudi attitude is that the country’s leaders are tired of doing all the heavy lifting for the other OPEC members — who then keep their spigots completely open and take advantage of the high prices the Saudis are making possible. Part of it is that the Saudis are unwilling to lose market share to other countries, and they have the wherewithal to withstand lower prices for a much longer period than virtually any other exporter. But part of it is also that Saudi Arabia doesn’t want a repeat of 2008.

“The worst thing from the Saudi point of view would be to announce a production cut, and the prices keep falling,” said Jason Bordoff, the founding director of the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University. It doesn’t want to be seen as the emperor with no clothes.

And then, of course, there is the effect of the shale revolution in the United States, where [oil production](#) has nearly doubled, to nine million barrels a day from five million a day, in the space of six years. The conventional wisdom holds that the Saudis “fear” the influx of shale oil onto the market — as The Wall Street Journal [put it on Monday](#) — and that they want to see the price go down in order to drive out some of that shale production.

But the Saudis don’t really fear shale oil. “I’ve heard officials in Saudi Arabia call shale a blessing,” said Robert McNally, the founder and president of The Rapidan Group, who is also affiliated with the Center on Global Energy Policy. “Shale oil is light,” he added. “Saudi oil is medium and heavy, and their real competitors are the Iraqis and the Iranians.” The Saudis can adjust to shale oil more easily than many other countries.

In effect, shale has the potential to play the role of the “swing supplier,” which is the role the Saudis used to play. At a certain price, it will be uneconomical to drill for shale oil, at which point the price will stabilize. But the shale revolution is still too new for anybody to know what that price is. In a sense, what is going on now is an effort to discover how low oil has to go before shale production declines and the floor is found for the price of oil.

OPEC, McNally reminded me the other day, is hardly the first group to try to control the price of oil. In the early years of the industry, John D. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil controlled the price. For decades before the formation of OPEC, the Railroad Commission of Texas (now the Texas Railroad Commission) would have a monthly meeting to set production quotas.

More than anything else, the events of these past months, as oil has dropped and dropped again, shows that it is the market, rather than a cartel, that will dictate the price of oil for the foreseeable future.

Hold onto your seatbelt.

WSJ

[Safety Gear Helps Reduce U.S. Traffic Deaths](#)

Car Stability Controls, Multiple Air Bags Result in Fewer Injuries, Fatalities

by Andrea Fuller and Christina Rogers

Deaths in car crashes have fallen by about a quarter in the last decade, new federal data released on Friday show, as safety features built into the latest models have powered a drop in fatalities even as auto-safety recalls have surged.

The fall in deaths in newer cars has been especially sharp, a Wall Street Journal analysis of federal data shows. The number of fatalities in the latest model released each year has fallen by nearly two-thirds in the past decade. In 2013, new cars had a lower fatality rate than cars fresh off the line did just a few years earlier.

Overall, auto deaths fell 3.1% last year over the prior year and the number of people injured in auto crashes fell 2.1%, according to figures released Friday by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Safety improvements, in particular electronic stability control systems that make vehicles less likely to flip, are responsible for at least part of the drop in deaths, according to auto-safety and industry experts.

David Zuby, executive vice president and research chief at the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, said many factors, including driver behavior, could influence fatality rates from year to year. But generally speaking “cars are getting safer,” he said.

“Stability control is huge,” said John Capp, director of global vehicle safety for General Motors. “It’s head and shoulders above any other technology, since the seat belt, in terms of effectiveness.”

The latest results emerge after several large-scale defects have cast a shadow over auto safety, with manufacturers having recalled a record 52.5 million U.S. vehicles in 2014. Earlier this year, [General Motors Co.](#) recalled 2.6 million older-model small cars for an ignition-switch defect later linked to 42 deaths, despite knowing about the problem for more than a decade. Takata Corp. air bag inflators made between 2000 and 2007 have been tied to five deaths globally after a series of ruptures, and auto-safety regulators are pushing for additional recalls.

Even with those defects, the annual number of traffic deaths began falling in 2006 after staying relatively flat for over a decade. It ticked up in 2012 before dropping again in 2013.

Victoria Easterday of Asheville, N.C., says her 2009 Subaru Forester saved her two years ago from becoming another fatality. The 69-year-old had fainted at the wheel because of a then-undiagnosed heart condition. Her vehicle veered across the highway, ping-ponged into several structures and finally flipped onto its side.

Though the violent impact broke her neck and wrist, Ms. Easterday survived the accident, she says, because of the car’s reinforced structure. In addition, she said, all air bags in the vehicle deployed.



Victoria Easterday of Asheville, N.C. totaled her 2009 Subaru Forester two years ago when she fainted because of a then-undiagnosed heart condition. She credits her car's structural supports with saving her life.

After she regained consciousness, “the first thing I thought was, oh my God—those air bags—how are we going to get them back in those little holes?” she said.

The decline in auto fatalities stems largely from a drop in deaths in cars and light trucks. Fatalities in these vehicles have fallen by about a third since the mid-2000s. Though motorcycle and pedestrian deaths fell in 2013, they had increased the past few years.

The fatality rates fell fastest and were the lowest among the newest models of cars and light trucks, according to a Journal analysis of federal safety records and data provided by Experian Information Solutions Inc. That is no surprise, says Clarence Ditlow, executive director of safety-advocates Center for Auto Safety, since vehicles fresh off the line have new tires and little wear. Newer cars also typically are driven by older, more experienced drivers, he said.

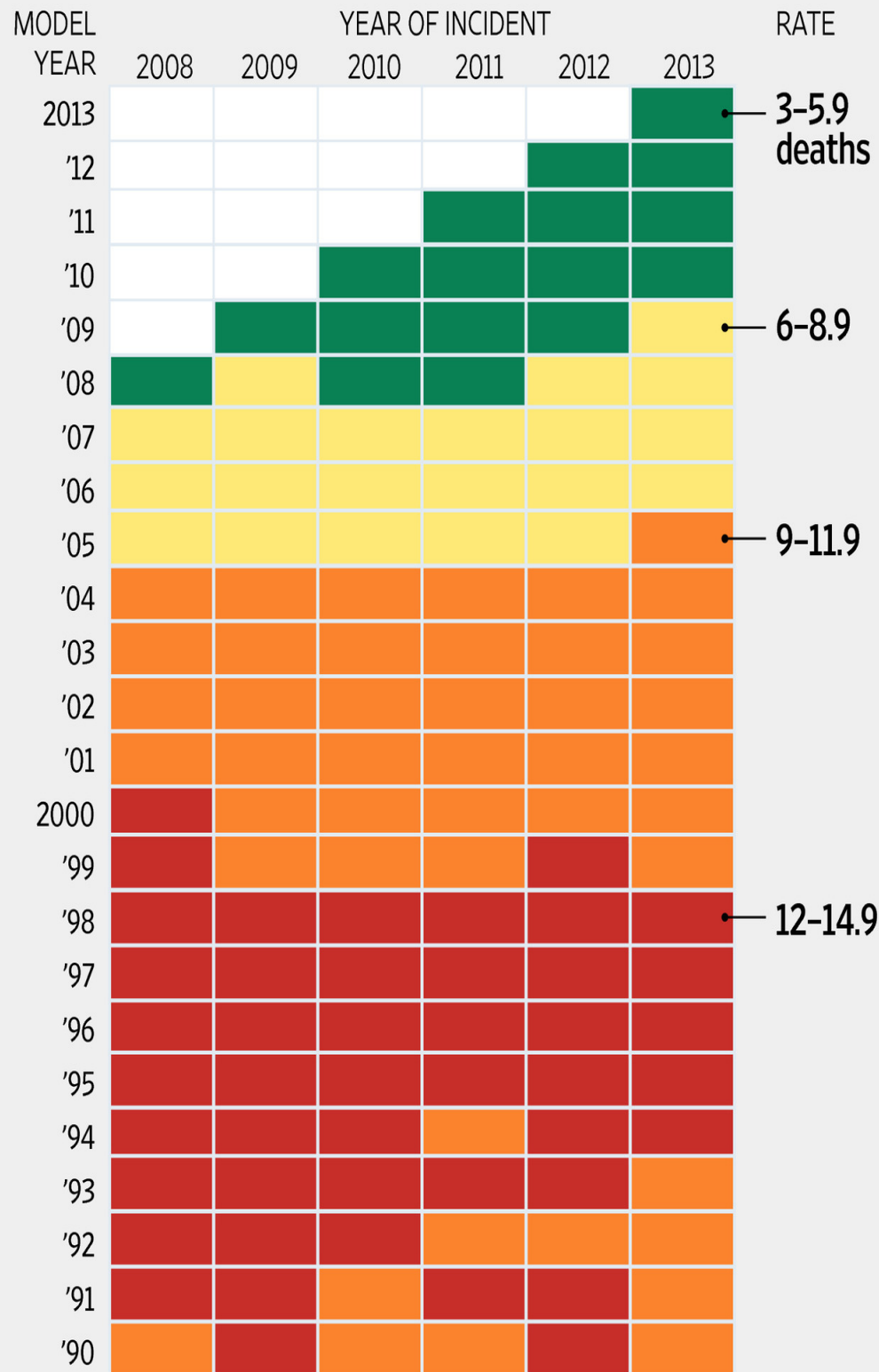
But here's the difference: In 2013, models from that year had a lower fatality rate than comparable brand-new cars in the years before. The fatality rate for those vehicles was 3.4 deaths per 100,000 cars on the road, about a third lower than the fatality rate for new cars five years earlier.

The improvements have been cumulative. For instance, cars two years old in 2013 had lower fatality rates than new cars in 2008.

Experian didn't provide The Journal with the number of cars on the road by model year before 2008. However, the fatality tallies are available: In 2013, about 500 people died in that year's model vehicle; in 1990, about 1,800 people died in a new car.

Newer Cars Are Safer

Rate of traffic fatalities per 100,000 cars on the road, by model year and year of incident



Source: WSJ analysis; Experian Information Solutions

The broad decreases in fatality rates stem from several factors. Increased use of child restraints and seat belts has saved thousands of lives, according to NHTSA. Though mandatory seat belt laws went into effect in the 1980s, compliance increased throughout the 2000s. Laws that restrict driving privileges for young drivers also have reduced fatalities, said Michael Sivak, a researcher at the University of Michigan's Transportation Research Institute. But a critical component in reducing the number of deaths is the snowballing improvements to vehicle-safety technology, say safety experts.

While regulators and auto makers have taken heat from Congress and face major lawsuits due to safety problems, officials have mandated better safety equipment in recent years. Through these efforts, car companies have added electronic systems designed to prevent crashes. While many safety features have been available in high-end models for more than a decade, only in recent years have those features become common in all cars.

Perhaps the most significant change, according to several auto safety experts, was the late-2000s requirement to begin phasing in electronic stability control. It was required from 2012 model years on. The technology helps drivers keep command of the wheel and has proved effective in preventing rollover. A NHTSA report estimated that electronic stability control saved over 1,100 lives in 2012 alone.

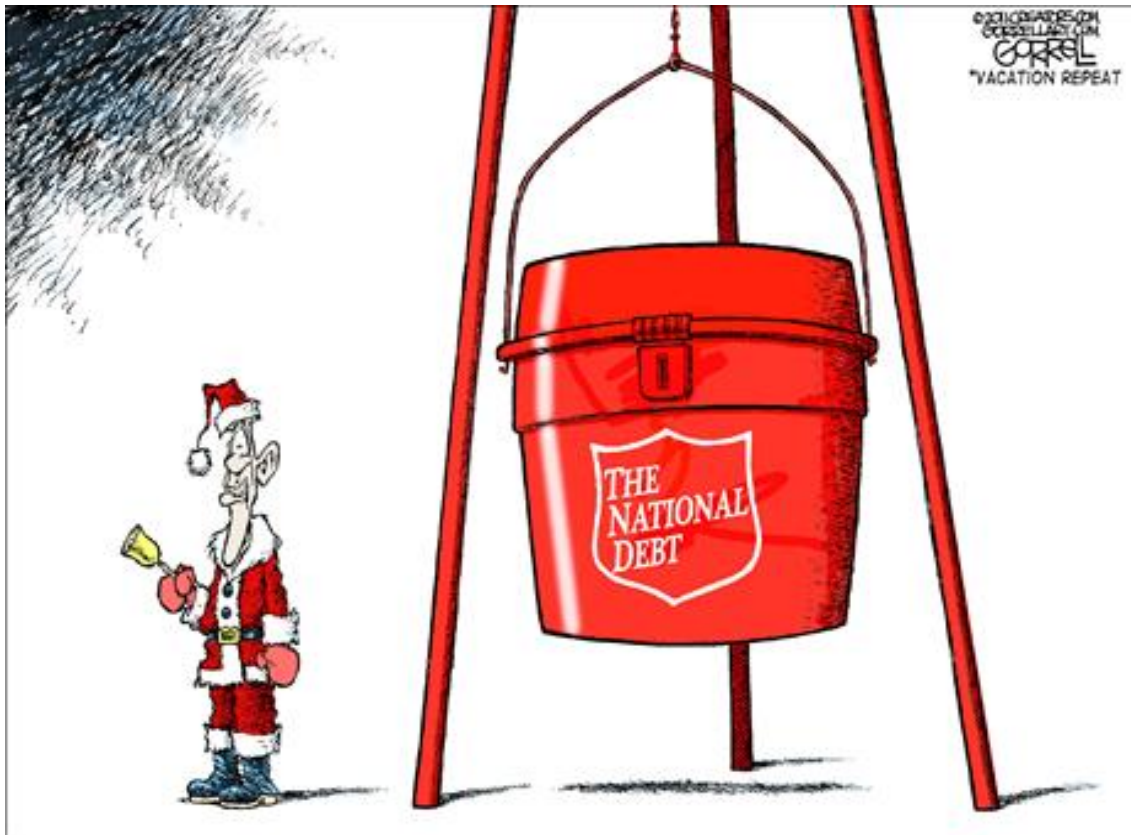
Another gain came from wider use of side, torso and knee air bags. The 2004 Ford Escape had two standard air bags—driver and passenger side. The 2014 model adds side, torso, and knee air bags as well as standard anti-lock brakes, electronic stability control, and rollover sensing.

"It's really a symptom of what the industry has been doing in the last 20 years," said Sue Cischke, who retired in 2012 from [Ford Motor](#) Co. after 11 years in safety engineering. "A lot of these technologies are [at] first options, and as they get more acceptance, they become standard."

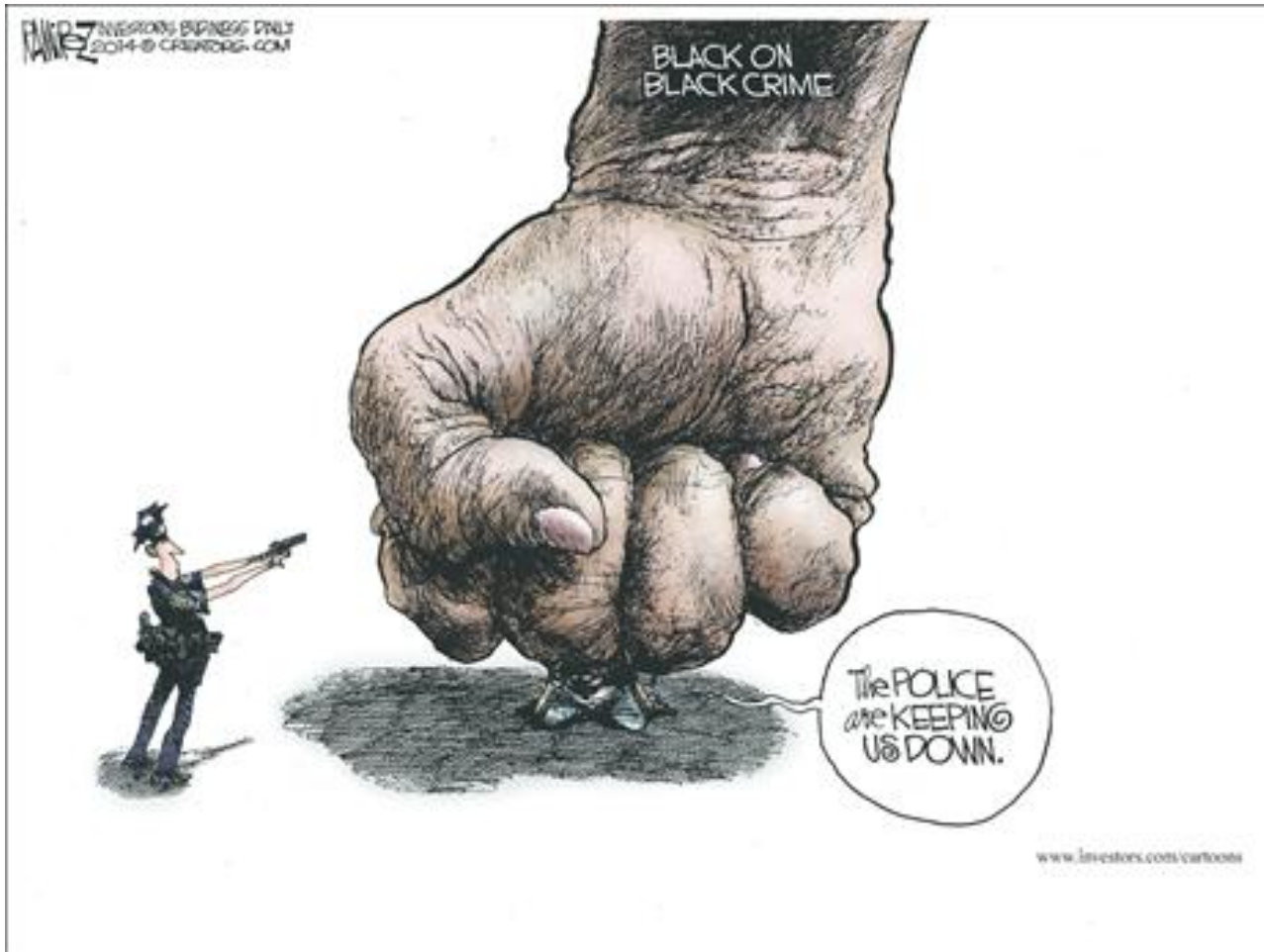
For a Christmas special we have a link to a video about ship-breakers in Bangladesh. There's some good use here of drones making this documentary. [Click here to be happy you're not there.](#)

A Pickings reader sent us a link to another special, it's the [Air Force Band flash mobbing at the Smithsonian](#) with some Christmas music.

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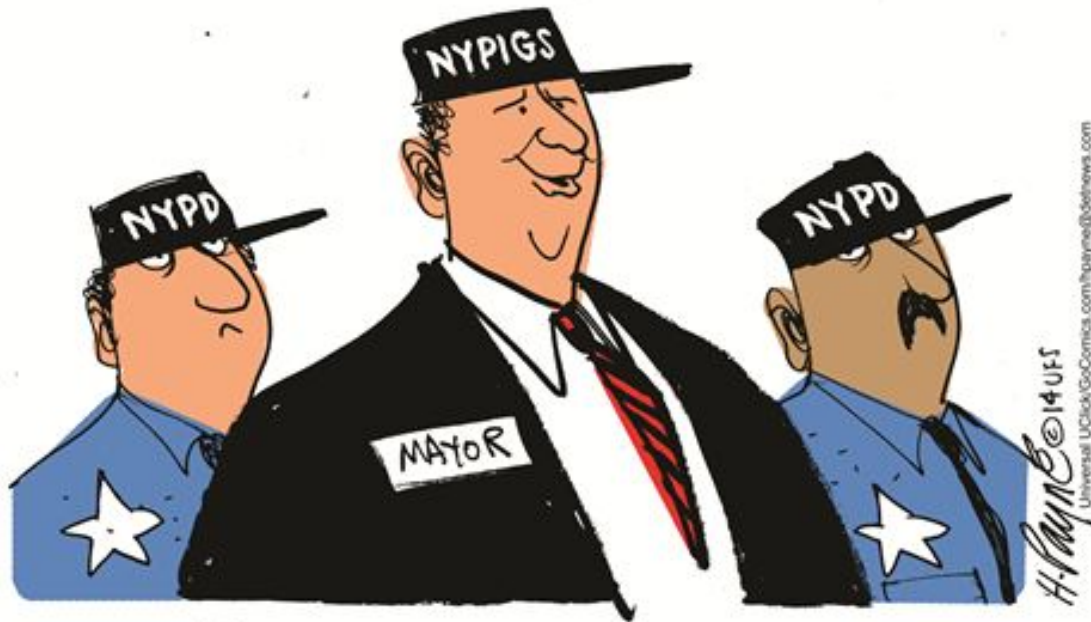
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