

December 4, 2014

Two weeks ago Rolling Stone dropped a bombshell on the Commonwealth of Virginia in a story about fraternity gang rape. The story is being challenged as we learn from [Erik Wemple in the Washington Post](#).

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*... When asked repeatedly on that Slate podcast whether she'd interviewed the accused, Erdely sounded evasive. Here's a rough transcript of the back-and-forth:*

*Slate DoubleX Podcast: Did they respond about this, did they deny it? What was their response to the allegations?*

*Erdely: There was never a need for a response until I stepped in apparently because it wasn't until I started asking questions that the university put them under some kind of investigation or so they said. It was unclear to me whether there was actually an investigation. The university said that they were under investigation but when I spoke to the Phi Psi chapter and also to the Phi Psi national representative, both of them said that they were not aware of any kind of university investigation....*

*Slate: But did the boys say anything to you? The thing about it is that everybody in the story seems to know who they are...*

*Erdely: There's no doubt that — people seem to know who these people are....I would speculate that life inside a frat house is a probably, you know, you have this kind of communal life where everybody is sort of sharing information...People are living lives closely with one another and it seems impossible to imagine that people didn't know about this.*

*Slate: Did they try to contact you? Did you try and call them. Was there any communication between you and them?*

*Erdely: Yeah, I reached out to them in multiple ways. They were kind of hard to get in touch with because their contact page was pretty outdated, but I wound up speaking...with their local president who sent me an email and then I talked with their national guy who's kind of like their national crisis manager —*

*Slate: But not the actual boys —*

*Erdely: They were both helpful in their own way, I guess. All they really said was, they both claim to have been really shocked by the allegations when they were told by the university. And they both said that this is a really tragic thing and if only we had more information we could look into it and that's the end of that.*

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*This lapse is inexcusable: Even if the accused aren't named in the story, Erdely herself acknowledges that "people seem to know who these people are." ...*

**Bret Stephens** refers to the story in his column this week.

*... Ms. Erdely tells the story of an undergraduate at the University of Virginia, identified only as "Jackie," who claims to have been gang-raped by seven young men at the Phi Kappa Psi fraternity over the course of three hours. The account is graphic and stomach-turning. No less disturbing is the article's description of UVA as a campus saturated with institutional misogyny and governed by a de facto law of omerta when it comes to sexual assault.*

*The article has stirred a national outcry. The university has shut down Greek life through January. Congressional Democrats are calling for hearings. New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand is using the UVA case as an opportunity to push a campus sex-crime bill.*

*All of this may do a great deal of good. With apologies to Bluto, there's not a lot to be said in favor of Greek life, much less of the toxic blend of partying, drinking and hooking up. Nor is there much doubt that rape is a serious problem on college campuses, all the more so because an astonishing number of young men do not seem to understand that coerced sex is rape.*

*But using the Rolling Stone story as an opportunity to promote a worthy cause should not acquit the media from looking closely at the details of the story itself. And here there are some serious reasons to exercise caution. ...*

So, if this is all true, **Megan McArdle** says UVA can find out who the perps are and bring them to justice.

*... For starters, there are two people whom the university can surely identify right now. First is "Drew," the boy who worked as a lifeguard at the university pool with her, invited her to the party, and handed her over to his brothers to be raped. There are about 80 brothers in this fraternity; the odds that more than one of them was an upperclassman lifeguard in 2012 seem pretty small, unless this happens to be the swim team frat.*

*Second is the kid who raped her with a beer bottle when he found himself unable to maintain an erection; she says she recognized him as a classmate from a small anthropology discussion group. The story strongly implies that the rape was an initiation ritual for the fraternity, and since fraternity rush takes place in the second half of freshman year at UVA, this boy was almost certainly a sophomore, or maybe an upperclassman who transferred in. At any rate, it's very unlikely that there is more than one young man who was a new member of Phi Kappa Psi in 2012, and also a member of lower-level anthropology class. The university ought to be able to identify these two young men in a matter of a few hours.*

*But the university may well be able to identify everyone, because the story strongly suggests that an entire new class of Phi Kappa Psi brothers participated in a gang rape, ...*

Here's the Richard Bradley piece noted by both Bret Stephens and Megan McArdle. Some years ago, when I was an editor at *George* magazine, I was unfortunate enough to work with the writer Stephen Glass on a number of articles. They proved to be fake, filled with fabrications, as was pretty much all of his work. The experience was painful but educational; it forced me to examine how easily I had been duped. Why did I believe those insinuations about Bill Clinton-friend Vernon Jordan being a lech? About the dubious ethics of uber-fundraiser (now Virginia governor) Terry McAuliffe?

*The answer, I had to admit, was because they corroborated my pre-existing biases. I was well on the way to believing that Vernon Jordan was a philanderer, for example—everyone seemed to think so, back in the '90s, during the Monica Lewinsky time.*

*So Stephen wrote what he knew I was inclined to believe. And because I was inclined to believe it, I abandoned my critical judgment. I lowered my guard.*

*The lesson I learned: One must be most critical, in the best sense of that word, about what one is already inclined to believe. So when, say, the Duke lacrosse scandal erupted, I applied that lesson. The story was so sensational! Believing it required indulging one's biases: A southern school...rich white preppy boys...a privileged sports team...lower class African-American women...rape. It read like a Tom Wolfe novel.*

*And of course it never happened. ...*

Sorry to have closed our week with such a bleak topic. To make amends we close with David Harsanyi telling us "we are never going to run out of oil." In a chilling 2010 column, Paul Krugman declared: "peak oil has arrived."

*So it's really not surprising that the national average for a gallon of gas has fallen to \$2.77 this week – in 10 states it was under \$2.60 – and analysts predict we're going to dip below the two-dollar mark soon. U.S. oil is down to \$75 a barrel, a drop of more than \$30 from the 52-week high.*

*Meanwhile, the Institute for Energy Research estimates that we have enough natural gas in the U.S. to meet electricity needs for around 575 years at current fuel demand and to fuel homes heated by natural gas for 857 years or so – because we have more gas than Russia, Iran, Qatar and Saudi Arabia combined.*

*With prices returning to ordinary levels and a few centuries' worth of fossil fuels on tap, this is a good time to remind ourselves that nearly every warning the Left has peddled about an impending energy crisis over the past 30 to 40 years has turned out to be wrong. And none of them are more wrong than the Malthusian idea that says we're running out of oil.*

*Each time there's a temporary spike in gas prices, science-centric liberals allow themselves a purely ideological indulgence, claiming – as Krugman, Paul Ehrlich, John Holdren and countless others have – that we're rapidly approaching a point when producers will hit the maximum rate of extraction of petroleum. Peak oil. With emerging demand, fossil fuels will become prohibitive. And unless we have our in solar panels in order, Armageddon is near. ...*

And some comedic looks at Thanksgiving instead of the normal cartoons.

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**Washington Post**  
**[Rolling Stone whiffs in reporting on alleged rape](#)**



*Protesters carry signs and chant slogans in front of the Phi Kappa Psi fraternity house at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville last month. The protest was in response to the university's reaction to an alleged sexual assault of a student detailed in Rolling Stone.*

For the sake of Rolling Stone's reputation, Sabrina Rubin Erdely had better be the country's greatest judge of character. On Nov. 19, the magazine [published Erdely's story](#) about a ghastly alleged gang rape at the stately Phi Kappa Psi fraternity at the University of Virginia. The victim, Jackie, was taken into a dark Phi Kappa Psi room in the early weeks of the 2012 school year and raped by seven men while her date, the pseudonymous "Drew," and one other man provided "instruction and encouragement," the story claims.

The story landed with tremendous impact, with the university [suspending fraternities until January](#) and a heap of media attention falling on Charlottesville. The alleged gang rape is under investigation by local police.

Asked on a [Slate podcast](#) what she cited as substantiation of the claims in the story, Erdely said, "I will just say that I found her story — I found her to be very credible."

Responses to rape allegations have an ugly history in this country, one in which the accuser's reputation and credibility end up on trial, while the perpetrators emerge unpunished. Reason

magazine, for example, asks, [“Is the UVA Rape Story a Gigantic Hoax?”](#) That’s a too-strong treatment hidden in the squishy confines of an interrogatory headline. Yet Rolling Stone bears a great deal of responsibility for placing the credibility of the accuser in the spotlight, thanks to shortcomings in its own reporting. Consider that:

**Erdely didn’t talk to the alleged perpetrators of the attack**, as [The Washington Post’s Paul Farhi has reported](#).

When asked repeatedly on that Slate podcast whether she’d interviewed the accused, Erdely sounded evasive. Here’s a rough transcript of the back-and-forth:

Slate DoubleX Podcast: Did they respond about this, did they deny it? What was their response to the allegations?

Erdely: There was never a need for a response until I stepped in apparently because it wasn’t until I started asking questions that the university put them under some kind of investigation or so they said. It was unclear to me whether there was actually an investigation. The university said that they were under investigation but when I spoke to the Phi Psi chapter and also to the Phi Psi national representative, both of them said that they were not aware of any kind of university investigation....

Slate: But did the boys say anything to you? The thing about it is that everybody in the story seems to know who they are...

Erdely: There’s no doubt that — people seem to know who these people are....I would speculate that life inside a frat house is a probably, you know, you have this kind of communal life where everybody is sort of sharing information...People are living lives closely with one another and it seems impossible to imagine that people didn’t know about this.

Slate: Did they try to contact you? Did you try and call them. Was there any communication between you and them?

Erdely: Yeah, I reached out to them in multiple ways. They were kind of hard to get in touch with because their contact page was pretty outdated, but I wound up speaking...with their local president who sent me an email and then I talked with their national guy who’s kind of like their national crisis manager —

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Those answers look bad for Rolling Stone. Perhaps Erdely didn’t understand what she was being asked — that is, whether she spoke with the actual alleged perpetrators themselves. She answers only the much different question of whether she spoke to fraternity management, a much less central matter.

This lapse is inexcusable: Even if the accused aren’t named in the story, Erdely herself acknowledges that “people seem to know who these people are.” If they were being cited in the story for mere drunkenness, boorish frat-boy behavior or similar collegiate misdemeanors, then there’d be no harm in failing to secure their input. The charge in this piece, however, is gang rape,

and so requires every possible step to reach out and interview them, including e-mails, phone calls, certified letters, FedEx letters, UPS letters and, if all of that fails, a knock on the door. No effort short of all that qualifies as journalism.

### **Witnesses aren't named.**

Following the alleged incident, Jackie emerges from the Phi Kappa Psi house and huddles with three friends, whose names are changed in the piece. Why the pseudonymous treatment for the friends? Perhaps they feared that being identified would provide clues to the complete identity of Jackie; perhaps they just don't want to get involved; one of them, "Randall," tells Erdely that he doesn't want to be interviewed because of "his loyalty to his own frat." And perhaps they also couldn't speak to the events in the room because they hadn't witnessed them — and that makes the outreach to the alleged perpetrators all the more critical.

The Erik Wemple Blog has requested an interview with Erdely, which Rolling Stone has declined, though Erdely did speak to Slate and to The Post's Farhi. Separately, we asked for an answer to this question about the friends. Rolling Stone spokeswoman Melissa Bruno told the Erik Wemple Blog that "dozens" of Jackie's friends were indeed interviewed — some were on the record, and some wanted to remain nameless because "they were concerned about retaliation on campus."

In her comments to Slate, Erdely said, "I spoke to, you know, virtually, all of her friends to find out what she had told them at various points." So the stories matched up? Erdely was asked. "Well, I found it to be very consistent," she replied. Then why wasn't this information included in the story?

**Erdely herself has started hedging on the account.** She told Slate, "The degree of her trauma — there's no doubt in my mind that something happened to her that night. What exactly happened, you know, I wasn't in that room. I don't know and I do tell it from her point of view."

That's not the mastery of material that you want from an investigative reporter. In comments to Farhi, Erdely noted: "[T]he gang-rape scene that leads the story is the alarming account that Jackie — a person whom I found to be credible — told to me, told her friends, and importantly, what she told the UVA administration, which chose not to act on her allegations in any way — i.e., the overarching point of the article. THAT is the story: the culture that greeted her and so many other UVA women I interviewed, who came forward with allegations, only to be met with indifference."

In deference to Erdely, her reporting on the internal proceedings at the University of Virginia over sexual assault is helpful. A high point comes when Erdely writes about a trustees meeting in September: "Two full hours had been set aside to discuss campus sexual assault, an amount of time that, as many around the conference table pointed out, underscored the depth of UVA's commitment. Those two hours, however, were devoted entirely to upbeat explanations of UVA's new prevention and response strategies, and to self-congratulations to UVA for being a 'model' among schools in this arena. Only once did the room darken with concern, when a trustee in UVA colors — blue sport coat, orange bow tie — interrupted to ask, 'Are we under any federal investigation with regard to sexual assault?'"

That said, Erdely has lost the ability to lecture others on the *real* story at hand. She and her editors, after all, placed the horrific gang-rape scene in the lede of their piece and seeded the rest of the narrative with its aftermath. People are justified in concluding that THAT is the story.

That said, when Erdely asserts that "something happened" on that night in September 2012, she rests on firmer ground. On-the-record comments come from Rachel Soltis, a suitemate of Jackie in 2012, who says, "At the beginning of the year, she seemed like a normal, happy girl, always with

friends. Then her door was closed all the time. We just figured she was out.” Soltis is also quoted this way: “The university ignores the problem to make itself look better. They should have done something in Jackie’s case. Me and several other people know exactly who did this to her. But they want to protect even the people who are doing these horrible things.”

In a [much-cited piece](#), Richard Bradley, a former editor at George magazine, writes of his skepticism of Erdely’s piece because it plays to our biases about fraternities and college men. Surely it does, but that consideration shouldn’t be held against it.

What should be held against it is its own flimsiness and the half-hearted attempts of Rolling Stone to report it. The publication says it didn’t name the perpetrators because Jackie is “so fearful of them. That was something we agreed on,” Erdely commented. That’s a compelling reason — to hold the story until Jackie felt comfortable naming them; or until she filed a complaint; or until something more solid on the case emerged. In explaining the origins of the piece to Slate, Erdely said, “I made contact with a student activist at the school who told me about the culture of the school...and then I asked her to put me in touch with other rape survivors and she had mentioned a bunch of people with different situations and she had kind of casually mentioned that she knew somebody who had been gang-raped.” When she chose her opening anecdote, that is, Erdely opted for a sensational and undocumented gang-rape case over other cases, which were perhaps more prosaic and documentable.

The last word goes to Rolling Stone, which sent us this statement:

The story we published was one woman’s account of a sexual assault at a UVA fraternity in October 2012\* – and the subsequent ordeal she experienced at the hands of University administrators in her attempts to work her way through the trauma of that evening. The indifference with which her complaint was met was, we discovered, sadly consistent with the experience of many other UVA women who have tried to report such assaults. Through our extensive reporting and fact-checking, we found Jackie to be entirely credible and courageous and we are proud to have given her disturbing story the attention it deserves.

\*The story alleges that the incident happened on Sept. 28, 2012.

**UPDATE 4:35 p.m.:** Rolling Stone has adjusted the statement to reflect the September incident.

**WSJ**

### [UVA, Ferguson and Media Failure](#)

***Narratives and allegations are not facts, despite what the media would have us believe.***

by Bret Stephens

In March 2007 the [New York Times Magazine](#) ran a stunning 12,000-word [cover story](#) on the subject of “The Women’s War.” It told the story of several female veterans of the war in Iraq, of the sexual assault some had endured in the military, and of their subsequent struggles with alcoholism, depression, PTSD and other effects of combat.

Among the most compelling characters in the piece was a woman named Amorita Randall, who claimed she had barely survived an IED attack on her Humvee and that she had been raped twice

in her six years of Navy service. She claimed to have reported the second incident to her commanders only to be told “not to make such a big deal about it.”

The details are gruesome: “I remember there were other guys in the room too,” Ms. Randall told the Times. “Somebody told me they took pictures and put them on the Internet.” Ms. Randall, added reporter Sara Corbett, “says she has blocked out most of the details of the second rape—something else experts say is a common self-protective measure taken by the brain in response to violent trauma—and that she left Iraq ‘in a daze.’ ”

Only one problem: “Ms. Randall did not serve in Iraq, but may have become convinced she did,” as the Times later acknowledged in an Editors’ Note. Instead, her overseas service was spent in Guam, 6,200 miles away from the combat zone. The Navy, the Times added, “had no record of a sexual-assault report involving Ms. Randall.”

I was reminded of Ms. Corbett’s article while reading another blockbuster piece, [this one](#) in Rolling Stone by Sabrina Rubin Erdely. Ms. Erdely tells the story of an undergraduate at the University of Virginia, identified only as “Jackie,” who claims to have been gang-raped by seven young men at the Phi Kappa Psi fraternity over the course of three hours. The account is graphic and stomach-turning. No less disturbing is the article’s description of UVA as a campus saturated with institutional misogyny and governed by a de facto law of omerta when it comes to sexual assault.

The article has stirred a national outcry. The university has shut down Greek life through January. Congressional Democrats are calling for hearings. New York Sen. [Kirsten Gillibrand](#) is using the UVA case as an opportunity to push a campus sex-crime bill.

All of this may do a great deal of good. With apologies to [Bluto](#), there’s not a lot to be said in favor of Greek life, much less of the toxic blend of partying, drinking and hooking up. Nor is there much doubt that rape is a serious problem on college campuses, all the more so because an [astonishing number](#) of young men do not seem to understand that coerced sex *is* rape.

But using the Rolling Stone story as an opportunity to promote a worthy cause should not acquit the media from looking closely at the details of the story itself. And here there are some serious reasons to exercise caution.

The most intelligent dissection of the article comes from a Nov. 24 [blog post](#) from Richard Bradley, the editor in chief of Worth magazine. Mr. Bradley picks up on some of the journalistic malpractice in the story, including the failure to get any statement (or “no comment”) from the accused rapists. He also notes lurid details that are also simply improbable, such as the suggestion that the victim was raped over shards of glass. (Wouldn’t that have wounded the rapists also?)

Which isn’t to say that the rape did not happen, even if it may not have happened precisely in the way described in the piece. But it ought to raise a skeptical eyebrow. Mr. Bradley’s sharpest observation is that the journalistic fabrications that most often make it into print are those that “play into existing biases.” In the UVA case, he notes, those include biases against fraternities, men and the South—exactly the kinds of biases that led to the fabricated rape charges against the Duke lacrosse players in 2006.

Much the same could be said about other recent media sensations, Ferguson most of all. The killing of Michael Brown was many things, but for the media it was largely an opportunity to confirm an existing narrative, this one about trigger-happy cops, institutionalized racial disparities and the fate of young black men caught in between.

That narrative, also conforming to pre-existing biases, overwhelmed what ought to have been the only question worth answering: Was Darren Wilson justified in shooting Brown? If the media had stuck to answering that, the damage inflicted on the rest of Ferguson—not to mention all the squalid racial hucksterism that went with it—could have been avoided.

It isn't surprising that a generation of journalists schooled in the idea that "narrative" contains truth independent of fact are so easily taken in by stories that ultimately prove less than accurate, if not utterly untrue. Nor is it surprising that American distrust in the news media is near an [all-time high](#). Bad journalism is bad *for* journalism, and good journalists have a responsibility and an interest in calling out sensationalist stories whose details ring false even as they play to what we're inclined to believe is true.

The UVA story cries out for a much closer look.

## **Bloomberg Blogs**

### **[UVA Should Help Police Catch Alleged Rapists -- Now](#)**

by Megan McArdle

I wrote last week about the explosive rape allegations against a University of Virginia fraternity in [Rolling Stone](#). This morning I see that Richard Bradley, a former editor at *George* who had the unhappy distinction of having been taken in by Stephen Glass, is [raising questions](#) about the story and the reporting by the author, Sabrina Rubin Erdely.

I read Bradley's article and thought, "well, if there are problems with Erdely's story, it will probably come out eventually, because there's enough detail that can be checked." But there's a corollary to that: If the *Rolling Stone* article's allegations are true, there's also enough detail to put at least a couple of people in jail, and possibly the whole group, even if Jackie (the victim) is reluctant to assist the investigation.

For starters, there are two people whom the university can surely identify right now. First is "Drew," the boy who worked as a lifeguard at the university pool with her, invited her to the party, and handed her over to his brothers to be raped. There are about 80 brothers in this fraternity; the odds that more than one of them was an upperclassman lifeguard in 2012 seem pretty small, unless this happens to be the swim team frat.

Second is the kid who raped her with a beer bottle when he found himself unable to maintain an erection; she says she recognized him as a classmate from a small anthropology discussion group. The story strongly implies that the rape was an initiation ritual for the fraternity, and since fraternity rush takes place in the second half of freshman year at UVA, this boy was almost certainly a sophomore, or maybe an upperclassman who transferred in. At any rate, it's very unlikely that there is more than one young man who was a new member of Phi Kappa Psi in 2012, and also a member of lower-level anthropology class. The university ought to be able to identify these two young men in a matter of a few hours.

But the university may well be able to identify everyone, because the story strongly suggests that an entire new class of Phi Kappa Psi brothers participated in a gang rape, either of Jackie or of the two other girls who she learned were also gang raped at the fraternity around the same time that she had been. As far as I can tell, Virginia has [no statute of limitations](#) on rape, which means the police should be aggressively investigating these sickening allegations. The university has a duty

to its own community, and to the community at large, to do its utmost to identify as many rapists as possible, and help the police to bring them to justice. And all of us who have a stake in reducing rape -- which is to say, all of us who are not rapists -- should be putting as much pressure as possible on the UVA administration to ensure that it does exactly that.

## Shots In The Dark

### Is the Rolling Stone Story True?

by Richard Bradley

Some years ago, when I was an editor at George magazine, I was unfortunate enough to work with the writer Stephen Glass on a number of articles. They proved to be fake, filled with fabrications, as was pretty much all of his work. The experience was painful but educational; it forced me to examine how easily I had been duped. Why did I believe those insinuations about Bill Clinton-friend Vernon Jordan being a lech? About the dubious ethics of uber-fundraiser (now Virginia governor) Terry McAuliffe?

The answer, I had to admit, was because they corroborated my pre-existing biases. I was well on the way to believing that Vernon Jordan was a philanderer, for example—everyone seemed to think so, back in the '90s, during the Monica Lewinsky time.

So Stephen wrote what he knew I was inclined to believe. And because I was inclined to believe it, I abandoned my critical judgment. I lowered my guard.

The lesson I learned: One must be most critical, in the best sense of that word, about what one is already inclined to believe. So when, say, the Duke lacrosse scandal erupted, [I applied that lesson](#). The story was so sensational! Believing it required indulging one's biases: A southern school...rich white preppy boys...a privileged sports team...lower class African-American women...rape. It read like a Tom Wolfe novel.

And of course it never happened.

Which brings me to a magazine article that is causing an enormous furor in Virginia and around the country; it's inescapable on social media. Written by a woman named [Sabrina Rubin Erdely](#), the article is called "[A Rape on Campus: A Brutal Assault and Struggle for Justice at UVA.](#)"

The article alleges a truly horrifying gang rape at a UVA fraternity, and it has understandably shocked the campus and everyone who's read it. The consequences have been pretty much instantaneous: The fraternity involved has voluntarily suspended its operations (without admitting that the incident happened); UVA's president is promising an investigation and has since suspended *all* fraternity charters on campus; the alumni are in an uproar; the governor of Virginia has spoken out; students, particularly female students, are furious, and the concept of "rape culture" is further established. Federal intervention is sure to follow.

The only thing is...I'm not sure that I believe it. I'm not convinced that this gang rape actually happened. Something about this story doesn't feel right.

Here's why.

The article tells the story of “Jackie”—we never learn her identity—an 18-year-old freshman at UVA. She’s a model student, “attending events, joining clubs, making friends and, now, being asked on an actual date” by a fraternity member she met while working as a lifeguard. Her date, “Drew”—for a reason Rolling Stone never explains, we never learn his identity either—leads Jackie upstairs so that they can talk “where it’s quieter.”

What Rolling Stone writer Sabrina Rudin Erdely says happens next turns the stomach.

*Drew ushered Jackie into a bedroom, shutting the door behind them. The room was pitch-black inside. Jackie blindly turned toward Drew, uttering his name. At that same moment, she says, she detected movement in the room – and felt someone bump into her. Jackie began to scream.*

*“Shut up,” she heard a man’s voice say as a body barreled into her, tripping her backward and sending them both crashing through a low glass table. There was a heavy person on top of her, spreading open her thighs, and another person kneeling on her hair, hands pinning down her arms, sharp shards digging into her back, and excited male voices rising all around her. When yet another hand clamped over her mouth, Jackie bit it, and the hand became a fist that punched her in the face. The men surrounding her began to laugh. For a hopeful moment Jackie wondered if this wasn’t some collegiate prank. Perhaps at any second someone would flick on the lights and they’d return to the party.*

*“Grab its motherfucking leg,” she heard a voice say. And that’s when Jackie knew she was going to be raped.*

And, Rubin Erdley says, she was—repeatedly, and for an agonizingly long time.

*She remembers every moment of the next three hours of agony, during which, she says, seven men took turns raping her, while two more – her date, Drew, and another man – gave instruction and encouragement. She remembers how the spectators swigged beers, and how they called each other nicknames like Armpit and Blanket. She remembers the men’s heft and their sour reek of alcohol mixed with the pungency of marijuana. Most of all, Jackie remembers the pain and the pounding that went on and on.*

Let me be very clear: I don’t doubt that it’s possible that this happened. People can do terrible things, things that one doesn’t want to believe happen. And I certainly don’t want to think that this could have happened.

But more than that: I don’t believe that it happened—certainly not in the way that it is recounted.

Remember: One must be most critical about stories that play into existing biases. And this story nourishes a lot of them: biases against fraternities, against men, against the South; biases about the naivete of young women, especially Southern women; pre-existing beliefs about the prevalence—indeed, the existence—of rape culture; extant suspicions about the hostility of university bureaucracies to sexual assault complaints that can produce unflattering publicity.

And, of course, this is a very charged time when it comes to the issue of sexual assault on campuses. Emotion has outswept reason. Jackie, for example, alleges that one out of three women who go to UVA has been raped. This is silly.

So let’s look at this story with a different set of eyes—not the eyes of a man or a woman, but those of a magazine editor who has seen fakes before.

The first thing that strikes me about it, of course, is that Jackie is never identified. I don't love that—it makes me uncomfortable to base an entire story on an unnamed source, and I can't think of any other situation other than rape where a publication would allow that—but certainly one can see the rationale.

Then we have three friends who talked to Jackie right after the rape, and apparently discouraged her from going to the hospital or the authorities because they might subsequently be banned from frat parties. Not one of them is named, or interviewed; so the three people who could allegedly corroborate the assault don't.

Then there's the fact that Jackie apparently knew two of her rapists, but they are not named, nor does Rubin Erdley contact them, which is basically a cardinal rule of journalism: If someone in your story is accused of something, you'd better do your damndest to give them a chance to respond. There's no sign that Rubin Erdley did so. Why not? Did she not know their names? Would Jackie not tell her? Because if Rubin Erdley knew their names and didn't call them, that is horrible journalism and undermines confidence in her reporting. And if she didn't know their names—well, we're back in [Patrick Witt-land](#) again.

Finally there's the narrative of the gang rape itself. It is a terrible story—so terrible that, if it weren't for the power of our preexisting biases, we would be hard-pressed to believe it.

A young woman is lured to a fraternity in order to be gang-raped as part of a fraternity initiation. It's a premeditated gang rape. I am not, thankfully, an expert on premeditated gang rape, but to the extent that it exists, it seems to be most prevalent in war-torn lands or countries with a strain of a punitive, misogynist and violent religious culture (Pakistan, for example).

The allegation here is that, at U.Va., gang rape is a rite of passage for young men to become fraternity "brothers." It's possible. One would think that we'd have heard of this before—gang rape as a fraternity initiation is hard to keep secret—but it's possible.

So then we have a scene that boggles the mind. (Again, doesn't mean it's untrue; does mean we have to be critical.)

A young woman is led into a "pitch-black" room. She is shoved by a man, who falls on her; they crash through a glass table and she lands in shards of glass. She bites his hand; he punches her; the men laugh. (Really? A man punches a woman and people laugh?) With the smell of marijuana (not usually known as a violence-inducing drug) hovering over the room, he and six more men rape her. The last uses a beer bottle; allegedly he can not get an erection, so his fellow frat brothers goad him on, mock him, then finally give him a tool with which to violate Jackie. (This is the man whom Jackie allegedly knew because they were in an anthropology seminar together.) This, after all, is who men really are, in anonymous darkness.

It is hard for me here not to think of [Tawana Brawley](#), who not too long ago—but too far back for many of this article's readers to remember—showed up at her home after going missing for a couple of days wearing only a garbage bag, covered in feces and with racial slurs scrawled on her body. Brawley told her family that she'd been kidnapped and raped by six white men.

Turned out she made the whole thing up because to avoid a potential punishment from her stepfather. But before that truth was discovered, the lives of the men she accused were very nearly destroyed.

(Jackie: “She remembers how...the men called each other nicknames like ‘Armpit’ and ‘Blanket’”—which apparently explains why she doesn’t know the names of seven of the men involved.)

The story of what happened to Jackie is similarly horrifying—and similarly incredible. Having been raped for three hours while lying in shards of glass “digging into her back”—three hours of which Jackie remembers every detail, despite the fact of the room’s pitch-blackness—she passes out and wakes up at 3 AM in an empty room.

Again: It’s possible. You can’t say it isn’t. But I am reminded of the urban myth about someone [waking up in a bathtub full of ice in New Orleans](#). This story contains a lot of apocryphal tropes.

Jackie makes her way downstairs, her red dress apparently sufficiently intact to wear; the party is still raging. Though she is blood-stained—three hours with shards of glass “digging into her back,” and gang-raped, including with a beer bottle— and must surely look deeply traumatized, no one notices her. She makes her way out a side entrance she hadn’t seen before. She calls her friends, who tell her that she doesn’t want to be known as the girl who cried rape and worry that if they take her to the hospital they won’t get invited to subsequent frat parties.

Nothing in this story is impossible; it’s important to note that. It *could* have happened. But to believe it beyond a doubt, without a question mark—as virtually all the people who’ve read the article seem to—requires a lot of leaps of faith. It requires you to indulge your pre-existing biases.

Or perhaps I should say your pre-existing fantasies—your nightmares about the worst possible thing that could happen to you, or your friend or your daughter or sister; your deepest fears about what men are capable of; your horror at the horror of rape; your outrage about the lack of outrage.

“Grab its motherfucking leg,” says the first rapist to one of his “brothers.” It reminds me of [Silence of the Lambs](#): “It rubs the lotion on its skin...” But Silence of the Lambs was fiction.

What happens now? There will be investigations; the police will likely be involved. If there really were nine men in that pitch-black room, it is hard to imagine that we won’t find out the truth, or at least more information. And Jackie could, I believe, waive her legal protections and allow the university to disclose the file it allegedly has on her case.

But we do not know who Jackie is, and she will not put her name to this, for fear of backlash.

If it didn’t happen, this story will be impossible to disprove—some people seem to want to believe it—and U.Va’s reputation will likely not recover for decades. Rolling Stone—which published several articles by Stephen Glass, by the way, and always insisted that it was the one publication in which Glass did not tell lies—will stand by its story. And we will never know the truth.

## The Federalist

### Everything Liberals Have Told Us About Energy Is Wrong

#### *We Are Never Going To Run Out Of Oil*

by David Harsanyi

In a chilling 2010 column, Paul Krugman [declared](#): “peak oil has arrived.”

So it’s really not surprising that [the national average for a gallon of gas](#) has fallen to \$2.77 this week – in 10 states it was under \$2.60 – and analysts predict we’re going to dip below the two-dollar mark soon. U.S. oil is down to \$75 a barrel, a drop of more than \$30 from the 52-week high.

Meanwhile, the Institute for Energy Research [estimates](#) that we have enough natural gas in the U.S. to meet electricity needs for around 575 years at current fuel demand and to fuel homes heated by natural gas for 857 years or so – because we have more gas than Russia, Iran, Qatar and Saudi Arabia combined.

With prices returning to ordinary levels and a few centuries’ worth of fossil fuels on tap, this is a good time to remind ourselves that nearly every warning the Left has peddled about an impending energy crisis over the past 30 to 40 years has turned out to be wrong. And none of them are more wrong than the Malthusian idea that says we’re running out of oil.

Each time there’s a temporary spike in gas prices, science-centric liberals allow themselves a purely ideological indulgence, claiming – as Krugman, Paul Ehrlich, John Holdren and countless others have – that we’re rapidly approaching a point when producers will hit the maximum rate of extraction of petroleum. Peak oil. With emerging demand, fossil fuels will become prohibitive. And unless we have our in solar panels in order, Armageddon is near.

In a 2005 *New York Times Magazine* piece, ominously titled “The Breaking Point,” Peter Maass [warned](#): “Few people imagined a time when supply would dry up because of demand alone. But a steady surge in demand in recent years — led by China’s emergence as a voracious importer of oil — has changed that.” I can remember sitting through a number of editorial board meetings during the 2000s watching peak oil cranks pull out charts that, with pinpoint accuracy, predicted exactly when this tragedy would hit— even as enormous new deposits were being discovered and advancements in productivity were debunking those claims in real-time.

And while everything is “finite” in a galactic sense, there has never been any consensus on when oil, gas and coal will hit peak production. Probably because we’re never going to run out of any of them. Julian Simon is still right, and spikes in oil’s price only create more innovation and better [productivity](#):

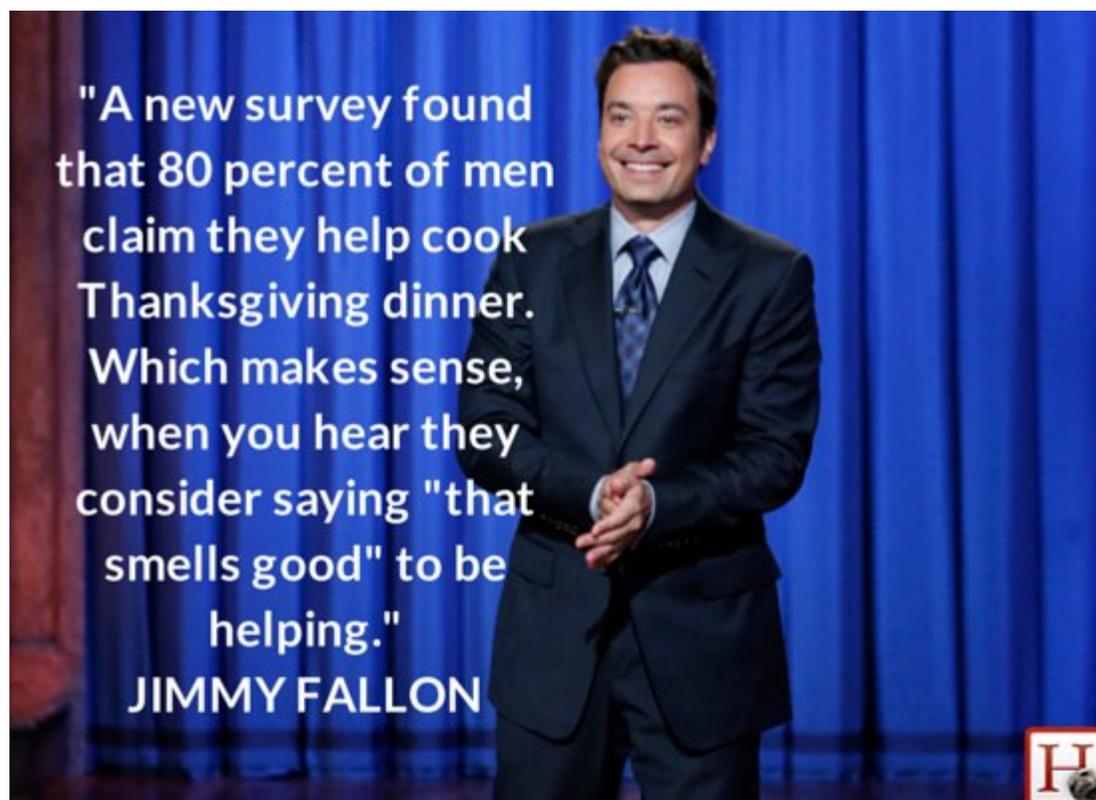
The reason that the cost of energy has declined in the long run is the fundamental process of 1) increased demand due to the growth of population and income, which raises prices and hence constitutes opportunity to entrepreneurs and inventors; 2) the search for new ways of supplying the demand for energy; 3) the eventual discovery of methods which leave us better off than if the original problem had not appeared.

One thing is for sure, the technological advancements we’ve seen in extracting fossil fuels is light years ahead of the progress we’ve made in the state-planned alternative energy infrastructure. Yet, the same people who were skeptics of shale and [are now skeptical of methane hydrate](#) believe windmills will solve our non-existent crisis. Probably because progress can often be confused with wishful thinking.

After all, it might not be President Obama's ideological obstinacy that sinks the Keystone pipeline, but economic reality. Saudi Arabia, the biggest OPEC producer, plans to cut its oil prices to preserve market share and hurt North American shale production. [The Canadian Energy Research Institute estimates](#) that the pipeline needs to extract a price of \$85 a barrel to be profitable at all. The price is still right but it might not be for long.

So what's the answer? Proposals to artificially spike energy prices, of course. One wonders why the Left never takes more credit for high gas prices. Isn't that the objective? There are numerous benefits to high energy prices. For starters, it's a great opportunity for politicians to get those speculators, predators, gougers and rent-seeking Big Oil executives into congressional hearings where they can be properly berated for an imaginary hold on fungible commodity prices.

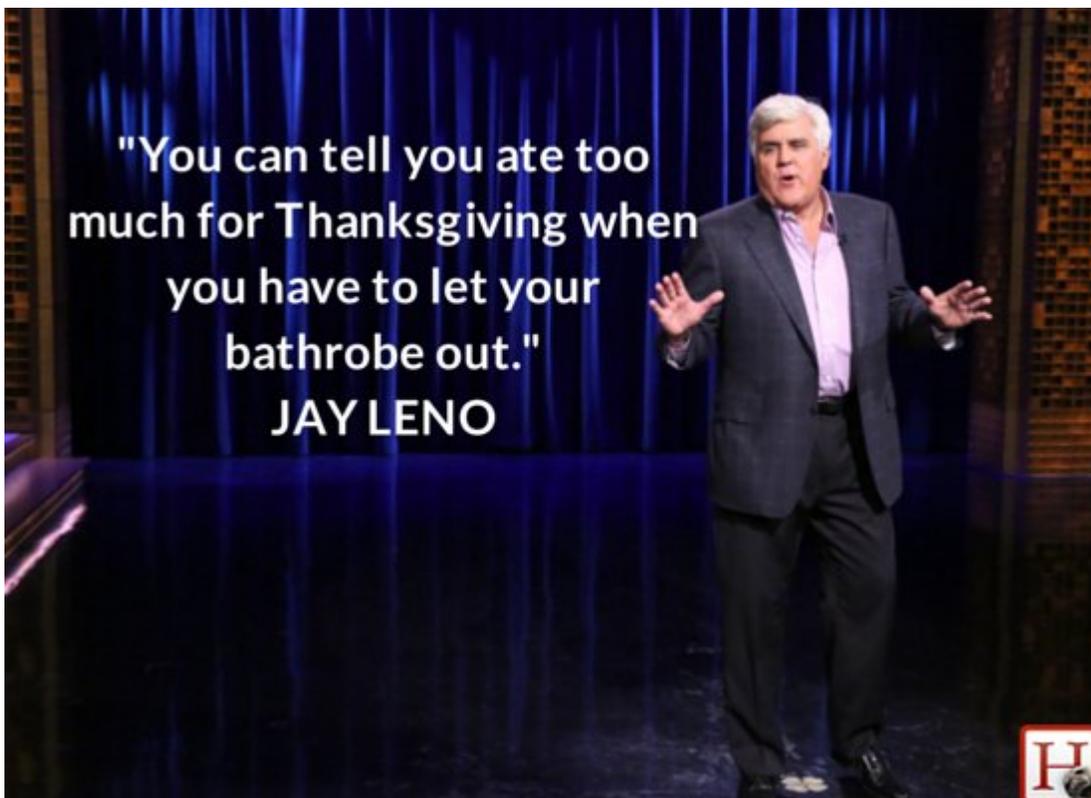
But the truth is Democrats should be thanking them. As Steven Chu [explained](#) in 2008, "Somehow we have to figure out how to boost the price of gasoline to the levels in Europe." President Obama conceded [he favored](#) a "gradual adjustment" in this direction. Now, an energy secretary doesn't normally seek out ways to make energy more expensive, but these were heady times. There was still hope that Washington would pass cap-and-trade, a contrived marketplace that folds the arbitrary cost of progressive guilt into the price of energy use. Obama turned to other means to get the job done. But after six years of trying, we learned that the laws of economics can't be circumvented. Which is great news for consumers, bad news for progressives.





"Thanksgiving, man. Not a good day to be my pants."

KEVIN JAMES



"You can tell you ate too much for Thanksgiving when you have to let your bathrobe out."

JAY LENO



"The meal isn't over when  
I'm full, the meal is over  
when I hate myself."

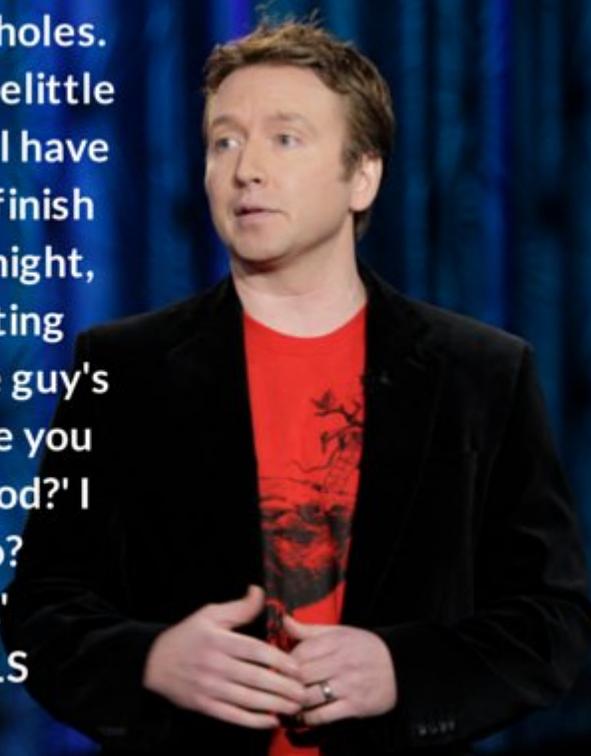
LOUIS C.K.



Her friends are a\*\*holes.  
They always try to belittle  
me because they all have  
PhD's and I didn't finish  
college. Like, one night,  
we're all out getting  
dinner, and this one guy's  
like, 'So, Chad, have you  
ever had Indian food?' I

was like, 'Hello?  
Thanksgiving.'

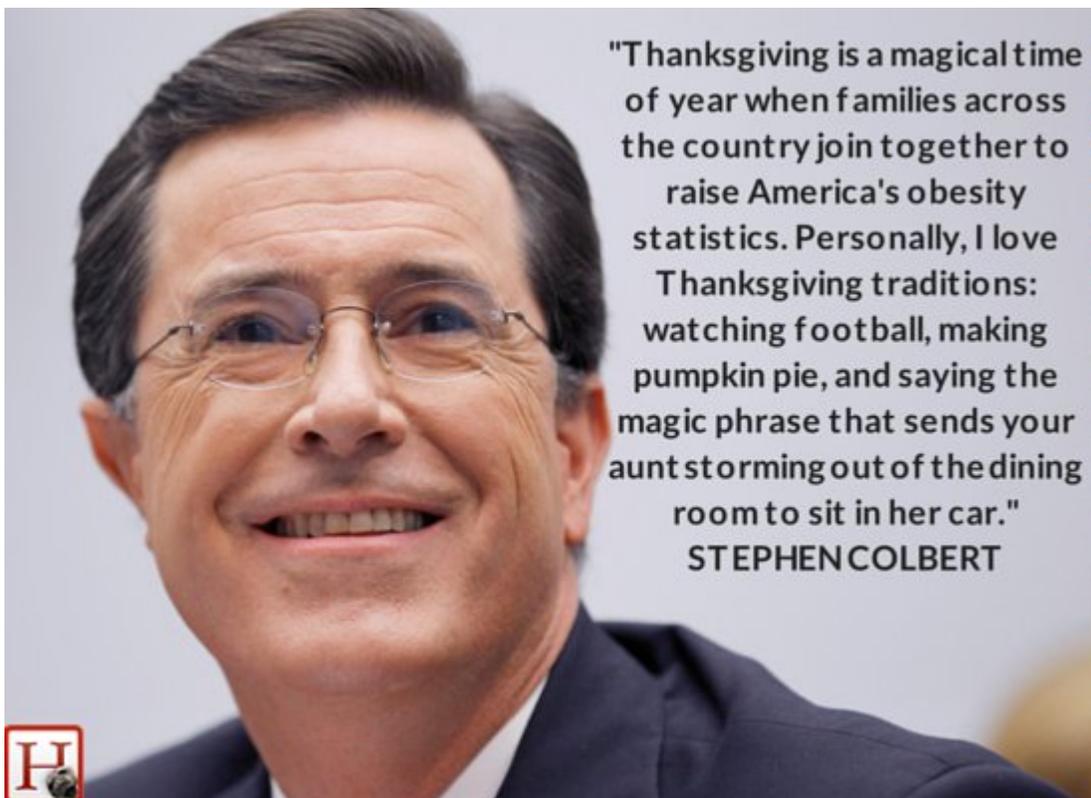
CHAD DANIELS





"People always think of Chinese food as the go-to ethnic food when everything else is closed during the holidays, but Indian is a nice alternative. Plus -- Indians? Thanksgiving? Kinda makes sense..."

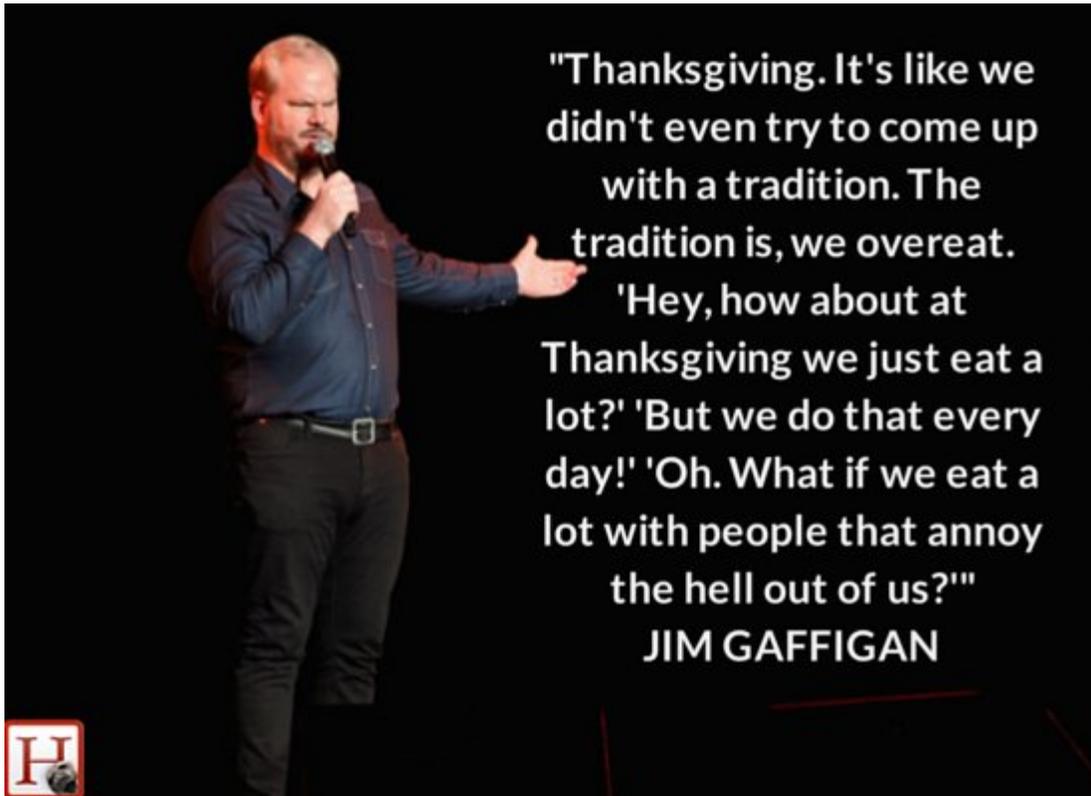
**ERIN GIBSON**



"Thanksgiving is a magical time of year when families across the country join together to raise America's obesity statistics. Personally, I love Thanksgiving traditions: watching football, making pumpkin pie, and saying the magic phrase that sends your aunt storming out of the dining room to sit in her car."

**STEPHEN COLBERT**





"Thanksgiving. It's like we didn't even try to come up with a tradition. The tradition is, we overeat.

'Hey, how about at Thanksgiving we just eat a lot?' 'But we do that every day!' 'Oh. What if we eat a lot with people that annoy the hell out of us?'"

**JIM GAFFIGAN**



"Walmart announced that this Thanksgiving they are opening earlier than they ever have. Because what better way to celebrate the pilgrims' arrival in America than buying crap from China."

**CONAN O'BRIEN**

