

February 17, 2015

Taking some time out from contemplating our present predicaments, Victor Davis Hanson reminds us of last month's 50 year anniversary of the death of Winston Churchill.

Fifty years ago this Saturday, (January 24, 1965) former British prime minister Winston Churchill died at age 90.

Churchill is remembered for his multiple nonstop careers as a statesman, cabinet minister, politician, journalist, Nobel laureate historian, and combat veteran. He began his career serving the British military as a Victorian-era mounted lancer and ended it as custodian of Britain's nuclear deterrent.

But he is most renowned for an astounding five-year-tenure as Britain's wartime prime minister from May 10, 1940, to June 26, 1945, when he was voted out of office not long after the surrender of Nazi Germany.

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The United States was not just neutral. It had no intention of entering another European war — at least not until after the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor a year and half later.

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Some of the British elite wished to cut a peace deal with Hitler to save their empire and keep Britain from being bombed or invaded. They understandably argued that Britain could hardly hold out when Poland, Denmark, Norway the Netherlands, Belgium, and France all had not. Yet Churchill voiced defiance and vowed to keep on fighting. ...

Back to the present predicament - the one where we have a rogue president. A president, incidentally, who on day one removed a bust of Winston Churchill from the oval office. City Journal with a good post on "faithful execution" of laws.

... Lots of debate will ensue over the extent to which the administration's non-deportation policy finds support in the maze of statutes comprising American immigration laws. But stepping back from the minutiae, one is struck by the gulf between the legal arguments proffered by the administration and the substance of its policy. The OLC (Office of Legal Counsel of the Justice Department) memo asserts that the president's policy of systematic nonenforcement, far from thwarting Congress, actually "is consistent with the removal priorities established by Congress," in light of the scarcity of funds that Congress appropriates for deportations. Yet in his remarks announcing the policy, President Obama stressed that his action was necessary precisely because Congress had not passed legislation "fixing this broken immigration system." Similarly, the OLC memo tries to downplay the impact of the administration's action, asserting that it is not "an absolute, inflexible policy of not enforcing the immigration laws in certain categories of cases" but instead a general framework that "provides for case-by-case determinations" based on each "individual alien's circumstances," leaving "ample room for the exercise of individualized discretion

by responsible officials.” Yet the documents make no serious attempt to explain how or why individuals meeting the policy’s broad standards would ever be singled out for harsher treatment—and Obama, to the contrary, announced to all illegal immigrants satisfying these conditions that “you’ll be able to apply to stay in this country temporarily without fear of deportation. You can come out of the shadows and get right with the law. That’s what this deal is.”

Most important, where OLC concludes that the president’s policy does not, “under the guise of exercising enforcement discretion, attempt to effectively rewrite the laws to match [his] policy preferences,” the president speaks to the contrary. “I just took an action to change the law,” he told an audience days after the OLC issued its analysis.

It is this unbridgeable gap between the president’s actions and the Justice Department’s rationalizations that reveals Obama’s failure to satisfy his constitutional obligation to “take care that the laws be faithfully executed.” Though a certain degree of statutory under-enforcement is tolerable (and often laudable) under our constitutional framework, the president is not “faithful” when his approach is fundamentally dishonest. “[T]he constitutional charge to the President to take care that the laws be faithfully executed,” wrote Attorney General William Wirt to President James Monroe in 1823, requires the president to see that each of his officers “performs his duty faithfully—that is, honestly: not with perfect correctness of judgment, but honestly.” The emphasis on the words “faithfully” and “honestly” in that quotation comes from Wirt himself. The current president and attorney general would do well to emphasize faithfulness and honesty, too.

We entered the 21st Century looking for better and better ways to store energy. Jeff Jacoby wrote a Valentine to the best way to store energy - a barrel of oil.

*... Here on Planet Earth, the booming use of petroleum, coal, and natural gas has fueled an almost inconceivable amount of good. All human technologies generate costs as well as benefits, but the gains from the use of fossil fuels have been extraordinary. The energy derived from fossil fuels, economist Robert Bradley Jr. wrote last spring in *Forbes*, has “liberated mankind from wretched poverty; fueled millions of high-productivity jobs in nearly every business sector; been a feedstock for medicines that have saved countless lives; and led to the development of fertilizers that have greatly increased crop yields to feed the hungry.” Far from wrecking the planet, the harnessing of carbon-based energy makes it safer and more livable.*

The rise of fossil fuels has led to dramatic gains in human progress — whether that progress is measured in terms of life expectancy, income, education, health, sanitation, transportation, or leisure. Nearly everything that is comfortable and convenient about modern civilization depends on the ready availability of energy, and nearly 90 percent of our energy comes from oil, gas, and coal. Pro-divestment activists know better than to push people to give up electricity, air travel, computers, or central heating — all of which would vanish without the fossil fuel industry. Instead they demonize the industry, reasoning that it will be easier to turn Big Oil into a pariah than to convince the public to abandon its cars and smartphones. ...

Megan McArdle posts on Scott Walker's college career.

The Washington Post has a lengthy article on Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker's college career and his decision to drop out of Marquette University during his senior year. I read it carefully, and I think that this piece raises a pretty important question about Walker's presidential campaign.

Namely: Who cares?

We're talking about events that happened almost 30 years ago. None of them are illegal, or even, frankly, very interesting. (He got a D-minus in French!) So why are we talking about this? ...

... The fact that we seem so fixated on events decades past is its own dire signal -- of the way that America's Mandarin class is starting to think about college education not merely as the basic credential required for many of the best-paying jobs, but also the basic credential required for being a worthy, capable person. This is not merely untrue, but also a giant middle finger raised to the majority of upstanding American citizens who also didn't graduate from college. ...

Glenn Reynolds of Instapundit has more on the subject we will explore often in the next year or two. Reynolds thinks the election of Walker "might bring reality back to an Ivy League-suffocated government." It would be a refreshing change because only people who have sat in years of classes from this country's professoriate could be as dumb as what we have running the government today.

A lot of people don't know much about him yet, and he may not even be running, but if Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker is elected president in 2016, he'll immediately accomplish something that no other candidate being talked about can: He'll lay to rest the absurd belief that you're a nobody if you don't have a college degree. And he might even cut into the surprisingly recent takeover of our institutions by an educated mandarin class, something that just might save the country.

Though Walker attended Marquette University, he left before graduating, which has caused some finger-wagging from the usual journalistic suspects. After all, they seem to believe, everyone they know has a college degree, so it must be essential to getting ahead. As the successful governor of an important state, you'd think that Walker's subsequent career would make his college degree irrelevant, but you'd be wrong.

And that's why a President Walker would accomplish something worthwhile the moment he took office. Over the past few years in America, a college degree has become something valued more as a class signifier than as a source of useful knowledge. When Democratic spokesman Howard Dean (who himself was born into wealth) suggested that Walker's lack of a degree made him unsuitable for the White House, what he really meant was that Walker is "not our kind, dear" — lacking the credential that many elite Americans today regard as essential to respectable status.

Of course, some of our greatest presidents, from George Washington to Abraham Lincoln to Harry S. Truman, never graduated from college. But the college degree as class-signifier is, as I note in my book, The New School, a rather recent phenomenon. ...

National Review

The Last Lion Remembered

Winston Churchill never once flinched in the face of the Third Reich.

by Victor Davis Hanson

Fifty years ago this Saturday, (**January 24, 1965**) former British prime minister Winston Churchill died at age 90.

Churchill is remembered for his multiple nonstop careers as a statesman, cabinet minister, politician, journalist, Nobel laureate historian, and combat veteran. He began his career serving the British military as a Victorian-era mounted lancer and ended it as custodian of Britain's nuclear deterrent.

But he is most renowned for an astounding five-year-tenure as Britain's wartime prime minister from May 10, 1940, to June 26, 1945, when he was voted out of office not long after the surrender of Nazi Germany.

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Some of the British elite wished to cut a peace deal with Hitler to save their empire and keep Britain from being bombed or invaded. They understandably argued that Britain could hardly hold out when Poland, Denmark, Norway the Netherlands, Belgium, and France all had not. Yet Churchill voiced defiance and vowed to keep on fighting.

After the fall of France, Churchill readied Britain's defenses against a Nazi bombing blitz, and then went on the offensive against Italy in the Mediterranean.

As much of London went up in flames, Churchill never flinched, despite the deaths of more than 40,000 British civilians.

By some estimates, the Soviet Red Army eventually killed three out of four German soldiers who died in World War II. The American economic colossus built more military ships, aircraft, vehicles, and tanks than did any other country during World War II.

In comparison with such later huge human and material sacrifices, the original, critical British role in winning World War II is often forgotten. But Britain was the only major power on either side of the war to fight continuously the entire six years, from September 3, 1939, to September 2, 1945. Britain was the only nation of the alliance to have fought Nazi Germany alone without allies. Churchill's defiant wartime rhetoric anchored the entire moral case against the Third Reich.

Unlike the Soviet Union or the United States, Britain entered the war without being attacked, on the principle of protecting independent Poland from Hitler. Unlike America, Britain fought Germany

from the first day of the war to its surrender. Unlike Russia, it fought the Japanese from the moment Japan started the Pacific War to the Japanese general surrender.

Churchill's Britain had a far smaller population and economy than either the Soviet Union or the United States. Its industry and army were smaller than Germany's.

Defeat would have meant the end of British civilization. But victory would ensure the end of the British Empire and a future world dominated by the victorious and all-powerful United States and Soviet Union.

It was Churchill's decision that Britain would fight on all fronts of both the European and Pacific theaters. He ordered strategic bombing over occupied Europe, a naval war against the German submarine and surface fleets, and a full-blown land campaign in Burma.

He ensured that the Mediterranean stayed open from Gibraltar to Suez. Churchill partnered with America from North Africa to Normandy, and he helped to supply Russia — even as Britain was broke and its manpower exhausted.

In the mid-1930s, Churchill first — and loudest — had damned appeasement and warned Europe and the United States about the dangers of an aggressive Nazi Germany. For that prescience, he was labeled a warmonger who wished to revisit the horrors of World War I.

After the end of World War II, the lone voice of Churchill cautioned the West that its former wartime ally, the Soviet Union, was creating an "Iron Curtain" and was as ruthless as Hitler's Germany had been. Again, he was branded a paranoid who unfairly demonized Communists.

The wisdom and spirit of Winston Churchill not only saved Britain from the Third Reich, but Western civilization from a Nazi dark age, when there was no other nation willing to take up that defense.

Churchill was the greatest military, political, and spiritual leader of the 20th century. The United States has never owed more to a foreign citizen than to Winston Churchill, a monumental presence 50 years after his death.

City Journal

Unfaithful Executive

On presidential oaths and obligations

by Adam White

Every president's first official act is to affirm the constitutional oath to "faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States" and to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed." In fact, it is by taking that oath that he becomes president. Barring tragedy, the president's last official act is to witness his successor make the same pledge.

The oath is so central to our republic that when President Obama and Chief Justice John Roberts accidentally misphrased one line of it in 2009, during Obama's first inauguration, the White House decided to do the whole thing over the next day. One might argue that a small verbal miscue could have no effect on the transfer of presidential power. But "the oath appears in the Constitution

itself,” as the White House counsel explained, “and out of an abundance of caution, because there was one word out of sequence, Chief Justice Roberts administered the oath a second time.”

In hindsight, it's ironic that “faithfully” was the “one word” misplaced by the president and chief justice. “Faithful execution” of the laws is one of the Constitution's most vexing concepts. Set forth in Article II, it embodies centuries of hard-earned Anglo-American experience in self-government under law. Professor Philip Hamburger recounts that history in his recent book, *Is Administrative Law Unlawful?* Describing King Charles II's and James II's efforts to disregard unilaterally laws regarding religion, and the subsequent prohibition of such attempts to nullify laws in the 1689 Declaration of Rights, Hamburger writes that, “as might be expected, American constitutions generally precluded any executive acts suspending or dispensing with the law.” Law professors Robert Delahunty and John Yoo make similar points in a recent *Texas Law Review* article, noting that Pennsylvania's James Wilson, the Take Care Clause's original proponent, explained years after the Constitution's ratification that the president has no authority “to make, or alter, or dispense with the laws.”

But even if one accepts the premise that presidents may not “suspend” or “dispense with” the law in general, questions still arise in the operation of government, often justifying the executive branch's decision not to enforce a statute. In a recent opinion criticizing the Obama administration's refusal to obey statutes regarding development of the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste facility, Brett Kavanaugh, a prominent conservative judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, cited “two principles rooted in Article II of the Constitution that give the Executive authority, in certain circumstances, to decline to act in the face of a clear statute.” First, “the President possesses significant independent authority to assess the constitutionality of a statute” and may decline to observe those that he finds unconstitutional. Second, “under Article II, the President possesses a significant degree of prosecutorial discretion not to take enforcement actions against violators of a federal law”—indeed, while Congress surely can define criminal and civil laws, it “may not *mandate* that the President prosecute a certain kind of offense or offender.”

Unfortunately, no bright line exists separating a president's decision to invoke either of those justifications as grounds not to enforce a law against a limited number of violators and the president's effective nullification of the law altogether. Everyone recognizes intuitively the difference between a sheriff letting speeders off without a ticket and a sheriff tacitly declaring his county a no-speed-limit zone. But the line separating the two ends of the spectrum is difficult, if not impossible, to discern.

When Obama campaigned for the White House in 2008, he joined many other Democrats in condemning President George W. Bush's use of “signing statements” narrowly to construe federal laws touching on the president's powers. Obama excoriated the Bush administration's efforts “to change the meaning of the legislation, to avoid certain provisions of the legislation that the President does not like, and to raise implausible or dubious constitutional objections to the legislation.” He added: “Any President takes an oath to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.~ The American people need to know where we stand on these issues before they entrust us with this responsibility—particularly at a time when our laws, our traditions, and our Constitution have been repeatedly challenged by this Administration.”

But that was then. After years of controversy over his targeted nonenforcement of federal laws—from “waiving” inconvenient provisions of the Affordable Care Act to disregarding provisions of the Clean Air Act that would render his climate-change program unsustainable—the president announced that he was effectively waiving the federal immigration laws with respect to 5 million illegal immigrants. He justified his policy on the basis of scarce government resources—the administration cannot deport *all* 11 million illegal immigrants, the argument goes, so it should at

least set policies that prioritize particular deportations over others. Obama buttressed his move with memoranda from the Department of Homeland Security, setting forth the new policies on prosecutorial discretion and a 33-page memo from the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel, densely packed with legal analysis attesting to the program's lawfulness.

Lots of debate will ensue over the extent to which the administration's non-deportation policy finds support in the maze of statutes comprising American immigration laws. But stepping back from the minutiae, one is struck by the gulf between the legal arguments proffered by the administration and the substance of its policy. The OLC memo asserts that the president's policy of systematic nonenforcement, far from thwarting Congress, actually "is *consistent* with the removal priorities established by Congress," in light of the scarcity of funds that Congress appropriates for deportations. Yet in his remarks announcing the policy, President Obama stressed that his action was necessary precisely because Congress had *not* passed legislation "fixing this broken immigration system." Similarly, the OLC memo tries to downplay the impact of the administration's action, asserting that it is not "an absolute, inflexible policy of not enforcing the immigration laws in certain categories of cases" but instead a general framework that "provides for case-by-case determinations" based on each "individual alien's circumstances," leaving "ample room for the exercise of individualized discretion by responsible officials." Yet the documents make no serious attempt to explain how or why individuals meeting the policy's broad standards would ever be singled out for harsher treatment—and Obama, to the contrary, announced to all illegal immigrants satisfying these conditions that "you'll be able to apply to stay in this country temporarily without fear of deportation. You can come out of the shadows and get right with the law. That's what this deal is."

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It is this unbridgeable gap between the president's actions and the Justice Department's rationalizations that reveals Obama's failure to satisfy his constitutional obligation to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed." Though a certain degree of statutory under-enforcement is tolerable (and often laudable) under our constitutional framework, the president is not "faithful" when his approach is fundamentally dishonest. "[T]he constitutional charge to the President to take care that the laws be faithfully executed," wrote Attorney General William Wirt to President James Monroe in 1823, requires the president to see that each of his officers "performs his duty *faithfully*—that is, *honestly*: not with perfect correctness of judgment, but *honestly*." The emphasis on the words "faithfully" and "honestly" in that quotation comes from Wirt himself. The current president and attorney general would do well to emphasize faithfulness and honesty, too.

Adam White is counsel at Boyden Gray & Associates, an adjunct fellow of the Manhattan Institute, and a contributing editor of City Journal.

Boston Globe

A valentine for fossil fuels

by Jeff Jacoby

ROMANTICS MAY look forward to sharing their love this weekend, but as far as the organizers of [Global Divestment Day](#) are concerned, Valentine's Day is for breaking up.

Environmental activists have designated February 13 and 14 for [collective action](#) “to sever our ties with the fossil fuel industry whose plans will destroy the planet as we know it.” To intensify hostility toward oil, coal, and natural gas companies — which the divestment movement's godfather, climate militant Bill McKibben, labels “[Public Enemy Number One](#)” — the Fossil Free campaign urges individuals to stop doing business with banks or pension funds that invest in fossil fuels, and encourages college students on college campuses to put pressure on administrators to rid their endowment funds of holdings in traditional energy corporations.

“Fossil fuel investments are a risk for investors and the planet,” the activists claim, so it is imperative to “loosen the grip that coal, oil, and gas companies have on our government and financial markets.” The fact that fossil-fuel stocks have generally performed well for funds investing in them [is beside the point](#). “If it's wrong to wreck the planet, then it's also wrong to profit from that wreckage.”

Wreck the planet?

What sort of wreckage is it that has divestment advocates up in arms? Increases in deadly floods and droughts? Rising levels of air pollution? Fewer sources of clean drinking water? Catastrophic depletion of nonrenewable energy sources? Less forest cover and more deserts?

If the use of carbon-based fuels were indeed causing such havoc, who could blame passionate environmentalists for declaring war on the industry that produces those fuels? But if their outrage over the “wreckage” of the planet is sincere, it's hard not to wonder, [in the spirit of former Congressman Barney Frank](#), on what planet they spend most of their time.

Here on Planet Earth, the booming use of petroleum, coal, and natural gas has fueled an almost inconceivable amount of good. All human technologies generate costs as well as benefits, but the gains from the use of fossil fuels have been extraordinary. The energy derived from fossil fuels, [economist Robert Bradley Jr.](#) wrote last spring in *Forbes*, has “liberated mankind from wretched poverty; fueled millions of high-productivity jobs in nearly every business sector; been a feedstock for medicines that have saved countless lives; and led to the development of fertilizers that have greatly increased crop yields to feed the hungry.” Far from wrecking the planet, the harnessing of carbon-based energy makes it safer and more livable.

The rise of fossil fuels has led to [dramatic gains in human progress](#) — whether that progress is measured in terms of life expectancy, income, education, health, sanitation, transportation, or leisure. Nearly everything that is comfortable and convenient about modern civilization depends on the ready availability of energy, and nearly 90 percent of our energy comes from oil, gas, and coal. Pro-divestment activists know better than to push people to give up electricity, air travel, computers, or central heating — all of which would vanish without the fossil fuel industry. Instead they demonize the industry, reasoning that it will be easier to turn Big Oil into a pariah than to convince the public to abandon its cars and smartphones.

Such “fossil-free” zealotry is justified in the name of climate change and its hazards. Yet as Alex Epstein documents in a dazzling new book, [“The Moral Case for Fossil Fuels,”](#) never have human beings been as protected from climate-related danger as they are right now. “As CO2 emissions rise, climate-related deaths plunge,” Epstein writes. Diving deep into the data, he illuminates the strong correlation between the expanding reliance on fossil fuels and the diminishing threat to human lives from climate disaster.

To cite just one of the book’s many examples, drought — historically the foremost climate-related killer — has ceased to be a major cause of death. Worldwide, the death toll from drought “has gone down by 99.98 percent in the last 80 years for many energy-related reasons,” notes Epstein. Not the least of those reasons are oil-powered drought-relief convoys and the huge increase in global food supplies thanks to “fossil fuel-based agriculture and irrigation systems.” Deaths from floods, storms, wildfires, temperature extremes? All down sharply, even as carbon-based energy use has soared.

It is much the same for all those other ways in which the use of coal, oil, and gas is supposedly “wrecking” the planet. Air and water quality are strikingly improved. The amount of [forest cover](#) and [other greenery](#) is burgeoning. Proven fossil-fuel reserves have never been greater.

Ours is a much safer, richer, cleaner, healthier planet than it would ever have been without fossil fuels. Break up with the industry that makes our energy so abundant? Sending a valentine would make more sense.

Bloomberg News

[Who Needs a Diploma to Be President?](#)

by Megan McArdle

The Washington Post has a lengthy article on Wisconsin Governor [Scott Walker's college career](#) and his decision to drop out of Marquette University during his senior year. I read it carefully, and I think that this piece raises a pretty important question about Walker's presidential campaign.

Namely: Who cares?

We're talking about events that happened almost 30 years ago. None of them are illegal, or even, frankly, very interesting. (He got a D-minus in French!) So why are we talking about this?

This is not the first time I've heard that Walker's status as a college dropout must mean there's something wrong with him. Decent, hardworking, upper-middle-class people who write for good media outlets graduate from college, dammit. If Walker didn't, that must tell you something ominous about his character.

Now, maybe I'm partial, because I [myself racked up a few D's in college](#), and for much the same reason that Walker seems to have: I didn't go to class enough. Unlike Walker, I pulled it together, got my grades up and got my diploma on time. But it was touch-and-go for a while.

Does that tell you something about my character? Yes, I think it does -- at the age of 20. But, sadly, that was a couple of decades ago, and I've changed a bit since then. When I was finishing my book, which involved a months-long stream of 18-hour days, my mother took me aside and

said, "You have to stop working so hard. You're wearing yourself out." All I could do was laugh, and after I said, "Mom, when I was 20, could you have imagined yourself saying those words to me?" she laughed, too.

My employers don't have to look at my college record to assess my critical-thinking skills or my work ethic. I guess they could look at my grad school transcript, where I did pretty well, or better yet, they could look at the work I have been putting out pretty steadily since 2001. Some of the folks who blow off college classes are destined for a career of lost jobs and permanent layabout status. Others just need a little time -- and maybe a brush with hard reality -- to get their act together.

There's a lot of debate among economists over what education really does for us. I mean, we know what it does for us -- helps us get better jobs -- but economists are split over why this is the case. Some think it is mostly a signal that you're conformist, intelligent and responsible enough to sit through four years of classes without flunking. Others think it mostly functions by imparting valuable skills that make people better workers.

But in either case, that's irrelevant to Walker's candidacy. College genuinely may give you important skills -- but that doesn't mean it's the only way to acquire those skills. I mean, Abraham Lincoln did manage to struggle along somehow.

Or college completion may be a signal of your character. But we have other, better signals about Scott Walker's abilities -- namely, his time as governor.

The fact that we seem so fixated on events decades past is its own dire signal -- of the way that America's Mandarin class is starting to think about college education not merely as the basic credential required for many of the best-paying jobs, but also the basic credential required for being a worthy, capable person. This is not merely untrue, but also a giant middle finger raised to the majority of upstanding American citizens who also didn't graduate from college.

Of course, if Scott Walker does become president, it would be nice if he spoke better French. But on the scale of things that will matter for his presidency, that probably ranks only slightly above his bowling score.

USA Today

Scott Walker's National Education Effect

The college dropout governor may bring reality back to an Ivy League-suffocated government.

by Glenn Harlan Reynolds

A lot of people don't know much about him yet, and he may not even be running, but if Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker is elected president in 2016, he'll immediately accomplish something that no other candidate being talked about can: He'll lay to rest the absurd belief that you're a nobody if you don't have a college degree. And he might even cut into the surprisingly recent takeover of our institutions by an educated mandarin class, something that just might save the country.

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an important state, you'd think that Walker's subsequent career would make his college degree irrelevant, but you'd be wrong.

And that's why a President Walker would accomplish something worthwhile the moment he took office. Over the past few years in America, a college degree has become something valued more as a [class signifier](#) than as a source of useful knowledge. When Democratic spokesman Howard Dean (who himself was [born into wealth](#)) suggested that Walker's lack of a degree [made him unsuitable](#) for the White House, what he really meant was that Walker is "[not our kind, dear](#)" — lacking the credential that many elite Americans today regard as essential to respectable status.

Of course, [some of our greatest presidents](#), from George Washington to Abraham Lincoln to Harry S. Truman, never graduated from college. But the college degree as class-signifier is, as I note in my book, [The New School](#), a rather recent phenomenon. As [late as the 1970s](#), it was perfectly respectable for middle-class, and even upper-middle-class, people to lack a college degree. And, of course, most non-elite Americans still do: [68% of Americans](#), like Scott Walker, lack a college diploma. But where 50 years or 100 years ago they might not have cared, many now feel inferior to those who possess a degree.

But without much reason, as many college degrees don't signify much besides a limited ability to show up on time most of the time, and avoid getting so falling-down-drunk that you flunk out. Nor does attendance at college necessarily even produce a leg up economically. Some studies suggest that attending college can actually [increase economic inequality](#), as graduates emerge with no better prospects of employment, but heavy student loan debt. Many students also don't learn much: In *Academically Adrift*, a study by Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, researchers found that [36% of students](#) "did not demonstrate any significant improvement in learning" over four years of college.

But the college degree — especially a degree from an elite school — has become an entry-level ticket into the educated mandarin. In his important book, [The New Class Conflict](#), Joel Kotkin calls it the "[clerisy](#)" — that now dominates government, journalism and academia. And as a result, an America that once prided itself on real-world achievement and practical good sense now runs largely on credentials.

[Today, the Supreme Court](#) is composed [entirely of Ivy Leaguers](#): five from Harvard Law School, three from Yale Law School, and one, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, from that scrappy Ivy League upstart Columbia Law School.

Likewise, you have to [go back to 1988](#) to find a U.S. president who wasn't a graduate of an Ivy League school — George W. Bush and Barack Obama upped the ante by having attended two each, Yale and Harvard for Bush, Columbia and Harvard for Obama. In Congress, [94% of the House, and 100% of the Senate](#), have college degrees of some sort. President Obama's [Cabinet is all college-educated](#), with just under half having an Ivy League undergraduate degree; almost 35% have an Ivy League graduate degree.

All this credentialism means that we should have the best, most efficiently and intelligently run government ever, right? Well, just look around. Anyone who has ever attended a faculty meeting should recognize that more education doesn't produce better decision makers, and our educated mandarin doesn't seem to have done much for the country.

Already people can point to tech pioneers like [Bill Gates and Steve Jobs](#) as evidence that a college degree isn't essential to getting ahead. But just as electing America's first black president had a resonance that no other achievement did, so, perhaps, electing America's first non-college-grad

president in many decades will serve to remind people that a college degree isn't the be-all and end-all, and that accomplishments and practical skills are, in the end, more important than credentials. It would be educational.

Glenn Harlan Reynolds, a University of Tennessee law professor, is the author of [*The New School: How the Information Age Will Save American Education from Itself*](#).



"AN ATTACK ON AN ENEMY. REFRESHING."



THE BOY WHO REFUSED TO CRY "WOLF."



"I'm a college professor, Jason. You need to ask someone else if you want advice about the real world."

FIFTY SHADES OF RED

DEBT
TAXES
SCHOOL LOANS



BONDAGE? YEAH,
YOU COULD CALL
IT **THAT**...

WE'RE NAKED
BECAUSE WE
CAN'T
AFFORD
CLOTHES!

HIGH
COST OF
LIVING

THE AVERAGE AMERICANS