

April 23, 2015

Glenn Reynolds of Instapundit devotes his weekly TODAY column to the story about the Wisconsin gestapo featured in April 21 Pickings.

*When Vladimir Putin sends government thugs to raid opposition offices, the world clucks its tongue. But, after all, Putin's a corrupt dictator, so what do you expect?*

*But in Wisconsin, Democratic prosecutors were raiding political opponents' homes and, in a worse-than-Putin twist, they were making sure the world didn't even find out, by requiring their targets to keep quiet. As David French notes in National Review, "As if the home invasion, the appropriation of private property, and the verbal abuse weren't enough, next came ominous warnings. Don't call your lawyer. Don't tell anyone about this raid. Not even your mother, your father, or your closest friends. ... This was the on-the-ground reality of the so-called John Doe investigations, expansive and secret criminal proceedings that directly targeted Wisconsin residents because of their relationship to Scott Walker, their support for Act 10, and their advocacy of conservative reform."*

*Is this un-American? Yes, yes it is. And the prosecutors involved — who were attacking supporters of legislation that was intended to rein in unions' power in the state — deserve to be punished. Abusing law enforcement powers to punish political opponents, and to discourage contributions to political enemies, is a crime, and it should also be grounds for disbarment.*

*If Republican officials treated political opponents this way it would be national news. But when Wisconsin's Democratic apparat behaved like Putin's thugs, it got little attention from the "mainstream" media. One of the good things about Scott Walker's presidential run is that it will bring these abuses national attention. They deserve it, and the perpetrators deserve punishment.*

FBI Director James Comey stepped in it last week when making comments on the Holocaust and its perpetrators. David Harsanyi has comments.

*So a bureaucrat used some clumsy wording. That's no reason to start whitewashing history*

*In a speech explaining why he requires all his new agents to visit the Holocaust Memorial Museum, FBI director James Comey said this:*

*"In their minds, the murderers and accomplices of Germany, and Poland, and Hungary, and so many, many other places didn't do something evil. They convinced themselves it was the right thing to do, the thing they had to do."*

*This muddled statement outraged Poland's Foreign Ministry, who "summoned" the U.S. Ambassador Stephen Mull to protest and demand an apology. And an apology was offered, of course. Mull emphasized that the position of the United States is that "Nazi Germany alone bears responsibility" for the Holocaust, even if nothing in Comey's speech maintained otherwise.*

*Hungary, where the anti-Semitic far-right Jobbik party has been doing pretty well for itself lately, was also slighted.*

*There isn't much to be gained from re-prosecuting the crimes of Nazis or their accomplices, especially when Jewry is faced with a similarly potent, if less dangerous (for now), strain of anti-*

*Semitism emanating from the Middle East. What is perplexing, however, is that Comey chose Hungary and Poland, rather than a host of other nations with populations far more enthusiastic about the extermination of European Jewry—countries like Austria, Rumania, Croatia, France, Latvia, or Ukraine.*

*It almost as if the director of a department that deals with domestic intelligence and security service of the United States should not be giving speeches about this sort of thing. ...*

**Cathy Young** writes in Newsday about mis-guided leftist, cartoonist Garry Trudeau. *Four months ago, a dozen people, mostly cartoonists and journalists, died in an attack on the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo because its provocative fare angered religious fanatics.*

*A week ago, a leading American political cartoonist receiving a top journalism award gave a speech blaming the victims and decrying "free-expression absolutism."*

*It was a shameful moment for American journalism. But it should also be a moment of truth that reveals how anti-liberal -- and how intellectually hollow -- the modern left has become in its fixation on "privilege" and identity politics.*

*The cartoonist was Doonesbury creator Garry Trudeau, chastising his murdered colleagues while speaking at the George Polk Awards at Long Island University. Charlie Hebdo, Trudeau asserted, violated the first rule of satire -- to side with the "non-privileged" against the powerful -- by provoking Muslims with cartoons of Muhammad: "By punching downward, by attacking a powerless, disenfranchised minority with crude, vulgar drawings . . . Charlie wandered into the realm of hate speech."*

*Hate speech? The cartoons did not mock or vilify Muslim immigrants but used images of Muhammad to lampoon Islamic extremism. ...*

A **Wall Street Journal** report on deaths in oil storage facilities makes you wonder how this could have gone on so long. After all, OSHA which investigated the fatalities, was supposed to be able to connect the dots. Another example of mis-placed belief in the competence of government?

*The deaths of Trent Vigus and at least nine other oil-field workers over the past five years had haunting similarities. Each worker was doing a job that involved climbing on top of a catwalk strung between rows of storage tanks and opening a hatch.*

*There were no known witnesses to any of the men's deaths. Their bodies were all found lying on top of or near the tanks. Medical examiners generally attributed the workers' deaths primarily or entirely to natural causes, often heart failure.*

*But in the past few months, there has been a shift. Though still unsure of the exact cause of the deaths, government agencies and some industry-safety executives are now acknowledging a pattern and are focusing on the possible role played in the deaths by hydrocarbon chemicals, which can lead to quick asphyxiation or heart failure when inhaled in large quantities.*

*In the meantime, federal agencies and industry-safety groups are planning to send out a joint alert to the oil industry as early as this week, warning of the potential for imminent danger from inhaling hydrocarbons, according to several people involved in the effort. Much of the industry remains ignorant of the possible risks, they say. ...*

**Brain Blogger** post says musical training makes kids smarter.

*... Multiple studies suggest that learning to play a musical instrument early in childhood induces long-term intellectual benefits that stay well into adulthood. One recent study demonstrated that children aged around four-and-a-half who learned music for about a year displayed improved cognitive functioning than their untrained peers.*

*Musical training affects the oscillatory connections in the brain related to executive functions like reasoning, switching between multiple tasks, forming working memory, planning and executing, and problem solving. Children who undergo musical training for a sustained length of time tend to have superior cognitive abilities in these specific domains. Musical children also tend to learn and perform better in subjects like languages and mathematics than their non-musical peers.*

*These findings do not come as a surprise. Sustained and intense musical training demands that individuals focus intently on dynamic sensory (auditory and visual) and motor signals. These are high-level cognitive abilities that go on to affect learning and performance in non-musical spheres as well.*

*It is also believed that intense musical training enhances the ability of the practitioner to string together abstract concepts and think relationally to make sense of these. This is why some scientists believe that musical training improves mathematical skills and non-verbal IQ. ...*

From a blog named **War On The Rocks**, we learn about the importance of colonial taverns.

*... However, ... the taverns' most important role in society (and American history) is the role they played in the beginning of the Revolutionary War. As anger spread throughout the colonies, many took to the tavern to discuss, argue, and debate what needed to be done. One location in particular, Boston's Green Dragon Tavern (or as Daniel Webster put it "the Headquarters of the Revolution") played host to the infamous "Sons Of Liberty" who, presumably after a couple of pints of spruce beer or molasses-infused porters, plotted the "Boston Tea Party." It's not hard to imagine why a couple of ales could have played a role in nudging along the idea of dressing like a Native American and dumping some of the East India Company's finest tea into Boston Harbor.*

*The implications of the tavern go beyond just the spread of ideas. Two of our nation's most significant institutions, the Freemasons and the United States Marine Corps, trace their origin back to the same colonial taphouse. According to historical records, the Tun Tavern in Philadelphia hosted the first meetings of St. John's Lodge No. 1 (the first American lodge of the Grand Lodge of the Masonic Temple). On November 10th, 1775, the tavern also became the birthplace of the United States Marine Corps. Historically, the tavern was a popular destination for military recruitment, with Ben Franklin recruiting for the Pennsylvania Militia there in 1756. Eventually, the tavern would play host to Washington, Jefferson, and the First Continental Congress, who would task the tavern's owner, Samuel Nicholas, "to raise the first two battalions*

of Marines” out of the tavern’s guests (although some speculate this occurred at another tavern owned by the Nicholas family, the “Conestoga Waggon [sic]”). The USMC still commemorates November 10th annually, with Marines everywhere raising a glass in honor of the Tun Tavern.  
...

Andrew Malcolm with Late Night Humor.

*Conan: Turns out, Hillary is not the first woman presidential candidate. That was Victoria Woodhull who ran in 1872. Her running mate was a young, scrappy John McCain.*

*Meyers: A new poll in Cuba shows that President Obama is more popular there than Fidel Castro. Then again, so is putting your whole family on a raft in the middle of the night.*

---

---

---

**USA Today**

**Wisconsin's dirty prosecutors pull a Putin**

***Abusing law enforcement powers to punish political opponents is a crime.***

by Glenn Harlan Reynolds

When Vladimir Putin sends government thugs to [raid opposition offices](#), the world clucks its tongue. But, after all, Putin's a corrupt dictator, so what do you expect?

But in Wisconsin, Democratic prosecutors were [raiding political opponents' homes](#) and, in a worse-than-Putin twist, they were making sure the world didn't even find out, by requiring their targets to keep quiet. As David French notes in *National Review*, "As if the home invasion, the appropriation of private property, and the verbal abuse weren't enough, next came ominous warnings. Don't call your lawyer. Don't tell anyone about this raid. Not even your mother, your father, or your closest friends. ... This was the on-the-ground reality of the so-called John Doe investigations, expansive and secret criminal proceedings that directly targeted Wisconsin residents because of their relationship to Scott Walker, their support for Act 10, and their advocacy of conservative reform."

Is this un-American? Yes, yes it is. And the prosecutors involved — who were [attacking supporters of legislation](#) that was intended to rein in unions' power in the state — deserve to be punished. Abusing law enforcement powers to punish political opponents, and to discourage contributions to political enemies, is a crime, and it should also be grounds for disbarment.

If Republican officials treated political opponents this way it would be national news. But when Wisconsin's Democratic *apparatus* behaved like Putin's thugs, it got little attention from the "mainstream" media. One of the good things about Scott Walker's presidential run is that it will bring these abuses national attention. They deserve it, and the perpetrators deserve punishment.

## The Federalist

### FBI Director Got It Wrong On The Holocaust. (But So Did Anne Applebaum)

by David Harsanyi

So a bureaucrat used some clumsy wording. That's no reason to start whitewashing history

In a speech explaining why he requires all his new agents to visit the Holocaust Memorial Museum, FBI director James Comey [said this](#):

"In their minds, the murderers and accomplices of Germany, and Poland, and Hungary, and so many, many other places didn't do something evil. They convinced themselves it was the right thing to do, the thing they had to do."

This muddled statement outraged Poland's Foreign Ministry, who "summoned" the U.S. Ambassador Stephen Mull to protest and [demand](#) an apology. And an apology was [offered](#), of course. Mull emphasized that the position of the United States is that "Nazi Germany alone bears responsibility" for the Holocaust, even if nothing in Comey's speech maintained otherwise.

Hungary, where the anti-Semitic far-right Jobbik party has been doing [pretty well for itself lately](#), was also slighted.

There isn't much to be gained from re-prosecuting the crimes of Nazis or their accomplices, especially when Jewry is faced with a similarly potent, if less dangerous ([for now](#)), strain of anti-Semitism emanating from the Middle East. What is perplexing, however, is that Comey chose Hungary and Poland, rather than a host of other nations with populations far more enthusiastic about the extermination of European Jewry—countries like Austria, Rumania, Croatia, France, Latvia, or Ukraine.

It almost as if the director of a department that deals with domestic intelligence and security service of the United States should not be giving speeches about this sort of thing.

Nonetheless. Comey might have picked the wrong targets, but it's another thing to start acting like the Hungarians and Poles bore no culpability. In a piece titled "[FBI director got it wrong on the Holocaust](#)," the typically fantastic historian Anne Applebaum, who is married to speaker of the Polish parliament, sounds a lot like a person doing just that.

In two poorly worded sentences, he sounded to Polish readers as if he were repeating the World War II myth that most drives them crazy: Namely, that somehow, those who lived in occupied Eastern Europe shared full responsibility for a German policy.

Applebaum goes on to offer number of reasonable points. It's important to make distinctions on where to place the moral onus, which lays predominantly on Germans, most of whom were planning, participating, ignoring, or complicit in extermination. There is also a big difference between nations like Poland, who resisted German rule, and governments that collaborated with Nazis.

Yet, Applebaum takes it farther. If Comey's lack of precision upsets Applebaum, shouldn't she be just as careful when she writes about the role Poland and Hungary played during the war?

Applebaum rightly points out that the mass murder and deportation of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz began in earnest in March 1944, after the government dissolved and the country become a “lawless, violent zone where anything was possible.”

Yet, it was the Hungarians, on their own, who allied themselves Nazi Germany in the first place. Miklos Horthy, popular among everyday Hungarians, enacted anti-Semitic laws in 1920, and then more intense laws in 1938. Years before the Germans displaced him for trying to cut a deal with the Russians, Horthy [sent](#) more than 100,000 Jewish men into forced labor, of which 40,000 never came back. The Hungarians sent around 20,000 Jews who held foreign citizenship to the Germans [to be murdered](#)—less than many countries, but more than others.

After Horthy was removed, the mass deportation of 450,000 Hungarian Jews to concentration camps began. It was run by Hungarians using Hungarian infrastructure and Hungarian workers with the knowledge of many Hungarian citizens. Hungarians were the ones who collected the Jews from the ghettos. They knew where to go and round them up because they had put them there in the first place. There were countries a lot worse than Hungary in Europe. And there were better (Finland and sometimes Bulgaria, who were also allied with Nazi Germany, for instance), but that hardly makes Hungary innocent.

When the Russian victory was imminent, the Hungarian Arrow Cross [were still rounding up Jews](#), murdering them either on the banks of the Danube or marching them hundreds of miles away from the front to be shot. It is true that Hungarians weren't as industrious at liquidating Jews as their neighbors in Rumania or Austria, but many of them tried their best.

Then, of course, many Christians saved Jews—including my father. Whether any of the murderers in Hungary convinced themselves it was the right thing to do, I doubt Comey is in a position to know.

Poland is more complicated. It is true that there are more Polish “[Righteous Among the Nations](#)” than of any other ethnicity. Applebaum says that in Poland the “many people were frightened by or indifferent to the fate of the Jews, and some murdered in order to avoid being murdered.” Even if you bought all of that, there is no mention of the Polish-led progroms or the willing collaborators or deeply embedded anti-Semitism in that nation—both before and after World War II.

A few years back, Jan Gross wrote his [Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne](#), stirring a debate among Poles about their own role in the Holocaust. In a piece in *Tablet* [detailing the fallout](#), Denise Grollmus neatly sums up how Poles see themselves:

When Gross' book was first published in 2001, it created enormous controversy in Poland, where Communist revisionism not only rewrote the Holocaust's role in Poland's national narrative, but also reinforced the Poles' perception of themselves as absolute victims. Many Poles point to the fact that, unlike most European nations, Poland never officially collaborated with the Nazis, never ran their camps or established Polish SS groups. As a result of this resistance, more than 20 percent of the country's population was destroyed. For that reason, Auschwitz has long been considered a site not of Jewish suffering, but of Polish suffering—even though half of the country's death toll included 90 percent of its Jewish population.

The Poles were victims, there is no doubt. And sometimes they were persecutors. There were collaborators and there were heroes. Poland's government has apologized for wartime acts [perpetrated](#) by its citizens. This year, Hungary [acknowledged its own part](#) in the Holocaust, as well. It's obvious that Comey's bromide-heavy speech intended to make a broader point



about the ability of people to rationalize their wicked behavior. Perhaps he mentioned Hungary because of contemporary events. Perhaps he mentioned Poland because he didn't want to pile on Greece. Who knows? Whatever the case, one bureaucrat's hazy thinking is no reason to start whitewashing history.

**Newsday**

**Gary Trudeau's troubling view on speech**

by Cathy Young



*Garry Trudeau speaks onstage during the "Alpha House" panel at the Amazon Summer TCA on 7/12/2014, in Beverly Hills.*

Four months ago, a dozen people, mostly cartoonists and journalists, died in an attack on the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo because its provocative fare angered religious fanatics.

A week ago, a leading American political cartoonist receiving a top journalism award gave a speech blaming the victims and decrying "free-expression absolutism."

It was a shameful moment for American journalism. But it should also be a moment of truth that reveals how anti-liberal -- and how intellectually hollow -- the modern left has become in its fixation on "privilege" and identity politics.

The cartoonist was Doonesbury creator Garry Trudeau, chastising his murdered colleagues while speaking at the George Polk Awards at Long Island University. Charlie Hebdo, Trudeau asserted, violated the first rule of satire -- to side with the "non-privileged" against the powerful --

by provoking Muslims with cartoons of Muhammad: "By punching downward, by attacking a powerless, disenfranchised minority with crude, vulgar drawings . . . Charlie wandered into the realm of hate speech."

Hate speech? The cartoons did not mock or vilify Muslim immigrants but used images of Muhammad to lampoon Islamic extremism.

As attorney and astute commentator Ken White points out on the Popehat blog, the kind of religious authoritarianism Charlie Hebdo assailed is responsible for the oppression of powerless people in country after country -- men and women who are jailed, flogged or killed after being accused of blasphemy.

One might object that Trudeau was talking about the Muslim minority in France. But no: He also rebuked Charlie Hebdo for "triggering violent protests across the Muslim world" by printing seven million copies after the attack.

It's hard to argue with his observation that the satirist's right to free speech does not negate the target's right to feel hurt or outraged. (Channeling those feelings into violence is another matter.) But in the same speech, he also spoke proudly of his controversial cartoons that ridiculed American abortion opponents. Not all hurt feelings are created equal.



Trudeau's biases reflect a common left-wing mindset that sees the world through the lens of "privilege" and "oppression" based on race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and/or religion: non-privileged good, privileged bad (to paraphrase George Orwell). The result is a bizarre inverse caste system in which right and wrong depend almost entirely on the parties' places in the hierarchy of oppressions -- but only in the traditional Western social order.

From this perspective, because Muslims are a "non-privileged" group in the West, criticism of even the most militant forms of Islam is bigoted "hate speech."

It doesn't matter how many religious minorities, women or gays are disenfranchised under hardline Islamist regimes. On the other hand, socially conservative Christians, a de facto marginalized minority in Western Europe and increasingly in the United States, are not entitled to such deference.



In a brilliant riposte to Trudeau on the Atlantic magazine website, political commentator David Frum argues that it's not always easy to tell which dog is the underdog. An immigrant community that experiences discrimination and prejudice may also have radical elements that harass other ethnic or religious minorities, or bully women who don't conform to traditional norms. For that matter, using violence to suppress speech that offends you is indisputably a form of power.

Identity politics has had a disastrous effect on our public life, encouraging polarization and contests in victimhood. Now, it has led a renowned journalist and artist to condemn those who stand up for free speech against violence and intimidation.

For liberals who have not forgotten what the word means, this should be a wake-up call.

**WSJ**

### **Why Did These Oil Workers Die?**

***Natural causes were blamed, but the focus has shifted to hydrocarbon chemicals***

by Alexandra Berzon

The deaths of Trent Vigus and at least nine other oil-field workers over the past five years had haunting similarities. Each worker was doing a job that involved climbing on top of a catwalk strung between rows of storage tanks and opening a hatch.

There were no known witnesses to any of the men's deaths. Their bodies were all found lying on top of or near the tanks. Medical examiners generally attributed the workers' deaths primarily or entirely to natural causes, often heart failure.

But in the past few months, there has been a shift. Though still unsure of the exact cause of the deaths, government agencies and some industry-safety executives are now acknowledging a pattern and are focusing on the possible role played in the deaths by hydrocarbon chemicals, which can lead to quick asphyxiation or heart failure when inhaled in large quantities.

In the meantime, federal agencies and industry-safety groups are planning to send out a joint alert to the oil industry as early as this week, warning of the potential for imminent danger from inhaling hydrocarbons, according to several people involved in the effort. Much of the industry remains ignorant of the possible risks, they say.

David Miller, the director of the American Petroleum Institute's standards board, said the industry may also address the issue while working on new recommendations involving tank storage. "It is an acknowledgment from our perspective that one accident is too many," he said.

According to some industry-safety and government officials. The industry has been ignoring warning signs for years and has been resistant to implementing some steps that would reduce or eliminate the risk to workers.

"I was trying to get workers into respirators and all kinds of things and running an uphill battle," said a former industrial hygienist for a large oil company who said he had noticed dangerously high hydrocarbon levels in some of his testing as far back as 2009. "They say, 'Everyone does it this way.' But that doesn't make it any less right or wrong."



*Tank batteries in North Dakota where a worker died on April 28, 2014.*

Some industry officials said that companies hadn't realized there might be a problem until the pattern of deaths began to emerge, but they now acknowledge the situation needs to be studied further.

The documented deaths date back to 2010, with six last year. Three were in North Dakota, three in Colorado, one in Texas, one in Oklahoma and one in Montana, according to the Centers for Disease Control, which first highlighted the pattern in May 2014. This year there was at least one death, in North Dakota. It's still under investigation and may fit the pattern, federal officials said.

Four workers were engaged in what's called tank gauging, where they measure the level of oil in tanks coming out of wells or the level of some byproducts that come up after the fracking process is completed. Five others were assigned to take samples of oil for further testing.

These jobs are often done alone in remote areas and require opening the hatch and standing above it. When that happens, chemicals that have vaporized spurt out in a dense plume that is often invisible, safety experts say.

It's unclear why these types of deaths were noticed only recently, and the cause is still under study. Unlike many previous oilfield deaths involving toxic fumes, the culprit doesn't appear to be hydrogen sulfide, which has long been well-known in the industry as a hazard. Some experts have focused on the unusually high levels of certain hydrocarbons, including benzene, in the type of crude that is now common in the U.S.

In one small sample, the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration found that some chemicals that came out of the tanks close to where some workers stood exceeded levels that have the potential to cause imminent death or permanent health effects, according to a study the agency presented in December.



*Plume of chemicals coming out of the top of a tank, taken with an infrared camera.*

Some industry and government experts say they believe the danger may be exacerbated in part by a recent environmental rule designed to protect public health.

In 2012 the Environmental Protection Agency enacted a rule that new oil-field tanks would have to capture hydrocarbons coming out of well sites rather than vent them into the atmosphere. As a result of the requirement, the same dangerous chemicals that had been emitted regularly were now more likely to build up pressure inside the newer tanks, industry and government scientists say.

A spokeswoman for the EPA said its storage-tank requirements shouldn't add to hazards if they are properly designed and operated.

In July 2010, Mr. Vigus, a 30-year-old worker on a Montana well site, was found slumped over on a catwalk near a storage tank he was checking. The county's pathologist determined he had died of heart failure.

Mr. Vigus's mother, Terri Vigus, said the report had always left her uneasy. "I just never, ever felt that that was what happened," Ms. Vigus said. "I just kept going to how healthy he was."

OSHA safety inspectors closed their case with no findings around two months later, when they received the medical report.

Some industry experts say the industry knew the plumes could unleash potentially dangerous vapors and should have been monitoring the chemical levels all along. And, they say, companies could implement safety fixes that would reduce or remove hazards. One option is to

use automated or remote methods to read tank levels. That is done regularly elsewhere, including in Canada.

“There’s no question in my mind it was absolutely known” that there were dangerously noxious fumes coming from the tanks, said Dennis Schmitz, a safety consultant for oil companies in North Dakota. “You are absolutely required to evaluate that hazard before you put that employee up there.”

“Every hazard should be engineered out,” added Mr. Schmitz, who acknowledged that fixes would add some cost.

In a case related to one of the deaths, an environmental engineer for [Marathon Oil MRO -2.71 %](#) noticed in his emissions studies that his company was using pipes that were too narrow to accommodate the pressure of the gas coming through them, creating too much gas buildup in the tanks, according to a sworn statement he gave in a later lawsuit after the worker, Dustin Bergsing, died on a Marathon Oil site.

The engineer said he asked the company to redesign some of the piping systems to create more of a constant flow but was ignored.

Lee Warren, a spokeswoman for Marathon Oil, said in an email that the company considered that statement to be “grossly inaccurate and wholly without merit.” Marathon settled the case; it did not admit liability. “We take seriously the responsibility to properly educate employees about potential hazards that could be encountered in their work,” she said.

Kenny Jordan, the executive director of the Association of Energy Service Companies, said the first priority for the industry is to raise more awareness among workers about the dangers. “We’re trying to take a proactive approach with what we’re doing and trying to get the notice out to workers in the field,” Mr. Jordan said.

Federal officials say they have limited power to force the industry to do more. Oil and gas sites are exempted from many OSHA rules, including specifications on how to handle potential benzene exposure.

At a recent online presentation designed to educate North Dakota oil workers about hydrocarbon dangers, a panel made up of federal and industry safety officials as well as some oil companies showed workers an infrared video image of a giant plume of chemicals coming out of the top of a tank that they said was otherwise invisible.

The officials told workers they should stand upwind of the chemicals when they open the tank hatches.

Workers should also hold a tool called a “four-gas monitor” over the top of the tank, the officials told workers, though all workers aren’t currently provided with the tool.

But afterwards several experts, including some panel members, said those measures won’t solve the problem. Said Timothy Hicks, an oil-field safety consultant: “Wind is not a reliable exposure control.”

## Brain Blogger

### Musical Training Makes You Smarter

by Viatcheslav Wlassoff, PhD

Mozart has not only enthralled countless music lovers through the ages but also intrigued neuroscientists. In fact, his genre of music has spawned a whole body of research into the effect of classical music on cognitive development in kids.

The “[Mozart Effect](#)” is the idea that children and babies (even unborn) become more intelligent if they are fed on a dose of the symphonies, operas, and concertos created by this musical legend. Disappointingly, the researchers since have established that listening to Mozart or any other piece of [classical music](#) does not lead to long-term cognitive benefits. But in the process, they have also discovered that serious and sustained musical training does have a positive effect on some aspects of cognitive development.

### **Music training and the brain**

There have been several studies to find an association, if any, between music and cognitive capabilities.

The Mozart Effect was, in effect, nullified when a 2005 study found that listening to music improved the cognitive performance of the listeners only for a short period of time. This development is attributed to the general mood-enhancing effect of music. After this finding, many of the studies began to focus on the short- and long-term effects of taking [music](#) lessons and making music on specific cognitive abilities like general intelligence, memory, language, and visual-spatial processing.

Multiple studies suggest that learning to play a musical instrument early in childhood induces long-term intellectual benefits that stay well into adulthood. One recent study demonstrated that children aged around four-and-a-half who learned music for about a year displayed improved cognitive functioning than their untrained peers.

[Musical training](#) affects the oscillatory connections in the brain related to [executive functions](#) like reasoning, switching between multiple tasks, forming working memory, planning and executing, and problem solving. Children who undergo musical training for a sustained length of time tend to have superior cognitive abilities in these specific domains. Musical children also tend to learn and perform better in subjects like languages and mathematics than their non-musical peers.

These findings do not come as a surprise. Sustained and intense musical training demands that individuals focus intently on dynamic sensory (auditory and visual) and motor signals. These are high-level cognitive abilities that go on to affect learning and performance in non-musical spheres as well.

It is also believed that intense musical training enhances the ability of the practitioner to string together abstract concepts and think relationally to make sense of these. This is why some scientists believe that musical training improves mathematical skills and non-verbal IQ.

### **Language skills**



Very recently, researchers have shown that children who undertook long-term training in music exhibited enhanced academic development compared to the children in the same age group who did not receive this training. More specifically, this effect was seen mostly in the aspect of [language](#) skills. Children who trained in music in their early years exhibited enhanced verbal memory and increased reading skills in comparison to those who had never received any musical training. These skills seemed to sharpen with every extra year of training.

Learning a language and learning and/or making music engage similar areas of the brain and demand identical cognitive and auditory processing abilities. For example, to understand a spoken language, the listener needs to be able to correctly discriminate between words, understand how they sound different because certain vowels and consonants are present, and the process the sequencing of syllables and tones.

Musical training is also believed to improve reading skills in serious practitioners. Learning music enhances auditory working memory, phonological awareness, and the ability to differentiate between sounds, identify patterns, and recognize rhythm and [pitch](#). It seems that these abilities also help individuals develop reading and pronunciation skills. Children who receive musical training early and continue to train show a greater grasp of second language acquisition skills than their non-musical peers.

### **Improved sensory processing**

The benefits of early music training have also been documented in studies aimed to determine the effect of music on sensory processing capabilities. According to these findings, individuals who undertook sustained musical training before the age of seven showed greater neural plasticity in their brains than those who undertook training after this age. Specifically, the former group showed improved sensory motor responses, such as exhibiting coordinated reflex actions and having a sense of posture.

Another study suggests that early music training enhances the plasticity of white matter in the [corpus callosum](#). This structural peculiarity results in enhanced connectivity between the sensory and motor areas of the brain.

An article published last year nails down the cause behind this association and indicates that there is a sensitive period during the developmental phase of a person when this effect is strongest. The right ventral pre-motor cortex is involved in the processing and integration of sensory (auditory) and motor information. And according to this study, musicians who began training early showed greater thickness (increased white and gray matter) in this region of their brains. This region exhibits peak maturational transformation between the ages of six and nine years. The effect of musical training on the plasticity in this region is therefore greatest just before maturation. So it is no surprise that highly-skilled musicians, who began practicing before the age of seven, show enhanced cognitive development than musicians who train later.

The above findings on the positive association between musical training and cognitive abilities hold significance not only for parents and neuroscientists but also for those who work in the education sphere. For instance, educationists entrusted with policy making should think twice before chopping the budget for arts and music training in schools. These findings should also prompt scientists, psychologists, and educational counselors to ponder over the efficacy of recommending musical training to children with learning disabilities.

It is evident that musical training improves cognitive abilities in children. The earlier they begin to strum the guitar and tinkle the piano, the brighter are their chances of performing in school. So



continue encouraging your kid to play the banjo even if he is out of tune. You will be doing her a world of good.

## War on the Rocks Blog

### [The Colonial Tavern, Crucible of the American Revolution](#)

by Salvatore Colleluori

Alcohol, bars, and innovation have a storied relationship. Whether it's the infamous Pet Rock, which Gary Dahl conceived while drinking with friends, or the idea behind *A Few Good Men*, which Aaron Sorkin thought up while bartending at the Palace Theater, alcohol has infused some of the most famous and infamous aspects of American life. However, to truly comprehend the roles alcohol, and more specifically bars, have played in America's history, one must harken back to the Colonial era when taverns, as they were then called, helped shape American history.



While alcohol was a prominent fixture in Colonial life, oftentimes the location where one consumed said alcohol was equally as relevant. Public houses, and more specifically taverns, played an especially important role — they weren't simply places to drink. Rather, they served as a venue to meet like-minded individuals, and functioned as clearinghouses and test beds of revolutionary ideas. As the colonies took shape, taverns became central locations for several aspects of colonial life. According to the U.S. Postal Service, early colonists adopted a practice used frequently in Europe and established taverns as a place to collect and distribute mail sent from overseas. In addition, according to the Gettysburg Historical Journal, taverns became a “means of direction for travelers, as well as settings where they could eat, drink, be entertained, and spend the night.” Taverns were also “utilized as meeting places for assemblies and courts” and became a central location for discussion and debate. In taverns across the colonies, literate patriots drank and read the news of the day aloud to their fellow revelers, thereby stoking revolutionary fervor. The network of taverns not only provided travelers with a place to rest and enjoy a beverage, but also a place to bring news from other colonies, and promulgate ideas from the likes of Thomas Paine, James Chalmers, and Thomas Jefferson.

However, arguably the taverns' most important role in society (and American history) is the role they played in the beginning of the Revolutionary War. As anger spread throughout the colonies,

many took to the tavern to discuss, argue, and debate what needed to be done. One location in particular, Boston's Green Dragon Tavern (or as Daniel Webster put it "the Headquarters of the Revolution") played host to the infamous "Sons Of Liberty" who, presumably after a couple of pints of spruce beer or molasses-infused porters, plotted the "Boston Tea Party." It's not hard to imagine why a couple of ales could have played a role in nudging along the idea of dressing like a Native American and dumping some of the East India Company's finest tea into Boston Harbor.

The implications of the tavern go beyond just the spread of ideas. Two of our nation's most significant institutions, the Freemasons and the United States Marine Corps, trace their origin back to the same colonial taphouse. According to historical records, the Tun Tavern in Philadelphia hosted the first meetings of St. John's Lodge No. 1 (the first American lodge of the Grand Lodge of the Masonic Temple). On November 10th, 1775, the tavern also became the birthplace of the United States Marine Corps. Historically, the tavern was a popular destination for military recruitment, with Ben Franklin recruiting for the Pennsylvania Militia there in 1756. Eventually, the tavern would play host to Washington, Jefferson, and the First Continental Congress, who would task the tavern's owner, Samuel Nicholas, "to raise the first two battalions of Marines" out of the tavern's guests (although some speculate this occurred at another tavern owned by the Nicholas family, the "Conestoga Waggon [sic]"). The USMC still commemorates November 10th annually, with Marines everywhere raising a glass in honor of the Tun Tavern.

After the war, the concept of the tavern persisted, but waves of immigration, changes in drinking habits, and new advances in communication and publishing obviated the role of the tavern as a central location in society. However, if you wish to recreate that tavern spirit, many are preserved as historic locations, and replicas have cropped up across the former colonies. Furthermore, thanks to some enterprising modern breweries seeking to recreate that revolutionary spirit, we might finally have the opportunity to try some of the historic ales that once graced the taps of the Green Dragon and other colonial taverns. Yards Brewing Company, a Philadelphia-based brewery, is attempting to recreate a few of the recipes our forefathers left behind. In their "Ales of the Revolution" series, Yards has set out to recreate Thomas Jefferson's Tavern Ale, Poor Richard's Tavern Spruce, and General Washington's Tavern Porter. Ranging in alcohol content from five-to-eight percent ABV, these recipes attempt to maintain authenticity by using similar ingredients and historic recipes compiled straight from the records of Jefferson, Franklin, and Washington. Whether or not they're actually accurate is anyone's guess, thanks to inconsistencies in labeling and recipes on the part of our forebears.

While the authenticity of these beers is up for debate, the role of the tavern in Colonial America is not. The next time you're in a bar with friends, talking about what you may think is nothing in particular, remember the impact and significance that alcohol and taverns have had on American society — maybe you too can come up with something revolutionary.

## IBD

### Late Night Humor

by Andrew Malcolm

Conan: Hillary Clinton is making income inequality a central theme in her presidential campaign. For example, she points out that her husband makes \$300 million a year and she has to get by on only \$200 million.

Conan: What to call Bill Clinton if Hillary wins? The most popular choices are First Man, First Husband and That Naked Guy Running Across the South Lawn.

Conan: A new report says dogs can sniff out prostate cancer with almost 98% accuracy. The report also finds that cats can sniff it out with 100% accuracy. But they prefer to watch you die.

Meyers: A 120-pound Texas woman has set a new competitive eating record after she consumed three 72-ounce steaks, three baked potatoes, three shrimp cocktails, three salads and three dinner rolls in 20 minutes. Or as they call that in Texas, a kid's meal.

Conan: Hillary Clinton made the big announcement we all knew was coming. That's right. She's joining the all-female cast of 'Ghostbusters.'

Conan: Scientists have located the section in the brain responsible for sarcasm. The scientists said, "Isn't that just the most important scientific breakthrough ever?"

Conan: At an Ohio Chipotle, a campaigning Hillary Clinton had a burrito with chips and salsa. Leaving, she was overheard saying, "Well, that locks down the Hispanic vote."

Conan: Someone has launched balloons carrying thousands of copies of the film 'The Interview' over North Korea. North Koreans are now waiting for balloons carrying DVD players and electricity.

Conan: Jeb Bush just welcomed his fourth grandchild. The new Bush grandchild is happy, healthy and will be running for President in 2048.

Meyers: Chris Christie today appeared on a talk show called "Pasta and Politics." It went so well that he's agreed to go on "Meet the Garlic Press."

Conan: Burger King unveils a "Whopper"-scented cologne. So, ladies, if he smells like a Whopper, he's either wearing the cologne or just ate one. Either way, he's a keeper.

Conan: President Obama announced that next month, he'll visit his 50th state, South Dakota. Obama's exact words were, "Let's get this over with." (*Scroll down for 2008 news video of Obama's infamous "57 states" claim. He was elected president anyway, but of only 50 states, however.*)

Conan: Turns out, Hillary is not the first woman presidential candidate. That was Victoria Woodhull who ran in 1872. Her running mate was a young, scrappy John McCain.

Meyers: A new poll in Cuba shows that President Obama is more popular there than Fidel Castro. Then again, so is putting your whole family on a raft in the middle of the night.

Fallon: Did you see a GoPro camera just survived a ten-thousand-foot fall with its footage intact after it was accidentally kicked off of a skydiver's helmet? Meanwhile, your iPhone just fell two feet onto a pile of marshmallows and is now completely useless.

Conan: Somebody in Utah has come down with a rare allergy to water. The person's going to be fine though, because he just moved to California.

Meyers: A rough season for the LA Lakers. Coach Byron Scott said this week that he thinks, given the opportunity, most of his players would shoot him in the back. On the plus side, they'd probably miss.

Conan: Ex-NFL tight end Aaron Hernandez got life in prison for first-degree murder. His lawyer will try to get his sentence down to two seasons with the New York Jets.

Conan: Tax Day fun fact: The federal tax code is over 74,000 pages long. But stick with it, because after page 72,000, it gets really good.

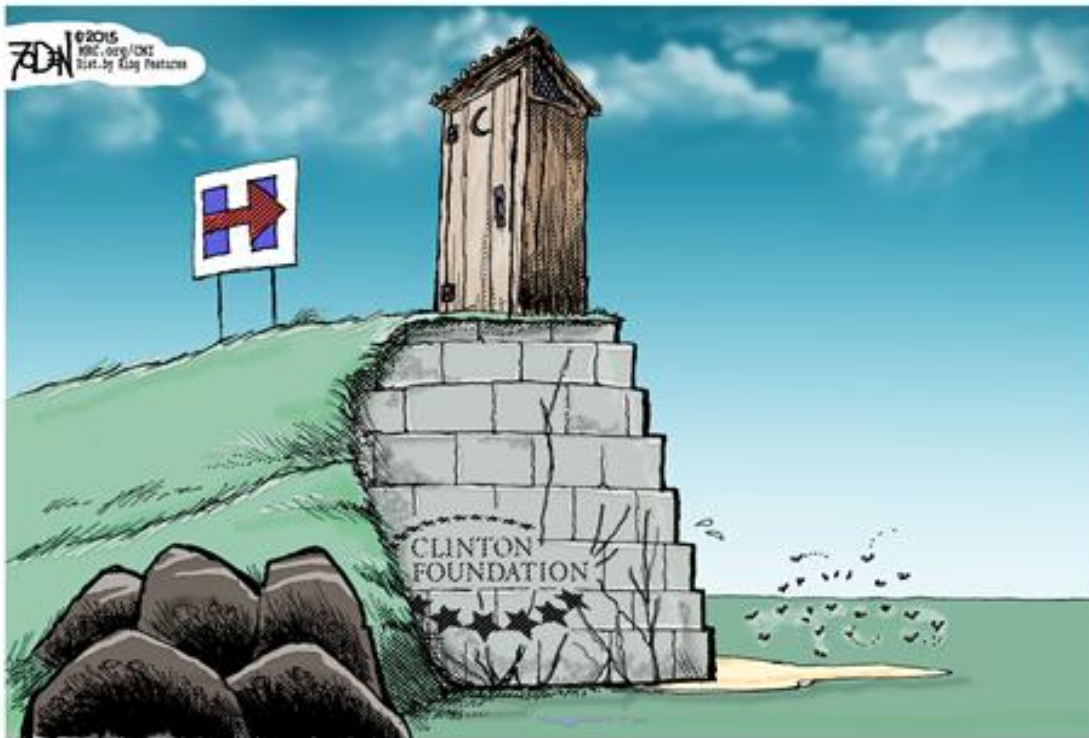
Conan: Hillary Clinton is taking a different tack in Iowa this campaign. She doesn't start speeches with, "Hello Iowa, or Idaho, or whichever one you are!"





## White House response to the persecution of Christians





Crack.