

September 21, 2015

We suffered long years with a foolish president and now have to endure a similar pope. George Will writes;

Pope Francis embodies sanctity but comes trailing clouds of sanctimony. With a convert's indiscriminate zeal, he embraces ideas impeccably fashionable, demonstrably false and deeply reactionary. They would devastate the poor on whose behalf he purports to speak — if his policy prescriptions were not as implausible as his social diagnoses are shrill.

Supporters of Francis have bought newspaper and broadcast advertisements to disseminate some of his woolly sentiments that have the intellectual tone of fortune cookies. One example: "People occasionally forgive, but nature never does." The Vatican's majesty does not disguise the vacuity of this. Is Francis intimating that environmental damage is irreversible? He neglects what technology has accomplished regarding London's air (see Page 1 of Dickens's "Bleak House") and other matters. ...

... Francis's fact-free flamboyance reduces him to a shepherd whose selectively reverent flock, genuflecting only at green altars, is tiny relative to the publicity it receives from media otherwise disdainful of his church. Secular people with anti-Catholic agendas drain his prestige, a dwindling asset, into promotion of policies inimical to the most vulnerable people and unrelated to what once was the papacy's very different salvific mission.

He stands against modernity, rationality, science and, ultimately, the spontaneous creativity of open societies in which people and their desires are not problems but precious resources. Americans cannot simultaneously honor him and celebrate their nation's premises.

Noah Rothman sees the president's minions throwing Hillary under the bus.

The central mission of Barack Obama's White House in the waning days of his administration is to communicate to the public that none of this is his fault. Their search for figures toward which this administration can shift blame for the suboptimal state of affairs is growing increasingly frantic, self-sabotaging, and reflective of an undisciplined political operation in the midst of a spiraling crisis.

Given the increasingly dire state of geopolitical affairs, securing exonerations for Obama's conduct is a particularly urgent imperative on the foreign policy front. The resurrection of the Islamist militant threat in the Middle East is perhaps the most glaring failure of this administration. The largely pacified Iraq that Barack Obama inherited is a boiling cauldron of bloody sectarian warfare. Even the most stalwart member of the president's thinning clique of apologists would today concede that the withdrawal of every last American soldier from Iraq in 2011 was shortsighted. They contend, however, that the president had no choice. Proud Iraqi negotiators prevented this White House from securing a mutually satisfactory agreement that secured legal immunity for American soldiers tied his hands. Nonsense. This excuse has been thoroughly dispelled in reports that clearly indicate the administration was only prepared to accept full and total withdrawal in order to fulfill a political objective Obama set for himself in 2008. ...

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says, should be pointed not at Mr. Obama but at those who pressed him to attempt training Syrian rebels in the first place," New York Times reporter Peter Baker revealed, "a group that, in addition to congressional Republicans, happened to include former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton." ...

... As the primary executor of Barack Obama's hideously failed approach to preserving U.S. interests abroad and executing American grand strategy in his first term, Hillary Clinton's record as secretary of state is a liability. She has chosen the Syrian crisis as the way in which she can create distance between herself and this president in order to inoculate herself against attacks on his foreign policy record. It is testament to the shortsighted and thin-skinned nature of this administration that even this mild criticism cannot be tolerated. They would handicap their party's successor before they would suffer even a modest critique.

The campaign is only just beginning. There is a reason why a political party has secured three consecutive terms in the White House only once in the post-War era. The voters are hungry for a change, and, presuming she is the nominee, Clinton will have to distance herself from the president if she is to win a general election next November. It's not clear that Barack Obama's capacious ego can take it.

Our favorite, Scott Walker, has gone down in flames. David Harsanyi suggests a cabinet job for him - Secretary of Labor.

As he's still a relatively young man, I imagine there are a multitude of things Scott Walker can still achieve in his life. But being president is not going to be one them. And it's nothing to be ashamed of. We're all endowed with certain gifts and hindered by certain realities. I will never be George Will. Scott Walker will never be Ronald Reagan. Or even James Polk. ...

... Walker could put to use his formidable experience fighting off union bosses. Having already dealt with the pressure of facing a well-funded special interest, and winning (on numerous times), Walker is more qualified on this front than anyone else running. If he wants to make a difference, it might be his best chance. ...

And Matthew Continetti posts on Carly.

There's one story out of the CNN Republican debate, and that's Carly Fiorina. The cable network expanded the ranks of GOP candidates to include her in the primetime debate, and she made the most of the opportunity. She did what no one thought was possible: She beat Donald Trump in the television game with her retort to his comments about her physical appearance. And she did more than that: She gave crisp, strong, visceral answers on questions regarding national security, abortion, and the economy. Conservative audiences have been thrilled at Fiorina's appearances for months. Tonight she showed the nation that she is articulate, capable, passionate, and fearless. She displayed more thumos than many of the men on stage.

Fiorina has a fascinating speaking style. She's clipped, emphatic, almost rote in her delivery. But it comes across as though she's entirely committed to telling you what she's thinking at any given moment. I can't think of a more affecting statement from a politician I've heard than the one she gave on the Planned Parenthood scandal. When you combine that with how she destroyed Donald Trump when she was asked to comment on his remarks about her appearance, I expect the Republican audience of this debate to move to her in swarms. ...

Jonathan Tobin says Trump can blame himself for his current problem.

This isn't something that will hurt Donald Trump much among his populist base. But the kerfuffle over Trump's failure to correct a questioner that claimed President Obama was a Muslim and not even an American is a club that the mainstream media will beat him with for the rest of the presidential campaign. Blaming a candidate for the prejudicial or even crazy comments made by their supporters is unfair. Less unfair but part of the political game is the way candidates are judged by their responses to outrageous questions that don't put sufficient daylight between their positions and those of the persons expressing a controversial opinion. But in this case, the candidate can only blame one person for the fact that a prejudiced nativist birther would steel his thunder: Donald J. Trump. The criticisms for his failure to correct or rebuke the questioner have some traction because only a couple of years ago, no one was doing more to promote wacky theories about the president's birth or his faith than Trump. ...

Roger Simon knows what Trump should have said.

That familiar question "Is Obama a Muslim?" came up once again at a New Hampshire Trump rally Thursday night when a man (supporter? plant? who knows?) shouted out to the candidate, looking for approbation, that Barack Obama is a Muslim and "not even an American." The man added, "We have a problem in this country — it's called Muslims."

Trump did nothing at the time to disabuse the man of this notion and the candidate has since taken considerable heat for his nonresponse from just about every quarter, including that paragon of justice and honesty Hillary Clinton. The Donald, as is his wont, has declined to apologize for what Mrs. Clinton called his "hateful rhetoric." He has gone so far as to tweet that he had no responsibility to respond. "If someone made a nasty or controversial statement about me to the president, do you really think he would come to my rescue. No chance!"

Good point, but it raises the question: Is Obama a Muslim? The answer is no. But what is he then? Is Obama a Christian, as Jeb Bush asserted in an attempt to make Trump look bad after Thursday's dustup? Not a chance. Obama is about as pure a post-modern agnostic as you can find. He's about as Christian as your average gender studies professor at Swarthmore.

Religion is for the president a convenience, an instrument of power. As evidence of his Christianity he presents twenty-year attendance at Jeremiah Wright's church, which was and is no more than a front for extreme, self-destructive black nationalism amplified by screechy anti-American propaganda, about as Christian an institution as the White Citizens' Councils. (Oprah Winfrey didn't quit by accident). After acceding to the presidency, Obama has hardly ever gone to church. It interferes with his golf game or just about anything else. The family didn't even make it on Easter. ...

... Although it's perhaps a bit too complicated, or even apocalyptic, for the campaign hustings, here's how Trump should have answered the man's question. Is Obama a Muslim? No, but he's something even worse — a transnational progressive.

On second thought, such complex ideological talk is obviously not Trump's style. But there is someone running for the presidency with the intellectual chops, guts and speaking clarity to explain something like this to the public — Carly.

Washington Post

Pope Francis' fact-free flamboyance

by George Will

Pope Francis embodies sanctity but comes trailing clouds of sanctimony. With a convert's indiscriminate zeal, he embraces ideas impeccably fashionable, demonstrably false and deeply reactionary. They would devastate the poor on whose behalf he purports to speak — if his policy prescriptions were not as implausible as his social diagnoses are shrill.

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And the [Earth is becoming](#) "an immense pile of filth"? Hyperbole is a predictable precursor of yet another [U.N. Climate Change Conference](#) — the 21st since 1995. Fortunately, rhetorical exhibitionism increases as its effectiveness diminishes. In his June encyclical and elsewhere, Francis lectures about our responsibilities, but neglects the duty to be as intelligent as one can be. [This man who says](#) "the Church does not presume to settle scientific questions" proceeds as though everything about which he declaims is settled, from imperiled plankton to air conditioning being among humanity's "harmful habits." The church that thought it was settled science that Galileo was heretical should be attentive to all evidence.

Francis deplores "[compulsive consumerism](#)," a sin to which the [1.3 billion persons without even electricity](#) can only aspire. He leaves the Vatican to jet around praising subsistence farming, a romance best enjoyed from 30,000 feet above the realities that such farmers yearn to escape.

The saint who is Francis's namesake supposedly lived in sweet harmony with nature. For most of mankind, however, nature has been, and remains, scarcity, disease and natural — note the adjective — disasters. Our flourishing requires affordable, abundant energy for the production of everything from food to pharmaceuticals. Poverty has probably decreased more in the past two centuries than in the preceding three millennia because of industrialization powered by fossil fuels. Only economic growth has ever produced broad amelioration of poverty, and since growth began in the late 18th century, it has depended on such fuels.

Matt Ridley, author of "[The Rational Optimist](#)," notes that coal supplanting wood fuel reversed deforestation, and that "fertilizer manufactured with gas halved the amount of land needed to produce a given amount of food." The capitalist commerce that Francis disdains is the reason the portion of the planet's population living in "absolute poverty" (\$1.25 a day) declined from 53 percent to 17 percent in three decades after 1981. Even in low-income countries, writes economist Indur Goklany, life expectancy increased from between 25 to 30 years in 1900 to 62 years today. Sixty-three percent of fibers are synthetic and derived from fossil fuels; of the rest, 79 percent come from cotton, which requires synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. "Synthetic fertilizers and pesticides derived from fossil fuels," he says, "are responsible for at least 60

percent of today's global food supply." Without fossil fuels, he says, global cropland would have to increase at least 150 percent — equal to the combined land areas of South America and the European Union — to meet current food demands.

Francis grew up around the rancid political culture of Peronist populism, the sterile redistributionism that has reduced his Argentina from the world's 14th highest per-capita gross domestic product in 1900 to 63rd today. Francis's agenda for the planet — "[global regulatory norms](#)" — would globalize Argentina's downward mobility.

As the world spurns his church's teachings about abortion, contraception, divorce, same-sex marriage and other matters, Francis jauntily makes his church congruent with the secular religion of "sustainability." Because this is hostile to growth, it fits Francis's seeming sympathy for medieval stasis, when his church ruled the roost, economic growth was essentially nonexistent and life expectancy was around 30.

Francis's fact-free flamboyance reduces him to a shepherd whose selectively reverent flock, genuflecting only at green altars, is tiny relative to the publicity it receives from media otherwise disdainful of his church. Secular people with anti-Catholic agendas drain his prestige, a dwindling asset, into promotion of policies inimical to the most vulnerable people and unrelated to what once was the papacy's very different salvific mission.

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Contentions

[Obama Throws Hillary Under the Bus](#)

by Noah Rothman

The central mission of Barack Obama's White House in the waning days of his administration is to communicate to the public that none of this is his fault. Their search for figures toward which this administration can shift blame for the suboptimal state of affairs is growing increasingly frantic, self-sabotaging, and reflective of an undisciplined political operation in the midst of a spiraling crisis.

Given the increasingly dire state of geopolitical affairs, securing exonerations for Obama's conduct is a particularly urgent imperative on the foreign policy front. The resurrection of the Islamist militant threat in the Middle East is perhaps the most glaring failure of this administration. The largely pacified Iraq that Barack Obama inherited is a boiling cauldron of bloody sectarian warfare. Even the most stalwart member of the president's thinning clique of apologists would today concede that the withdrawal of every last American soldier from Iraq in 2011 was shortsighted. They contend, however, that the president had no choice. Proud Iraqi negotiators prevented this White House from securing a mutually satisfactory agreement that secured legal immunity for American soldiers tied his hands. Nonsense. [This excuse has been thoroughly dispelled](#) in reports that clearly indicate the administration was only prepared to accept full and total withdrawal in order to fulfill a political objective Obama set for himself in 2008.

The Iraqi crisis is, however, inexorably tied to another calamity just over the nation's northwestern border. The Syrian Civil War is the sine qua non for the revival of al-Qaeda and the birth of the Islamic State in the Northern Middle East. It is a nightmare that has rejuvenated the impression for millions of disaffected fundamentalist sympathizers around the globe that militant jihad is a movement with a future. It has yielded the worst refugee crisis since World War II as a great human tide spills over the Syrian border into neighboring countries and Europe. And it has provided Russia with a vacuum into which it has poured troops, capital, and influence as part of Moscow's strategic aim of decoupling Europe and the Middle East from the United States.

Like Iraq, the disaster that is Syria can no longer be ignored. Like Iraq, Barack Obama's White House can only ever approach a crisis with political damage control as its first priority. America's chief executive has but one approach to secure exculpation from the public and absolution from his confessors in the political press: blame shifting and buck-passing.

President Obama's schizophrenic Syria policy has been a disgrace. He initially drew a line in the sand designed to intimidate Bashar al-Assad into refraining from deploying chemical weapons against rebels in civilian areas. Over a year after he was repeatedly ignored and amid a war now characterized by the routine use of WMDs, Obama's secretary of state made the case for an "unbelievably small" war. That uninspiring pitch failed to convince either America's European allies or the American public of the mission's necessity. The president de-escalated by taking a Russian-provided off-ramp that allowed him to save face politically but did nothing to resolve the crisis. Predictably, it worsened, metastasized, and gave rise to the regional sectarian war that today threatens to deliver the Middle East into a new dark age. Finally and amid cascading failure, Barack Obama agreed to engage in the Syrian civil war with a two-pronged strategy: airstrikes on ISIS targets from above and training and equipping native insurgent elements on the ground.

It was a hopelessly convoluted strategy. The aim was to identify reasonably secular moderate fighters in Syria, transfer them to third-party countries in the region, train them, equip them, and reintroduce them into the theater of operations. By August of this year and \$500 million later, the Pentagon acknowledged that only 54 Syrian rebels had been prepared for combat. Less than a month later, almost all of them had been killed or captured. [General Lloyd Austin told Congress](#) this week that only "four or five" are continuing the fight against ISIS in Syria.

This self-evidently failed half-measure is a substantial embarrassment for this White House, and the administration's insular and paranoid handlers cannot allow that. As is the wont of this pathologically defensive administration, they have gone about looking for blame-worthy figures outside the ever-shrinking circle of Obama loyalists. "The finger, it says, should be pointed not at Mr. Obama but at those who pressed him to attempt training Syrian rebels in the first place," [New York Times reporter Peter Baker revealed](#), "a group that, in addition to congressional Republicans, happened to include former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton."

The White House all but washed its hands of the training program after General Austin's testimony.

"It is true that we have found this to be a difficult challenge," [White House Press Secretary Josh] Earnest said. "But it is also true that many of our critics had proposed this specific option as essentially the cure-all for all of the policy challenges that we're facing in Syria right now. That is not something that this administration ever believed, but it is something that our critics will have to answer for."

Forget for the moment a craven and humiliating self-defense that rests on the notion that the president was led by the nose into executing this flawed strategy, and the inescapable conclusion inexplicably promoted by this White House that the commander-in-chief is simply too pliant and irresolute. The desperation of blaming not merely Republicans but the Democrats' best hope for retaining the presidency and preserving Obama's achievements in office, Hillary Clinton, is pusillanimous in the extreme.

Hillary Clinton has been clear in her contention that Barack Obama should have done more in Syria and done it earlier in order to stave off catastrophe. "The failure to help build up a credible fighting force of the people who were the originators of the protests against Assad—there were Islamists, there were secularists, there was everything in the middle—the failure to do that left a big vacuum, which the jihadists have now filled," the likely Democratic standard-bearer [told Fox News](#) in the summer of 2014.

As the primary executor of Barack Obama's hideously failed approach to preserving U.S. interests abroad and executing American grand strategy in his first term, Hillary Clinton's record as secretary of state is a liability. She has chosen the Syrian crisis as the way in which she can create distance between herself and this president in order to inoculate herself against attacks on his foreign policy record. It is testament to the shortsighted and thin-skinned nature of this administration that even this mild criticism cannot be tolerated. They would handicap their party's successor before they would suffer even a modest critique.

The campaign is only just beginning. There is a reason why a political party has secured three consecutive terms in the White House only once in the post-War era. The voters are hungry for a change, and, presuming she is the nominee, Clinton will have to distance herself from the president if she is to win a general election next November. It's not clear that Barack Obama's capacious ego can take it.

The Federalist

Scott Walker For Labor Secretary

Wisconsin's governor can play an important role in 2016. But it won't be as a presidential candidate.

by David Harsanyi

As he's still a relatively young man, I imagine there are a multitude of things Scott Walker can still achieve in his life. But being president is not going to be one them. And it's nothing to be ashamed of. We're all endowed with certain gifts and hindered by certain realities. I will never be George Will. Scott Walker will never be Ronald Reagan. Or even James Polk.

Walker isn't outsider-y enough to generate enthusiasm among the grassroots and not insider-y enough to generate the funding that might help him overcome his unwinnable situation. Walker does not possess the appeal or rhetorical acumen to shake things up on his own. The problem with expectations is that you usually only get to meet them once. Ask Rick Perry.

If you're going to cast yourself as the hardheaded blue-state union buster, you can't go wobbly at the first sign of trouble. When more than 100,000 protesters occupied Wisconsin's state capitol, Walker did not back down. Death threats? Walker did not back down. A few anti-immigration activists demanded he get rid of Liz Mair, who was tabbed as his digital strategist,

and Walker, by then a presidential candidate, [folded quicker](#) than it takes to hold [three separate positions on birthright citizenship](#). So around a week.

His debate performance yesterday was workmanlike, but he probably offered far too little too late to save him in this crowded field. With the consensus being Marco Rubio and Carly Fiorina were the winners, and with Jeb Bush available for any Republican pining to support some moderate governor type, Walker has no place to turn for votes. The support he once enjoyed has completely cratered. In the latest Quinnipiac University poll, [he sits in tenth place](#) in the GOP race. He was leading the pack in a July with 18 percent. He is now at 3. He is at [2 percent](#) in the latest *New York Times*/CBS News poll.

In the end, Walker is basically a one-issue candidate. A good issue, but with unions dying out, an issue that doesn't drive the Right. Not all is lost, though. Walker can play an important role in 2016. Rubio or Fiorina (or someone else) could bring Walker aboard and make him their expert on labor policy. They could adopt his [pro-worker labor reform plan](#), which would bring Walker's Wisconsin accomplishments to Washington. Among other things, his plan offers:

- Elimination of the National Labor Relations Board.
- Elimination of the monopolistic unions at the federal level.
- If the new administration is unable to eliminate federal public employee unions, it would earmark the amount of union dues (funded by taxpayers) used for political activity by unions and withhold that money.
- The administration would campaign for all states to become right-to-work states, so unions could no longer require members to pay dues if they didn't want to participate.
- Campaign nationally to allow workers to negotiate contracts non-collectively.
- Campaign to allow secret ballot for workers to approve strikes, rather than the open voting that is rife with union intimidation.
- Repeal the Davis-Bacon Act.

Now, naturally, most candidates would probably avoid picking this kind of fight with labor in a general election. Yet this kind of restructuring would be tremendously popular with conservatives and with many business leaders. As Walker proved in Wisconsin, they also have some traction with independents and Democrats. Walker could put to use his formidable experience fighting off union bosses. Having already dealt with the pressure of facing a well-funded special interest, and winning (on numerous times), Walker is more qualified on this front than anyone else running. If he wants to make a difference, it might be his best chance.

Because he's not going to be president.

Free Beacon

[Carly Rocks](#)

by Matthew Continetti.

There's one story out of the CNN Republican debate, and that's Carly Fiorina. The cable network expanded the ranks of GOP candidates to include her in the primetime debate, and she made the most of the opportunity. She did what no one thought was possible: She beat Donald Trump in the television game with her retort to his comments about her physical appearance. And she did more than that: She gave crisp, strong, visceral answers on questions regarding

national security, abortion, and the economy. Conservative audiences have been thrilled at Fiorina's appearances for months. Tonight she showed the nation that she is articulate, capable, passionate, and fearless. She displayed more *thumos* than many of the men on stage.

Fiorina has a fascinating speaking style. She's clipped, emphatic, almost rote in her delivery. But it comes across as though she's entirely committed to telling you what she's thinking at any given moment. I can't think of a more affecting statement from a politician I've heard than the one she gave on the Planned Parenthood scandal. When you combine that with how she destroyed Donald Trump when she was asked to comment on his remarks about her appearance, I expect the Republican audience of this debate to move to her in swarms.

What also makes Carly fascinating is that she's gotten to this point without ever holding office and without a huge profile among Republicans. Ben Carson has been a grassroots favorite since he rebuked President Obama at the National Prayer Breakfast years ago. Donald Trump is Donald Trump. And Jeb Bush is the frontrunner's frontrunner—the son and brother of presidents. Carly? She was a surrogate for McCain in 2008 and a failed candidate for senate in California in 2010. And now she's on the Republican main stage, outperforming two term governors.

I'd say Chris Christie, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, and Jeb Bush also had strong debates. But debates basically serve to propel second-tier candidates to the top. That's what happened with Ben Carson last time. And it's what's going to happen to Carly Fiorina now.

Contentions

Trump's Birther Chickens Come Home to Roost

by Jonathan Tobin

This isn't something that will hurt Donald Trump much among his populist base. But the kerfuffle over Trump's failure to correct a questioner that claimed President Obama was a Muslim and not even an American is a club that the mainstream media will beat him with for the rest of the presidential campaign. Blaming a candidate for the prejudicial or even crazy comments made by their supporters is unfair. Less unfair but part of the political game is the way candidates are judged by their responses to outrageous questions that don't put sufficient daylight between their positions and those of the persons expressing a controversial opinion. But in this case, the candidate can only blame one person for the fact that a prejudiced nativist birther would steel his thunder: Donald J. Trump. The criticisms for his failure to correct or rebuke the questioner have some traction because only a couple of years ago, no one was doing more to promote wacky theories about the president's birth or his faith than Trump.

The incident, which took place at a New Hampshire town hall event where Trump spoke, involved a person asking the following question:

"We have a problem in this country, it's called Muslims. Our current President is one. We know he's not even an American," said a questioner at a town hall in New Hampshire. "We have training camps growing where they want to kill us. That's my question, when can we get rid of them?"

Trump's response seemed to validate the comments:

"A lot of people are saying that and a lot of people are saying that bad things are happening out there. We're going to be looking at that and a lot of different things,"

Trump may have considered that a neutral dismissal of the charge but, in this case, that isn't nearly good enough.

Let's state the obvious that needs to be reiterated. Growing Islamist terrorism is a global crisis that President Obama has fumbled in part because he refuses to confront the religious roots of the problem or commit the resources to needed to address it. Part of that is a troubling growth in lone wolf terrorism inspired by Islamists in this country. But American Muslims are not in of themselves a problem. The overwhelming majority of them are honest, decent, hard-working and loyal citizens. Though allegations of a broad anti-Muslim post-9/11 backlash in this country are utterly without foundation, prejudice against Muslims is a noxious virus that deserves to be condemned along with all other forms of hate. Moreover, there are no "training camps" in the United States where Islamists are gathering to "kill" Americans. It goes without saying that is the responsibility of all decent persons, let alone those who aspire to be president of the United States, to condemn such prejudice. They should do so, not only because it is right, but also because not drawing a line between the urgent concern over Islamists and hate against all Muslims undermines the effort to combat Islamist terror and those who rationalize it.

As for the president, let's also specify that while it is no insult to call someone a Muslim, the president long ago made it clear that he is a Christian and deserves to be taken at his word about his personal faith the same as any other person. As for his not being born in the United States that is an urban legend that was debunked by the publication of his birth certificate years ago. Yet for those afflicted by Obama derangement syndrome, it has become a matter of faith that that the object of their anger can't merely be an American Christian with whom they disagree. Instead they insist he must be a Muslim Manchurian candidate bent on the destruction of all they hold dear not because he is a hard-core liberal and a product of elite left-wing institutions such as Columbia and Harvard, but because he is an Islamist mole.

One needn't be a supporter of the president to be dismayed by the persistence of this nonsense on the margins of our political discourse. Those who promote these ideas aren't merely wrong. They are also hurting the cause of conservatism by diverting Americans from the strong arguments against Obama's harmful policies. Surely, for any principled conservative, opposing ObamaCare and the Iran nuclear deal ought to be reason enough to think ill of the president's tenure in office. But some people find it easier to live with his victories by putting it down to a grand conspiracy rather than accepting that sometimes those in the wrong are able to win in a democracy. There is much to criticize about President Obama but even his most fervent critics need to accept that his election and re-election have everything to do with his historic status as our first African-American president and nothing to do with conspiracies.

It's true that the first people to circulate the rumors about Obama's foreign birth may have been Hillary Clinton supporters in 2008. But far from an innocent party in this birther movement, Trump was its noisiest advocate until not that long ago. He prefers not to dwell on this insanity since he started his amazingly successful run for the presidency this past summer. But if many in the media found it hard to take him seriously once he started his campaign it was not just because we saw him as a vulgar real estate mogul/reality television star but also because we remembered his birther antics.

Trump subsequently claimed on Twitter that he was right to remain silent because Obama wouldn't defend him if someone attacked him in his presence. Perhaps not. But Obama hasn't wasted his time trying to prove Trump isn't a U.S. citizen. Nor can we take seriously his

assertion that rebuking the questioner would have opened him up to charges that he was interfering with free speech. But it's true that if he had done so, the man would have been within his rights to claim it was unfair since Trump has been America's leading birther.

Respectable candidates of all varieties have their crackpot followers. But Trump can't disown his tinfoil hat crowd because he did so much to encourage their craziness.

Trump's popularity and his ability to channel the anger of many Americans about the failure of our political class has rendered him immune to all sorts of gaffes and outrageous comments over the last three months. Indeed, a lot of people like him because he says these things, not in spite of them. This incident will probably be no different. But it does serve as a useful reminder for those not yet besotted with the Donald of just how irresponsible a figure he has been. Trump owns the birthers as much as he does the New York luxury building he named for himself. Though his comments were offensive, that foolish New Hampshire citizen did the country a favor when he forced Trump to confront his own extremism. Trump's birther chickens have come home to roost.

Roger L. Simon

Is Obama a Muslim? What Trump Should Have Said

That familiar question "Is Obama a Muslim?" came up once again at a New Hampshire Trump rally Thursday night when a man (supporter? plant? who knows?) shouted out to the candidate, looking for approbation, that Barack Obama is a Muslim and "not even an American." The man added, "We have a problem in this country — it's called Muslims."

Trump did nothing at the time to disabuse the man of this notion and the candidate has since taken considerable heat for his nonresponse from just about every quarter, including that paragon of justice and honesty Hillary Clinton. The Donald, as is his wont, has declined to apologize for what Mrs. Clinton called his "hateful rhetoric." He has gone so far as to tweet that he had no responsibility to respond. "If someone made a nasty or controversial statement about me to the president, do you really think he would come to my rescue. No chance!"

Good point, but it raises the question: Is Obama a Muslim? The answer is no. But what is he then? Is Obama a Christian, as [Jeb Bush](#) asserted in an attempt to make Trump look bad after Thursday's dustup? Not a chance. Obama is about as pure a post-modern agnostic as you can find. He's about as Christian as your average gender studies professor at Swarthmore.

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So Obama is neither Muslim nor Christian, but that is an entirely incomplete view of his belief system. Something is going on in an emotional sense that trumps (excuse the phrase) conventional religious belief. He seems almost always to side with Islamic society against

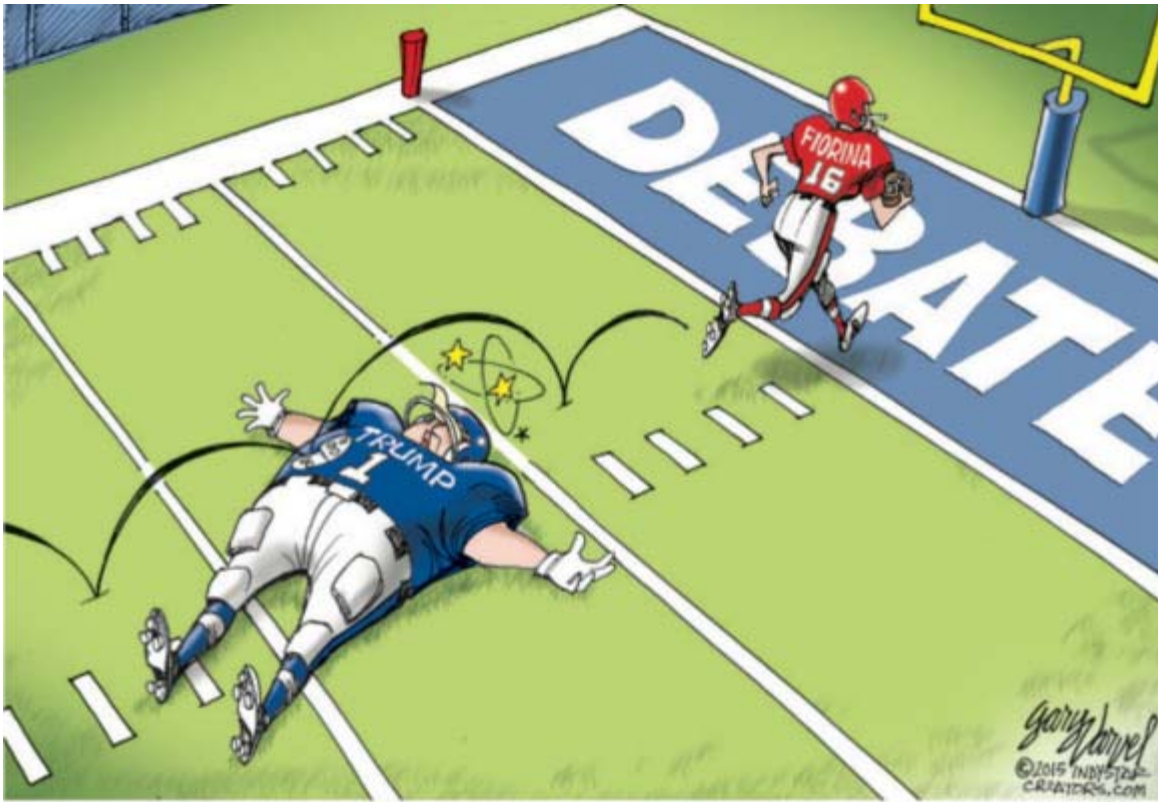
Christendom, bending over backwards on occasion to set up false equivalences. At the very moment the Islamic State was lopping off the heads of Christians and Yazidis in Libya, Syria and Iraq, he invoked the Crusades at a National Prayer Breakfast as if this behavior from centuries ago were even marginally equivalent. Unlike other major world leaders, he didn't bother to attend the Charlie Hebdo massacre memorial in Paris. He couldn't even say the Islamic terrorists who shot the people in the Paris kosher deli the day after did so because the victims were Jews. And then there's the Iran deal, the giveaway of the century (\$150 billion) to an Islamic state building nuclear weapons and intercontinental missiles, not to mention sponsoring terrorism across the world, for absolutely no verifiable quid pro quo.

Who would do such a thing? Well, Barack Obama obviously. Although not a Muslim (or anything else) religiously, he tilts Islamic *culturally*. Why? First, he identifies with it from his Indonesian childhood and as the religion of his father who deserted him. But at least as importantly he does so because he is a "progressive." It's no accident that he became one in the absence of Islam or Christianity. "Progressives" are the real true believers. They are convinced (to an extent religious people could only dream and at a level of almost absolute *blind faith*) that everything bad that happens or happened internationally is or was the fault of the imperialistic West. Arabs and Persians therefore are simply Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, even though they control immense amounts of oil, are hugely misogynistic and homophobic (the very things "progressives" say they abhor), and rape, murder and pillage everyone who doesn't go along with their "divine plan." Shiite or Sunni, it makes no difference.

Now, although blinded by ideology, Obama must sense this massive contradiction on some level. Who wouldn't? But he can't face it. He has an extremely fragile personality that almost never admits error. But contradictions of this nature find their way out in some manner. The repressions of Arab society have resulted in a shame culture that lashes out at themselves and others and only enhances their backwardness. Obama too, in his way, seems to be very much part of that shame culture. It may sound excessively psychoanalytic, but he frequently acts as if he were a man ashamed and in denial, almost constitutionally unable to see even possible truths in the ideas of those that disagree with him. (It's interesting to think of the prayer breakfast invocation of the Crusades in that context.) Alone and adrift, he is naturally confused in his policies, which have helped turn the Middle East into a hellhole beyond recognition with hundreds of thousands of its benighted citizens currently headed for Europe, perhaps to change that continent and our civilization forever — very much for the worse.

Although it's perhaps a bit too complicated, or even apocalyptic, for the campaign hustings, here's how Trump should have answered the man's question. Is Obama a Muslim? No, but he's something even worse — a transnational progressive.

On second thought, such complex ideological talk is obviously not Trump's style. But there is someone running for the presidency with the intellectual chops, guts and speaking clarity to explain something like this to the public — Carly.



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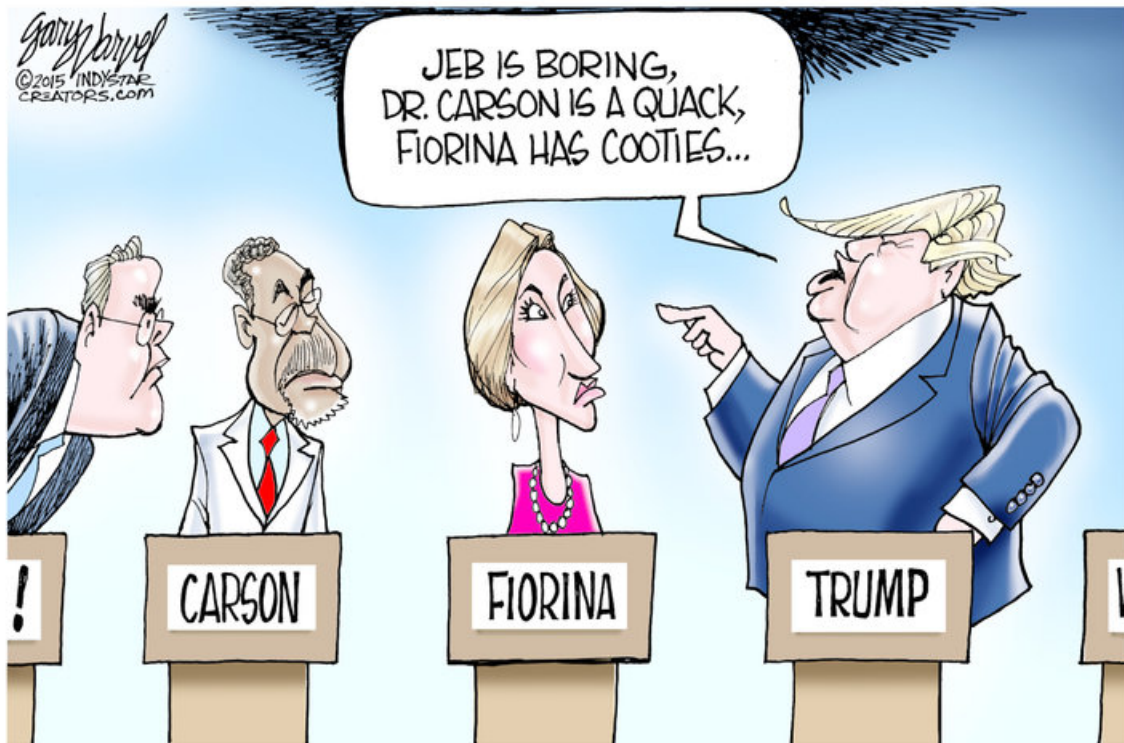
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