

November 6, 2015 - Walter Laqueur, Steve Bannon, and Late Night

Three items for the weekend. Yale historian Timothy Snyder's new book is the subject of a devastating review by Walter Laqueur. Bloomberg/Business Week reports on Steve Bannon who they call "the most dangerous political operative in America." And we have a double strength issue of Late Night Humor from Andy Malcolm.

Yale Historian [Timothy Snyder](#) made waves five years ago with the publication of *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (Basic Books, 2010). It had been previously suggested that the World Wars of the 20th century could easily be called the first and second Ukrainian Wars. Thus, a book about the conflict between Germany and Russia over that piece of the world was well received. Then, mining the same sources, Snyder published *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning*. 2015. Pickings offered a review of that book in [September](#). As readers can see, Snyder has made a leap from historian to environmental scold. Here are pull quotes from that review;

In my 2012 book, [Merchants of Despair](#), I exposed the role that Malthusian thought — the belief that the world cannot support a growing human population — has had in motivating most of the worst atrocities of the past two centuries, notably including those of Nazism and more recent antihuman movements operating under the “population control” and “environmentalist” banners. Now prominent Yale historian Timothy Snyder has written *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning*, which also lays out the Malthusian ideology behind the Holocaust.

But instead of forcefully rejecting the axioms of Malthusianism and the claims of its modern adherents, Snyder argues there's something to them. The world faces catastrophe from the overconsumption of fossil fuels, anthropogenic global warming, and impending food and resource shortages, he says — echoing similar pernicious claims of the 1930s — and for this he blames the U.S. ...

... But Snyder has it horribly wrong. Competition for scarce resources (land, food, energy) is effective as a demagogic myth, but it is not reality. There was no ecological crisis in the 1930s, any more than there is today. What there was then, as there is today, was ideological insanity. The Nazis' war had no rational basis. Germany never needed more “living space.” Germany today has much less land per person, but a far higher living standard, than it had under the Third Reich. The problem was all in their heads.

Similarly, today there is no resource crisis. There are far more resources available per capita today than ever before in human history. That is because resources are defined by human creativity. Thus, contrary to Malthus and all of his followers, the global standard of living has continuously gone up as the world's population has increased. The more people — especially free and educated people — the more inventors, and inventions are cumulative.

In this respect, America has been the most productive of nations. It is an anti-American — and anti-human — lie to say that we are destroying the world's resources. The opposite is true. ...

... The real lesson of the Holocaust for our time is this: **We are not threatened by there being too many people. We are threatened by people who say there are too many people.** ...

... The fundamental question boils down to this: Are humans destroyers or creators? If the idea is accepted that the world's resources are fixed, with only so much to go around, then each new life is unwelcome, each unregulated act or thought is a menace, every person is fundamentally the enemy of every other person, and each race or nation is enemy of every other race or nation. The ultimate outcome of such a worldview can only be enforced stagnation, tyranny, war, and genocide. ...

Worse for Snyder has arrived in the November issue of [Mosaic](#) where his new book is reviewed by [Walter Laqueur](#) one of the pre-eminent historians of European History. Laqueur is 94 years old and it would have been better for Snyder if he had held publication until the Mr. Laqueur had passed to his reward.

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... There is a great deal more in this very crowded volume, including its bizarre and much commented-upon concluding chapter with the "warning" promised in the book's subtitle. Here are the supposed lessons for today that lie hidden within the calamitous and genocidal events of yesterday—lessons about all the terrible and mistaken ways that people react in the face of impending dangers, real and perceived. And here the narrative shifts from the barbarism of the Nazis to global warming, from Auschwitz to Rwanda, from the gas chambers in Eastern Europe to greenhouse gases in the upper atmosphere, from the Holocaust, which took place, to all kinds of ecological horrors that may or may not take place. I need not dilate further. ...

... In general, despite the range of his research and his touted command of many languages, Snyder is more reliable when writing about Eastern Europe (though not necessarily about Russia) than about Germany and the West. Little slips give much away. Thus, discussing Rosa Luxemburg, the famous Marxist revolutionary and propagandist of the early 20th century, he refers to the “immensely influential” German journal Die Neue Zeit. In fact, Die Neue Zeit was a close runner-up for the period’s most boring publication; one doubts Snyder ever had an opportunity to consult it. And was it ever influential at all, let alone “immensely influential”? Hardly.

Or take the treatment of Carl Schmitt, Germany’s best known political philosopher of the 20th century, frequently quoted by Snyder as the man who gave Hitler many of his anti-state ideas: “Throughout Hitler’s career, Schmitt had provided elegant theoretical support for the Führer’s actions.” Here, too, reality is otherwise. Schmitt was indeed a member of the Nazi party—which, however, he joined only after Hitler came to power—and he wanted to be the new rulers’ supreme legal authority. But beginning in 1936 he ran into serious trouble, was charged with many ideological sins, and had to resign from all but two of his official positions.

Then there is the matter of the book’s approach and its tone. I’ve already referred to Snyder’s oft-proclaimed confidence in his originality and Newton-like authority. Another nettlesome quality is his tendency to sensationalize minor or inconsequential details and magnify them out of all proportion to their historical significance.

One example: the Jewish personality most frequently and copiously quoted in Black Earth is not the eminent British Zionist Chaim Weizmann (who rates a single mention) or David Ben-Gurion (none at all); neither is it a communal leader in prewar Poland, a commander of the Jewish underground, a prominent East European Zionist, Bundist, or Jewish Communist, or one of the heads of the ghettos appointed by the Germans. Instead, Snyder’s top Jewish witness is a young man in his late twenties named Avraham Stern (codename “Yair”), the head of the Zionist right-wing paramilitary group in Palestine known as Leḥi or the Stern Gang, which split off from the Irgun in 1940.

Stern, who was shot and killed by a British policeman in Tel Aviv in February 1942, is a tragic figure: a poet, a man of great bravery, and unfortunately, when it came to political judgment, something of a hopeless naif if not a fool. Before the war, he and his followers were involved in talks with Polish officials aimed at expediting the emigration of Jews from Poland to either Palestine or Madagascar. Later on, emissaries of his little group were sent to Beirut to talk to German diplomats there, evidently in the quixotic hope of establishing a common front against the British, then the Mandatory power in Palestine. All of these initiatives went nowhere.

Since nothing Stern did or failed to do was of genuine consequence, why has he been singled out for such extended treatment in Black Earth? What point is Snyder striving toward? That not all Jews were political geniuses? This is not exactly news. Was our author ignorant of the fact that Stern’s poignant story has already been thoroughly covered by historians of the period? Was he personally just so captivated as to conclude it therefore warranted greater publicity? Or was it the opportunity to bring into the picture Menachem Begin, a successor head of Irgun/Leḥi and a former member of the Polish anti-Nazi fighting force known as Anders Army, that he found irresistible? Whatever the motive, his elaborate treatment of this one figure is characteristic of an approach that tends repeatedly to favor the striking or outré at the expense of the relevant and important ...

... It is not easy to do justice to Snyder. When he is not operating under the compulsion to play the role of a Newton, or to present versions of history radically different from those of his predecessors, or to indulge his mania for exaggeration and sensationalism, or to waste his own and his readers' time encapsulating serious and complicated topics in shorthand, he deserves attention, respect, and some of the epithets bestowed on him by his admirers. On certain topics and on certain issues, especially concerning Eastern Europe, his work can be valuable and even innovative. If I have dwelled more on his shortcomings and misjudgments than on his merits, it is because seldom if ever can I remember having encountered so maddening a combination of right and wrong, imagination and fantasy, good sense and absurdity located together in such close vicinity.

In the end, one can say this: Snyder's obfuscating and half-baked "discoveries" about the Holocaust do further harm to a field of study already disfigured by the work of emissaries of one school or another, not to mention outright deniers. His book will not be the last such venture in misguided interpretation—the varieties are unlimited—but it will lengthen the time needed to repair the damage.

When the book [Clinton Cash](#) appeared last winter, it was amazing to see how the book was featured prominently by many in the main stream media. How those circumstances were created is just one of the themes in [Bloomberg/Business Week's](#) long and exhaustive story on the man they call "the most dangerous political operative in America" - Steve Bannon. He is the head of the Breitbart organization and the lower key Government Accountability Institute.

... Bannon's life is a succession of Gatsbyish reinventions that made him rich and landed him squarely in the middle of the 2016 presidential race: He's been a naval officer, investment banker, minor Hollywood player, and political impresario. When former Disney chief Michael Ovitz's empire was falling to pieces, Bannon sat Ovitz down in his living room and delivered the news that he was finished. When Sarah Palin was at the height of her fame, Bannon was whispering in her ear. When Donald Trump decided to blow up the Republican presidential field, Bannon encouraged his circus-like visit to the U.S.-Mexico border. John Boehner just quit as House speaker because of the mutinous frenzy Bannon and his confederates whipped up among conservatives. Today, backed by mysterious investors and a stream of Seinfeld royalties, he sits at the nexus of what Hillary Clinton once dubbed "the vast right-wing conspiracy," where he and his network have done more than anyone else to complicate her presidential ambitions—and they plan to do more. But this "conspiracy," at least under Bannon, has mutated into something different from what Clinton described: It's as eager to go after establishment Republicans such as Boehner or Jeb Bush as Democrats like Clinton.

"I come from a blue-collar, Irish Catholic, pro-Kennedy, pro-union family of Democrats," says Bannon, by way of explaining his politics. "I wasn't political until I got into the service and saw how badly Jimmy Carter f---ed things up. I became a huge Reagan admirer. Still am. But what turned me against the whole establishment was coming back from running companies in Asia in 2008 and seeing that Bush had f---ed up as badly as Carter. The whole country was a disaster."

As befits someone with his peripatetic background, Bannon is a kind of Jekyll-and-Hyde figure in the complicated ecosystem of the right—he's two things at once. And he's devised a method to influence politics that marries the old-style attack journalism of Breitbart.com, which helped drive out Boehner, with a more sophisticated approach, conducted through the nonprofit Government

Accountability Institute, that builds rigorous, fact-based indictments against major politicians, then partners with mainstream media outlets conservatives typically despise to disseminate those findings to the broadest audience. The biggest product of this system is the project Bannon was so excited about at CPAC: the bestselling investigative book, written by GAI's president, Peter Schweizer, Clinton Cash: The Untold Story of How and Why Foreign Governments and Businesses Helped Make Bill and Hillary Rich. Published in May by HarperCollins, the book dominated the political landscape for weeks and probably did more to shape public perception of Hillary Clinton than any of the barbs from her Republican detractors.

...

... While attacking the favored candidates in both parties at once may seem odd, Bannon says he's motivated by the same populist disgust with Washington that's animating candidates from Trump to Bernie Sanders. Like both, Bannon is having a bigger influence than anyone could have reasonably expected. But in the Year of the Outsider, it's perhaps fitting that a figure like Bannon, whom nobody saw coming, would roil the national political debate. ...

... What made Clinton Cash so unexpectedly influential is that mainstream news reporters picked up and often advanced Schweizer's many examples of the Clintons' apparent conflicts of interest in accepting money from large donors and foreign governments. ("Practically grotesque," [wrote Harvard Law School professor Lawrence Lessig](#), who's running for the Democratic presidential nomination. "On any fair reading, the pattern of behavior that Schweizer has charged is corruption.") Just before the book's release, the New York Times [ran a front-page story](#) about a Canadian mining magnate, Frank Giustra, who gave tens of millions of dollars to the Clinton Foundation and then flew Bill Clinton to Kazakhstan aboard his private jet to dine with the country's autocratic president, Nursultan Nazarbayev. Giustra subsequently won lucrative uranium-mining rights in the country. (Giustra denies that the Clinton dinner influenced his Kazakh mining decision.) The Times piece cited Schweizer's still-unpublished book as a source of its reporting, puzzling many Times readers and prompting a reaction from the paper's ombudswoman, Margaret Sullivan, [who grudgingly concluded that](#), while no ethical standards were breached, "I still don't like the way it looked."

For Bannon, the Clinton Cash uproar validated a personal theory, informed by his Goldman Sachs experience, about how conservatives can influence the media and why they failed the last time a Clinton was running for the White House. "In the 1990s," he told me, "conservative media couldn't take down [Bill] Clinton because most of what they produced was punditry and opinion, and they always oversold the conclusion: 'It's clearly impeachable!' So they wound up talking to themselves in an echo chamber." What news conservatives did produce, such as David Brock's Troopergate investigation on Paula Jones in the American Spectator, was often tainted in the eyes of mainstream editors by its explicit partisan association.

In response, Bannon developed two related insights. "One of the things Goldman teaches you is, don't be the first guy through the door because you're going to get all the arrows. If it's junk bonds, let Michael Milken lead the way," he says. "Goldman would never lead in any product. Find a business partner." His other insight was that the reporters staffing the investigative units of major newspapers aren't the liberal ideologues of conservative fever dreams but kindred souls who could be recruited into his larger enterprise. "What you realize hanging out with investigative reporters is that, while they may be personally liberal, they don't let that get in the way of a good story," he says. "And if you bring them a real story built on facts, they're f---ing badasses, and they're fair." Recently, I met with Brock, who renounced conservatism and became an important liberal strategist, fundraiser, and Clinton ally. He founded the liberal watchdog group Media Matters for America and just published a book, Killing The Messenger: The Right-Wing Plot to Derail Hillary and Hijack Your Government. Brock's attitude toward

Bannon isn't enmity toward an ideological opponent, as I'd expected, but rather a curiosity and professional respect for the tradecraft Bannon demonstrated in advancing the Clinton Cash narrative. What conservatives learned in the '90s, Brock says, is that "your operation isn't going to succeed if you don't cross the barrier into the mainstream." ...

Late Night Humor from [Andrew Malcolm](#).

Fallon: New York City Mayor De Blasio signs a bill requiring stores to keep their doors closed when the air conditioning is on. So apparently De Blasio is not only our mayor, he's also our dad.

Meyers: The Vatican has announced that Pope Francis will visit Mexico next year. Now that he's met all the Catholics in the United States, he wants to see where they're from.

Fallon: Yellowstone National Park has set a visitor record. Officials credit cheap gas, good marketing and kids being so distracted by their phones that you can drive them anywhere.

Mosaic

[Timothy Snyder: The Newton of the Holocaust?](#)

The Yale historian's much-lauded new book promises a revolutionary view of the Holocaust. But it misleads more than it enlightens.

by Walter Lacqueur

No author of books on Eastern Europe during the period of World War II and the Holocaust has been more widely reviewed and discussed in recent years than Timothy Snyder, a professor of history at Yale. In *Bloodlands* (2010), Snyder presented what might be termed a Polish-Ukrainian version of the Holocaust, highlighting the brutality of Nazi rule over the countries of Eastern Europe—the “bloodlands” between Germany and Soviet Russia—and the horrific toll in lives, especially Polish lives, taken by the two battling powers.

Now, in [Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning](#), Snyder deals mostly with the mass murder of Jews, ascribing greater responsibility than have other historians to the early work of the Nazi SS killing squads (*Einsatzgruppen*) operating in occupied Eastern Europe, but also memorializing those who helped to save Jewish lives in Poland after the 1939 invasion and partition of that country by the twin forces of Nazi Germany and the USSR. Indeed, the book, which is based to a considerable extent on the stories of individual survivors, centers like the previous one mainly on Poland, and to a lesser extent on the three Baltic states. There is little here on the fate of Jewish communities in other European countries, most of whom were transported to their deaths in Poland. Nor, despite its subtitle—“The Holocaust as History and Warning”—is *Black Earth* properly seen as another history of the Holocaust. It is instead a new interpretation, and one with some startling arguments to advance.

The reception given to both of Snyder's books has generally been rapturous, if more so in the United States than in Europe, and more so in some circles than in others. They have been called epic, haunting, brilliant, profoundly original, groundbreaking, provocative, erudite, challenging, unforgettable—exhausting the thesaurus. Most of those cheering, however, are not historians who have specialized in the study of Nazism, Eastern Europe, or the Holocaust. Within that more select group, a number have entered serious reservations and criticisms of Snyder's work, and some have voiced harsher and more heated judgments; a harvest can be found at the website *Defending History*.

Some of the negative comments on Snyder are highly emotional and even personal to a degree unusual in historical debate. He has been accused of prevarication, of consorting with shady characters in the present-day Baltic republics, of deliberately downplaying anti-Semitism and the unique character of the Final Solution, of anti-Russian and pro-Polish bias, and more. Skeptical reviewers in Europe have focused on his alleged espousal of the “double- genocide” theme—that is, equating the scale and seriousness of the atrocities committed respectively by Hitler and Stalin.

In addition to these criticisms, of which some are at least partially justified, even experts otherwise disposed to Snyder are understandably irked by his frequent statements, easily disproved, that much of his work is based on material hitherto unknown or neglected or inaccessible. When writing in this vein, he is capable of such breathless confidences as that most of the killing of Jews took place outside Germany and that many and possibly a majority of the killers were not themselves German: all basic facts, long and solidly established. More broadly, Snyder insists that the “conventional” understanding of the Holocaust has been so thoroughly misguided that only now, with the publication of *Bloodlands* and *Black Earth*, is it possible to see things as they really were and to rethink the subject afresh. Such asseverations cannot but create the impression that our author sees himself in the role of Isaac Newton as imagined by Alexander Pope:

*Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night
God said: Let Newton be! and all was light.*

What, then, *are* the findings that in Snyder's view have made such a radical reexamination imperative? Historians have traditionally been concerned with the character of Nazism, its real aims and doctrines, and with Hitler's mental makeup; few stones in this field remain unturned. Snyder, for his part, seems sincerely to believe that Hitler was neither a German nationalist nor even an anti-Semite in the traditional sense. So what was he?

Instead of explaining the dictator in terms of his ideological beliefs or the doctrines of the Nazi party, Snyder instead invokes considerations of agricultural science, the hybridization of grains, the storage and preservation of foods, and similar topics. When the German dictator came to power, Snyder writes, he was brought face to face with what he took to be a looming ecological crisis and the prospect of national starvation; here lies the key to his thinking and to his policies with regard to the nations of Eastern Europe with their fertile croplands and, in the end, to their millions of Jews.

A related discovery, to which Snyder returns time and again, concerns the crucial importance of so-called “stateless zones” in facilitating the Holocaust. One of Hitler's main aims, he writes, was to destroy existing government institutions and bureaucracies in Eastern Europe as a necessary prelude to Germany's successful takeover and, later, its implementation of the Final Solution. For this reason, the chances of Jewish survival were infinitely greater in countries where something like a state apparatus remained intact than in places where chaos prevailed.

In particular, according to Snyder, the chances of survival for Jews in Germany were as high as one in two; in countries where the state apparatus had been destroyed, the chances of Jewish survival were only one in twenty.

What to say about all this?

The belief in the need for German expansion—*Lebensraum*—did indeed exist and had an impact on Nazi policy, as seen in Hitler's invasion and seizure of the breadbasket regions of Eastern Europe. But as far as the Holocaust is concerned, it was hardly a decisive factor. Besides, if Hitler really did experience "ecological panic" (Snyder's term), he would not have kept it a secret. It would have prominently figured in his *Table Talk*, in the writings of those closest to him (see Joseph Goebbels' multi-volume diaries), in orders passed on to his ministers, and so on. It does not. By the same token, the central role in Germany's economy would have been played by Walther Darré and Herbert Backe, the two key operatives in the regime's agricultural policies, and not, as was really the case, by the banker Hjalmar Schacht in the 1930s and by Albert Speer in the 1940s.

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As for the instrumental utility of "stateless zones" in Nazi plans for political control and mass murder, this was evident enough in some places (like Poland and the Czech protectorate), but not in all (Slovakia, among others). And as for the odds-on advantage of living in Germany as opposed to a "stateless zone" in Eastern Europe, even those only vaguely familiar with the European situation in the 1930s and 40s know otherwise. In 1938, Snyder writes portentously, "some Nazis discovered that the most effective way to separate Jews from the protection of the state was to destroy the state"—as if the German state had protected the German Jews in 1937. Once the war broke out, the situation of German Jews was virtually hopeless, and only a few hundred survived underground. In the stateless zones, by contrast, there were many opportunities to hide, to assume new (non-Jewish) identities, and even to escape to neutral countries.

There is a great deal more in this very crowded volume, including its bizarre and much commented-upon concluding chapter with the "warning" promised in the book's subtitle. Here are the supposed lessons for today that lie hidden within the calamitous and genocidal events of yesterday—lessons about all the terrible and mistaken ways that people react in the face of impending dangers, real and perceived. And here the narrative shifts from the barbarism of the Nazis to global warming, from Auschwitz to Rwanda, from the gas chambers in Eastern Europe to greenhouse gases in the upper atmosphere, from the Holocaust, which took place, to all kinds of ecological horrors that may or may not take place. I need not dilate further.

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Or take the treatment of Carl Schmitt, Germany’s best known political philosopher of the 20th century, frequently quoted by Snyder as the man who gave Hitler many of his anti-state ideas: “Throughout Hitler’s career, Schmitt had provided elegant theoretical support for the Führer’s actions.” Here, too, reality is otherwise. Schmitt was indeed a member of the Nazi party—which, however, he joined only *after* Hitler came to power—and he wanted to be the new rulers’ supreme legal authority. But beginning in 1936 he ran into serious trouble, was charged with many ideological sins, and had to resign from all but two of his official positions.

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One example: the Jewish personality most frequently and copiously quoted in *Black Earth* is not the eminent British Zionist Chaim Weizmann (who rates a single mention) or David Ben-Gurion (none at all); neither is it a communal leader in prewar Poland, a commander of the Jewish underground, a prominent East European Zionist, Bundist, or Jewish Communist, or one of the heads of the ghettos appointed by the Germans. Instead, Snyder’s top Jewish witness is a young man in his late twenties named Avraham Stern (codename “Yair”), the head of the Zionist right-wing paramilitary group in Palestine known as Leḥi or the Stern Gang, which split off from the Irgun in 1940.

Stern, who was shot and killed by a British policeman in Tel Aviv in February 1942, is a tragic figure: a poet, a man of great bravery, and unfortunately, when it came to political judgment, something of a hopeless naif if not a fool. Before the war, he and his followers were involved in talks with Polish officials aimed at expediting the emigration of Jews from Poland to either Palestine or Madagascar. Later on, emissaries of his little group were sent to Beirut to talk to *German* diplomats there, evidently in the quixotic hope of establishing a common front against the British, then the Mandatory power in Palestine. All of these initiatives went nowhere.

Since nothing Stern did or failed to do was of genuine consequence, why has he been singled out for such extended treatment in *Black Earth*? What point is Snyder striving toward? That not all Jews were political geniuses? This is not exactly news. Was our author ignorant of the fact that Stern’s poignant story has already been thoroughly covered by historians of the period? Was he personally just so captivated as to conclude it therefore warranted greater publicity? Or was it the opportunity to bring into the picture Menachem Begin, a successor head of Irgun/Leḥi *and* a former member of the Polish anti-Nazi fighting force known as Anders Army, that he found irresistible? Whatever the motive, his elaborate treatment of this one figure is characteristic of an approach that tends repeatedly to favor the striking or outré at the expense of the relevant and important.

Finally, weaving in and out of the narrative are short and presumably snappy statements of a type that Snyder is exceedingly fond of: apothegms that are intended to convey summary pearls of wisdom, that are indeed sometimes clever, but that all too often are either platitudinous or meaningless—or worse. Two unfortunate examples: “Both the victims and the perpetrators of the Holocaust were human beings” (at once maudlin and trite); “Jews were killed because they

were rendered stateless” (false, as we have seen). In the concluding chapter on the coming global environmental disaster, such ex-cathedra pronouncements rain down hard and fast: “Hitler was a child of the first globalization”; “people have no choice but to think on a planetary scale, as Hitler and Carl Schmitt never tired of emphasizing”; “a psychic resolve for a relief from a sense of crisis [can overwhelm] the practical resolve to think about the future.” And so forth and so on.

A reasonable case can be made in favor of historical revisionism. Debate continues on a variety of issues and developments in modern history, for instance with regard to the main responsibility for the outbreak of World War I. Every few years, a new publication will appear that can offer an interesting reinterpretation even though few new facts of any importance have emerged or are likely to emerge.

In the field of Holocaust studies, a longstanding debate of this kind has pitted “intentionalists” against “functionalists.” The former believe that it was Hitler’s single-minded aim from the beginning to rid Europe of the Jews. The functionalists—the camp into which, roughly speaking, Snyder falls—are convinced that the aim was less clear-cut and the decision process more complicated, more chaotic, and more driven by unfolding events.

One point of dispute relevant to this debate and to Snyder’s work concerns the date of Hitler’s decision to destroy European Jewry physically. Christian Gerlach, a German historian teaching in Switzerland, is the most recent to argue that the decisive date fell in December 1941 (by which time, however, about a million Jews had already been murdered). Others, most prominently Christopher Browning, believe that the decision goes back to an earlier date that same year, perhaps as early as July.

This is not a purely pedantic exercise. Establishing the date beyond a reasonable doubt—it seems clear, after decades of digging, that no written order exists—would help to explain whether the decision was made because the war in the East was not going well for Germany (as seemed to be the case by December 1941) or, to the contrary, because a German victory appeared close at hand (as was the case in the initial weeks after the June 1941 invasion of Russia in Operation Barbarossa) and the Nazis were riding a wave of triumphalism.

Gerlach’s English-language magnum opus, *The Extermination of the European Jews*, will be published next year, and it, too, is already being hailed as a major revision in our understanding of the Holocaust. But Gerlach, like Snyder, has his detractors, some of whom have severely criticized his past work on the conservative opposition to Hitler. What also makes Gerlach’s date a little suspect is that, according to him, Hitler announced the decision on December 12 at a meeting of 50 Nazi leaders. If true, this would mark the first time in history that a secret shared by 50 people was solemnly kept for the ensuing 74 years.

It is not easy to do justice to Snyder. When he is not operating under the compulsion to play the role of a Newton, or to present versions of history radically different from those of his predecessors, or to indulge his mania for exaggeration and sensationalism, or to waste his own and his readers’ time encapsulating serious and complicated topics in shorthand, he deserves attention, respect, and *some* of the epithets bestowed on him by his admirers. On certain topics and on certain issues, especially concerning Eastern Europe, his work can be valuable and even innovative. If I have dwelled more on his shortcomings and misjudgments than on his

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Here's what Timothy Snyder is up against.

Works by Walter Laqueur

- *Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1956
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Bloomberg/Business Week

[This Man Is the Most Dangerous Political Operative in America](#)

Steve Bannon runs the new vast right-wing conspiracy—and he wants to take down both Hillary Clinton and Jeb Bush.

by Joshua Green

It's nearing midnight as Steve Bannon pushes past the bluegrass band in his living room and through a crowd of Republican congressmen, political operatives, and a few stray *Duck Dynasty* cast members. He's trying to make his way back to the SiriusXM *Patriot* radio show, broadcasting live from a cramped corner of the 14-room townhouse he occupies a stone's throw from the Supreme Court. It's late February, the annual Conservative Political Action Conference is in full swing, and Bannon, as usual, is the whirlwind at the center of the action.



Bannon is the executive chairman of *Breitbart News*, the crusading right-wing populist website that's a lineal descendant of the *Drudge Report* (its late founder, Andrew Breitbart, spent years apprenticing with Matt Drudge) and a haven for people who think Fox News is too polite and restrained. He'd spent the day at CPAC among the conservative faithful, zipping back and forth between his SiriusXM booth and an unlikely pair of guests he was squiring around: Nigel Farage, the leader of Britain's right-wing UKIP party, and Phil Robertson, the bandanna'd, ayatollah-bearded *Duck Dynasty* patriarch who was accepting a free-speech award. CPAC is a beauty contest for Republican presidential hopefuls. But Robertson, a novelty adornment invited after A&E suspended him for denouncing gays, delivered a wild rant about "beatniks" and sexually transmitted diseases that upstaged them all, to Bannon's evident delight. "If there's an explosion or a fire somewhere," says Matthew Boyle, Breitbart's Washington political editor, "Steve's probably nearby with some matches." Afterward, everyone piled into party buses and headed for the townhouse.

"Honey badger don't give a s---" is the *Breitbart* motto

Bannon, an ex-Goldman Sachs banker, is the sort of character who would stand out anywhere, but especially in the drab environs of Washington. A mile-a-minute talker who thrums with

energy, his sentences speed off ahead of him and spin out into great pileups of nouns, verbs, and grins. With his swept-back blond hair and partiality to cargo shorts and flip-flops, he looks like Jeff Spicoli after a few decades of hard living, and he employs “dude” just as readily.

Ordinarily, Bannon’s townhouse is crypt-quiet and feels like a museum, as it’s faithfully decorated down to its embroidered silk curtains and painted murals in authentic Lincoln-era detail. When I first stopped by in January, about the only sign that I hadn’t teleported back to the 1860s was a picture on the mantle of a smiling woman on a throne with a machine gun in her lap (it was Bannon’s daughter Maureen, a West Point grad and lieutenant in the 101st Airborne Division; the throne belonged to Saddam Hussein—or once did). Until Bannon showed up, the only sounds I heard were faint noises from the basement, which might have been the young women he calls the Valkyries, after the war goddesses of Norse mythology who decided soldiers’ fates in battle. More on them later.

On this February night, however, the party is roaring. Along with his CPAC triumph, a secret project he’d conceived was nearing fruition: His lawyers were almost finished vetting a book about Bill and Hillary Clinton’s murky financial dealings that he’s certain will upend the presidential race. “Dude, it’s going to be epic,” he tells me. I sip my “moonshine”—his wink at the *Dynasty* guests—and wonder, as people often do, whether Bannon is nuts. On my way out, the doorman hands me a gift: a silver hip flask with “Breitbart” printed above an image of a honey badger, the insouciant African predator of YouTube fame whose catchphrase, “Honey badger don’t give a s---,” is the *Breitbart* motto.

Bannon’s life is a succession of Gatsbyish reinventions that made him rich and landed him squarely in the middle of the 2016 presidential race: He’s been a naval officer, investment banker, minor Hollywood player, and political impresario. When former Disney chief Michael Ovitz’s empire was falling to pieces, Bannon sat Ovitz down in his living room and delivered the news that he was finished. When Sarah Palin was at the height of her fame, Bannon was whispering in her ear. When Donald Trump decided to blow up the Republican presidential field, Bannon encouraged his circus-like visit to the U.S.-Mexico border. John Boehner just quit as House speaker because of the mutinous frenzy Bannon and his confederates whipped up among conservatives. Today, backed by mysterious investors and a stream of *Seinfeld* royalties, he sits at the nexus of what Hillary Clinton once dubbed “the vast right-wing conspiracy,” where he and his network have done more than anyone else to complicate her presidential ambitions—and they plan to do more. But this “conspiracy,” at least under Bannon, has mutated into something different from what Clinton described: It’s as eager to go after establishment Republicans such as Boehner or Jeb Bush as Democrats like Clinton.

“I come from a blue-collar, Irish Catholic, pro-Kennedy, pro-union family of Democrats,” says Bannon, by way of explaining his politics. “I wasn’t political until I got into the service and saw how badly Jimmy Carter f---ed things up. I became a huge Reagan admirer. Still am. But what turned me against the whole establishment was coming back from running companies in Asia in 2008 and seeing that Bush had f---ed up as badly as Carter. The whole country was a disaster.”

As befits someone with his peripatetic background, Bannon is a kind of Jekyll-and-Hyde figure in the complicated ecosystem of the right—he’s two things at once. And he’s devised a method to influence politics that marries the old-style attack journalism of Breitbart.com, which helped drive out Boehner, with a more sophisticated approach, conducted through the nonprofit Government Accountability Institute, that builds rigorous, fact-based indictments against major politicians, then partners with mainstream media outlets conservatives typically despise to disseminate those findings to the broadest audience. The biggest product of this system is the project Bannon was so excited about at CPAC: the bestselling investigative book, written by GAI’s

president, Peter Schweizer, *Clinton Cash: The Untold Story of How and Why Foreign Governments and Businesses Helped Make Bill and Hillary Rich*. Published in May by HarperCollins, the book dominated the political landscape for weeks and probably did more to shape public perception of Hillary Clinton than any of the barbs from her Republican detractors.

Jeb Bush is about to come in for the same treatment. On Oct. 19, GAI will publish Schweizer's e-book, *Bush Bucks: How Public Service and Corporations Helped Make Jeb Rich*, that examines how Bush enriched himself after leaving the Florida governor's mansion in 2007. A copy obtained by *Bloomberg Businessweek* examines Bush's Florida land deals, corporate board sinecures, and seven-figure salary with Lehman Brothers, whose 2008 bankruptcy touched off the financial crisis. "It's not as cinematic as the Clintons, with their warlords and Russian gangsters and that whole cast of bad guys," says Bannon. "Bush is more prosaic. It's really just grimy, low-energy crony capitalism."

While attacking the favored candidates in both parties at once may seem odd, Bannon says he's motivated by the same populist disgust with Washington that's animating candidates from Trump to Bernie Sanders. Like both, Bannon is having a bigger influence than anyone could have reasonably expected. But in the Year of the Outsider, it's perhaps fitting that a figure like Bannon, whom nobody saw coming, would roil the national political debate.

Most days, Bannon can be found in his Hyde persona, in the Washington offices of *Breitbart News*. Operating from the basement of his townhouse—known to all as the Breitbart Embassy—*Breitbart's* pirate crew became tribunes of the rising Tea Party movement after Barack Obama's election, bedeviling GOP leaders and helping to foment the 2013 government shutdown. The site has also made life hell for Democrats by, for example, orchestrating the career-ending genital tweeting misfortune that cost New York Representative Anthony Weiner his seat in Congress in 2011. Tipped to Weiner's proclivity for sexting with female admirers, Bannon says, the site paid trackers to follow his Twitter account 24 hours a day and eventually intercepted a crotch shot Weiner inadvertently made public. The ensuing scandal culminated in the surreal scene, carried live on television, of Andrew Breitbart hijacking Weiner's press conference and fielding questions from astonished reporters.

On occasion, this partisan zeal has led to egregious errors. Just before our lunch in January, a *Breitbart* reporter published an article assailing Obama's nominee for attorney general, Loretta Lynch—but went after the wrong woman. She wasn't, as the site reported, the Loretta Lynch who was once part of Bill Clinton's defense team. The embarrassed reporter asked for time off. Bannon, allergic to any hint of concession, refused: "I told him, 'No. In fact, you're going to write a story every day this week.'" He shrugs. "We're honey badgers," he explains. "We don't give a s---."

But Bannon realizes that politics is sometimes more effective when it's subtle. So he's nurtured a Dr. Jekyll side: In 2012 he became founding chairman of GAI, a nonpartisan 501(c)(3) research organization staffed with lawyers, data scientists, and forensic investigators. "What Peter and I noticed is that it's facts, not rumors, that resonate with the best investigative reporters," Bannon says, referring to GAI's president. Established in Tallahassee to study crony capitalism and governmental malfeasance, GAI has collaborated with such mainstream news outlets as *Newsweek*, *ABC News*, and CBS's *60 Minutes* on stories ranging from insider trading in Congress to credit card fraud among presidential campaigns. It's essentially a mining operation for political scoops that now churns out books like *Clinton Cash* and *Bush Bucks*.



What made *Clinton Cash* so unexpectedly influential is that mainstream news reporters picked up and often advanced Schweizer's many examples of the Clintons' apparent conflicts of interest in accepting money from large donors and foreign governments. ("Practically grotesque," [wrote Harvard Law School professor Lawrence Lessig](#), who's running for the Democratic presidential nomination. "On any fair reading, the pattern of behavior that Schweizer has charged is corruption.") Just before the book's release, the *New York Times* [ran a front-page story](#) about a Canadian mining magnate, Frank Giustra, who gave tens of millions of dollars to the Clinton Foundation and then flew Bill Clinton to Kazakhstan aboard his private jet to dine with the country's autocratic president, Nursultan Nazarbayev. Giustra subsequently won lucrative uranium-mining rights in the country. (Giustra denies that the Clinton dinner influenced his Kazakh mining decision.) The *Times* piece cited Schweizer's still-unpublished book as a source of its reporting, puzzling many *Times* readers and prompting a reaction from the paper's ombudswoman, Margaret Sullivan, [who grudgingly concluded that](#), while no ethical standards were breached, "I still don't like the way it looked."

For Bannon, the *Clinton Cash* uproar validated a personal theory, informed by his Goldman Sachs experience, about how conservatives can influence the media and why they failed the last time a Clinton was running for the White House. “In the 1990s,” he told me, “conservative media couldn’t take down [Bill] Clinton because most of what they produced was punditry and opinion, and they always oversold the conclusion: ‘It’s clearly impeachable!’ So they wound up talking to themselves in an echo chamber.” What news conservatives did produce, such as David Brock’s Troopergate investigation on Paula Jones in the *American Spectator*, was often tainted in the eyes of mainstream editors by its explicit partisan association.

In response, Bannon developed two related insights. “One of the things Goldman teaches you is, don’t be the first guy through the door because you’re going to get all the arrows. If it’s junk bonds, let Michael Milken lead the way,” he says. “Goldman would never lead in any product. Find a business partner.” His other insight was that the reporters staffing the investigative units of major newspapers aren’t the liberal ideologues of conservative fever dreams but kindred souls who could be recruited into his larger enterprise. “What you realize hanging out with investigative reporters is that, while they may be personally liberal, they don’t let that get in the way of a good story,” he says. “And if you bring them a real story built on facts, they’re f---ing badasses, and they’re fair.” Recently, I met with Brock, who renounced conservatism and became an important liberal strategist, fundraiser, and Clinton ally. He founded the liberal watchdog group Media Matters for America and just published a book, *Killing The Messenger: The Right-Wing Plot to Derail Hillary and Hijack Your Government*. Brock’s attitude toward Bannon isn’t enmity toward an ideological opponent, as I’d expected, but rather a curiosity and professional respect for the tradecraft Bannon demonstrated in advancing the *Clinton Cash* narrative. What conservatives learned in the ’90s, Brock says, is that “your operation isn’t going to succeed if you don’t cross the barrier into the mainstream.” Back then, he says, conservative reporting had to undergo an elaborate laundering to influence U.S. politics. Reporters such as Brock would publish in small magazines and websites, then try to get their story planted in the British tabloids and hope a right-leaning U.S. outlet such as the *New York Post* or the *Drudge Report* picked it up. If it generated enough heat, it might break through to a mainstream paper.

“It seems to me,” says Brock of Bannon and his team, “what they were able to do in this deal with the *Times* is the same strategy, but more sophisticated and potentially more effective and damaging because of the reputation of the *Times*. If you were trying to create doubt and qualms about [Hillary Clinton] among progressives, the *Times* is the place to do it.” He pauses. “Looking at it from their point of view, the *Times* is the perfect host body for the virus.”

It wasn’t the only one. In June, when the *Clinton Cash* frenzy hit its apex, Bannon said: “We’ve got the 15 best investigative reporters at the 15 best newspapers in the country all chasing after Hillary Clinton.” There’s more coming, Bannon reveals, including a graphic novel of *Clinton Cash*, in January, and a *Clinton Cash* movie set to arrive in February, just as the presidential primary voting gets under way.

In the ’90s, right-wing activists enjoyed a long period of ascendancy, and then collapsed. Then, as now, their prime target was a Clinton, their great ally the House Republicans. What halted this uprising was the sheer lunacy of its perpetrators. The classic example is House Oversight Chairman Dan Burton of Indiana, who became convinced that the 1993 suicide of White House Deputy Counsel Vince Foster was actually murder—a theory he sought to prove by reenacting the crime in his backyard with a pistol and a watermelon. Democrats seized on the episode to impugn his credibility, branding him “Watermelon Dan.” “We used the watermelon and the phantom Vince Foster sightings again and again,” says Chris Lehane, a Clinton White House staffer and field marshal in the partisan wars of the ’90s. “The phrase didn’t exist then, but that’s when the right-wing conspiracy jumped the shark.”

Bannon believes that episodes like these killed conservatives' credibility, and with it, their political influence. He's set out to balance conservatives' wilder impulses with professionalism, a running theme in his own life. Born into a working-class family within sight of the naval base in Norfolk, Va., he signed up straight out of college, and spent four years at sea aboard a destroyer, first as an auxiliary engineer in the Pacific, then as a navigator in the north Arabian Sea during the Iranian hostage crisis. By the time he arrived in the Persian Gulf in 1979, the U.S. was preparing its ill-fated assault on Tehran, and Bannon's faith in his commander in chief had dimmed: "You could tell it was going to be a goat f---." His battle group rotated out just before Carter's Desert One debacle.

Bannon became a special assistant to the chief of Naval operations at the Pentagon, earning a master's degree in national security studies at Georgetown University at night. But he was restless. The siren of Reagan-era Wall Street capitalism drained the military life of its luster, so he resolved to make the leap. "Somebody told me," he says, "if you want to go to Wall Street, you have to go to Harvard Business School." HBS accepted him, and Bannon, at 29, matriculated in 1983.

Bannon's Harvard stint coincided with Wall Street's boom, which fueled fantasies among his classmates of the full-on, debauched 1980s investment-banker lifestyle. Bannon became a grind, made first-year honors, and blanketed the top firms with applications for summer associateships. He was universally rejected. Classmates told him that his age and Navy background were obstacles—he hadn't come up through the right schools.

One day, a Goldman Sachs representative invited Bannon to a campus recruiting party: Thinking he could talk himself into a job, he donned a suit and headed over. "I get there, and there's like 700 people jammed into this tent," he says. "I said, 'F--- it. There's no chance.' So I stood off on the side with a drink and these two other schmendricks standing next to me. And I talk to these guys. We have the greatest conversation about baseball, and I find out after half an hour it was John Weinberg Jr., whose dad runs the firm, and a guy named Rob Kaplan, who became a senior partner." That night the Goldman executives gathered to discuss prospective hires. One later recounted the scene. "They said, 'Well, Bannon, I guess we're gonna reject him. He's too old for a summer job,'" Bannon says. "And these guys say, 'Oh no, we talked to him. He's terrific.' Literally, a complete crapshoot. But I got a job."

Bannon landed in Goldman's New York office at the height of the hostile takeover boom. "Everything in the Midwest was being raided by Milken," he says. "It was like a firestorm." Goldman didn't do hostile takeovers, instead specializing in raid defense for companies targeted by the likes of Drexel Burnham and First Boston. The first few years, he worked every day except Christmas and loved it: "The camaraderie was amazing. It was like being in the Navy, in the wardroom of a ship." Later, he worked on a series of leveraged buyouts, including a deal for Calumet Coach that involved Bain Capital and an up-and-comer named Mitt Romney.

Two big things were going on at Goldman Sachs in the late '80s. The globalization of world capital markets meant that size suddenly mattered. Everyone realized that the firm, then a private partnership, would have to go public. Bankers also could see that the Glass-Steagall Act separating commercial and investment banking was going to fall, setting off a flurry of acquisitions. Specialists would command a premium. Bannon shipped out to Los Angeles to specialize in media and entertainment. "A lot of people were coming from outside buying media companies," he says. "There was huge consolidation."

After a few years, in 1990, Bannon and a couple of Goldman colleagues set off to launch Bannon & Co., a boutique investment bank specializing in media. At the time, investors preferred hard assets—manufacturing companies, real estate—and avoided things like movie studios and film libraries, which were harder to price. Bannon's group, drawing on data such as VHS cassette sales and TV ratings, devised a model to value intellectual property in the same way as tangible assets. "We got a ton of business," he says.

When the French bank Crédit Lyonnais, a major financier of independent Hollywood studios, almost went bankrupt, Bannon & Co. rolled up its loan portfolio. When MGM went bust, it worked on the studio's financing. When Polygram Records got into the film business, Bannon's firm handled its acquisitions.

And then, serendipitously, Bannon wound up in the entertainment business himself. Westinghouse Electric, a client, was looking to unload Castle Rock Entertainment, which had a big TV and movie presence, including Billy Crystal's films. Bannon reeled in an eager buyer: Ted Turner. "Turner was going to build this huge studio," he says, "so we were negotiating the deal at the St. Regis hotel in New York. As often happened with Turner, when it came time to actually close the deal, Ted was short of cash. ... Westinghouse just wanted out. We told them, 'You ought to take this deal. It's a great deal.' And they go, 'If this is such a great deal, why don't you defer some of your cash fee and keep an ownership stake in a package of TV rights?'" In lieu of a full adviser's fee, the firm accepted a stake in five shows, including one in its third season regarded as the runt of the litter: *Seinfeld*. "We calculated what it would get us if it made it to syndication," says Bannon. "We were wrong by a factor of five."

After Société Générale bought Bannon & Co. in 1998, Bannon, no longer needing a day job, dove into Hollywood moguldom, becoming an executive producer of movies, including Anthony Hopkins's 1999 Oscar-nominated *Titus*. He met a hard-partying talent manager named Jeff Kwatinetz who had discovered the band Korn and managed the Backstreet Boys. As Bannon was selling his company, Kwatinetz was launching one of his own, a management outfit called the Firm whose clients included Ice Cube and Martin Lawrence. Newly flush and sensing adventure, Bannon became a partner and a key player in the Firm's great coup, its acquisition of former Disney chief Ovitz's company, Artists Management Group. Ovitz had spent \$100 million building a media giant he thought would conquer Hollywood, but AMG was bleeding money. Selling to the Firm was a last-ditch bid to save face. Instead, as *Vanity Fair* recounted, Bannon was dispatched to Ovitz's Beverly Hills mansion to deliver the final humiliation in person, an offer for AMG of \$5 million, less than the value of Ovitz's home.

The Hollywood ether soon convinced Bannon that his passion wasn't financing films, but making them. He was souring on Wall Street and what it had come to represent. "Goldman in the '80s was like a priesthood, a monastic experience where you worked all the time but were incredibly dedicated to client services, to building and growing companies," he says. He underwent a conversion like the one Michael Lewis has described, watching with horror as staid private partnerships such as Goldman Sachs became highly leveraged, publicly traded companies operating like casinos. "I turned on Wall Street for the same reason everybody else did: The American taxpayer was forced to cut mook deals to bail out guys who didn't deserve it."

Bannon's political awakening was also spurred by the Sept. 11 attacks, which led him, in 2004, to make a Reagan-venerating documentary, *In the Face of Evil* ("A brilliant effort ... extremely well done," said Rush Limbaugh). This introduced him to Schweizer, a Cold War scholar whose book, *Reagan's War*, was the basis of the film. It also brought him into Andrew Breitbart's orbit. "We screened the film at a festival in Beverly Hills," Bannon recalls, "and out of the crowd comes

this, like, bear who's squeezing me like my head's going to blow up and saying how we've gotta take back the culture.”

Breitbart, who also lived in Los Angeles, had a profound influence on Bannon. When they met, Breitbart was starting his website, after having worked with Drudge and having helped Arianna Huffington launch the *Huffington Post*. Bannon lent his financial acumen and office space. He marveled at Breitbart's visceral feel for the news cycle and his ability to shape coverage through the *Drudge Report*, which is avidly followed by TV producers and news editors.

“One of the things I admired about him was that the dirtiest word for him was ‘punditry,’” says Bannon. “Our vision—Andrew's vision—was always to build a global, center-right, populist, anti-establishment news site.” With this in mind, he set out to line up investors.

Bannon continued making documentaries—big, crashing, opinionated films with Wagner scores and arresting imagery: *Battle for America* (2010), celebrating the Tea Party; *Generation Zero* (2010), examining the roots of the financial meltdown; *The Undefeated* (2011), championing Palin. In the Bannon repertoire, no metaphor is too direct. His films are peppered with footage of lions attacking helpless gazelles, seedlings bursting from the ground into glorious bloom. Palin, for one, ate it up and traveled to Iowa, trailed by hundreds of reporters, to appear with him at a 2011 screening in Pella that the press thought might signal her entrance into the 2012 presidential race. (No such luck.) Breitbart came along as promoter and ringmaster. When I spoke with him afterward, he described Bannon, with sincere admiration, as the Leni Riefenstahl of the Tea Party movement.

In 2010, *Breitbart News* hit a wall. The site published video, furnished by a conservative activist, of a speech to the NAACP by a Department of Agriculture official named Shirley Sherrod, in which she appeared to advocate anti-white racism. Within hours, she was fired, as the story blanketed cable news. It soon became clear that the *Breitbart News* video was misleadingly edited—that Sherrod's point was the opposite of what was portrayed Fox News, which aggressively promoted the video, banned Andrew Breitbart as an on-air guest. Bannon, who was raising capital for the site's relaunch, suddenly encountered “nuclear winter.”

But in a gauge of how media standards have shifted since the '90s, the ostracization of *Breitbart News* didn't last long. Less than a year later, when the site caught Weiner tweeting pictures of his genitals, Andrew Breitbart was welcomed back on Fox News. The experience taught Bannon the power of real news.

On the morning of March 1, 2012, with the relaunch just days away, Andrew Breitbart was walking in his Brentwood neighborhood when he collapsed. He died soon after of heart failure, at 43. Bannon got the news while in New York pitching investors. At the funeral, Drudge asked Bannon what he planned to do. “We're going ahead with the launch,” he replied. Bannon stepped in as executive chairman.

Breitbart's genius was that he grasped better than anyone else what the early 20th century press barons understood—that most readers don't approach the news as a clinical exercise in absorbing facts, but experience it viscerally as an ongoing drama, with distinct story lines, heroes, and villains. Breitbart excelled at creating these narratives, an editorial approach that's lived on. “When we do an editorial call, I don't even bring anything I feel like is only a one-off story, even if it'd be the best story on the site,” says Alex Marlow, the site's editor in chief. “Our whole mindset is looking for these rolling narratives.” He rattles off the most popular ones, which *Breitbart News* covers intensively from a posture of aggrieved persecution. “The big ones won't

surprise you,” he says. “Immigration, ISIS, race riots, and what we call ‘the collapse of traditional values.’ But I’d say Hillary Clinton is tops.”

The website, which Breitbart News Network CEO Solov says draws 21 million unique users a month, has often managed to inject these narratives into the broader discourse. It was *Breitbart News*, for example, that first drew attention to the child migrant crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border last summer that killed any chance of Congress passing immigration reform. “They have an incredible eye for an important story, particular ones that are important to conservatives and Republicans,” says Senator Jeff Sessions, an Alabama Republican. “They’ve become extraordinarily influential. Radio talk show hosts are reading *Breitbart* every day. You can feel it when they interview you.”

Lately, the site has championed Trump’s presidential candidacy, helping to coalesce a splinter faction of conservatives irate over Fox News’ treatment of the Republican frontrunner.

Tallahassee is about as far as you can get in the U.S., geographically and psychically, from the circus of the presidential campaign trail. That’s why Bannon chose to locate the Government Accountability Institute there—that, and the fact that Schweizer had moved down from Washington. “There’s nothing to do in Tallahassee, so I get a lot more work done,” Schweizer jokes, on my recent visit. GAI is housed in a sleepy cul de sac of two-story brick buildings that looks like what you’d get if Scarlett O’Hara designed an office park. The unmarked entrance is framed by palmetto trees and sits beneath a large, second-story veranda with sweeping overhead fans, where the (mostly male) staff gathers every afternoon to smoke cigars and brainstorm.

Schweizer began his career as a researcher at the conservative Hoover Institution, digging through Soviet archives. In 2004 he co-authored a well-regarded history of the Bush family, *The Bushes: Portrait of a Dynasty*, that drew on interviews with many of its members, including Jeb. But Schweizer grew disillusioned with Washington and became radicalized against what he perceived to be a bipartisan culture of corruption. “To me, Washington, D.C., is a little bit like professional wrestling,” he told me. “When I was growing up in Seattle, I’d turn on Channel 13, the public-access station, and watch wrestling. At first I thought, ‘Man, these guys hate each other because they’re beating the crap out of each other.’ But I eventually realized they’re actually business partners.”

Schweizer’s interest turned toward exposing this culture, and his books became more denunciatory. In 2011 he published *Throw Them All Out: How Politicians and Their Friends Get Rich Off Insider Stock Tips, Land Deals, and Cronyism That Would Send the Rest of Us to Prison*. The book caught the attention of *60 Minutes* and led Congress to pass a law, the STOCK Act, aimed at curbing the abuses Schweizer documented. Bannon encouraged these investigations and eventually offered Schweizer a job. “He told me, ‘I know people who will support this kind of work,’” Schweizer says. In 2012, GAI set up shop.

Schweizer, 50, is friendly, sandy-haired, and a little pudgy, the sort of fellow you’d meet at a neighborhood barbecue and instantly take a liking to. (Bannon nurses this regular-Joe appeal by forbidding him from wearing a tie when he’s on TV.) Bannon and Schweizer had two principles when they conceived the *Clinton Cash* project. First, it would avoid the nuttier conspiracy theories. “We have a mantra,” says Bannon. “Facts get shares, opinions get shrugs.” Second, they would heed the lesson Bannon learned at Goldman: specialize. Hillary Clinton’s story, they believed, was too sprawling and familiar to tackle in its entirety. So they’d focus only on the last decade, the least familiar period, and especially on the millions of dollars flowing into the Clinton Foundation. Bannon calls this approach “periodicity.”

As with many of the Clintons' troubles, the couple's own behavior provided copious material for investigators. When Clinton became secretary of state, the foundation signed an agreement with the White House to disclose all of its contributors. It didn't follow through. So GAI researchers plumbed tax filings, flight logs, and foreign government documents to turn up what the foundation withheld. Their most effective method was mining the so-called Deep Web, the 97 percent or so of information on the Internet that isn't indexed for search engines such as Google and therefore is difficult to find.

"Welcome to The Matrix," says Tony, GAI's data scientist, as he maps out the Deep Web for me on a whiteboard (we agreed I wouldn't publish his last name). A presentation on the hidden recesses of the Web follows. "The Deep Web," he explains, "consists of a lot of useless or depreciated information, stuff in foreign languages, and so on. But a whole bunch of it is very useful, if you can find it." Tony specializes in finding the good stuff, which he does by writing software protocols that spider through the Deep Web. Since this requires heavy computing power, Tony struck a deal to use the services of a large European provider during off-peak hours. "We've got \$1.3 billion of equipment I'm using at almost full capacity," he says. This effort yielded a slew of unreported foundation donors who appear to have benefited financially from their relationship with the Clintons, including the uranium mining executives cited by the *New York Times* (who showed up on an unindexed Canadian government website). These donations illustrate a pattern of commingling private money and government policy that disturbed even many Democrats.

Clinton Cash caused a stir not just because of these revelations, but because of how they arrived. GAI is set up more like a Hollywood movie studio than a think tank. The creative mind through which all its research flows and is disseminated belongs to a beaming young Floridian named Wynton Hall, a celebrity ghostwriter who's penned 18 books, six of them *New York Times* best-sellers, including Trump's *Time to Get Tough*. Hall's job is to transform dry think-tank research into vivid, viral-ready political dramas that can be unleashed on a set schedule, like summer blockbusters. "We work very long and hard to build a narrative, storyboarding it out months in advance," he says. "I'm big on this: We're not going public until we have something so tantalizing that any editor at a serious publication would be an idiot to pass it up and give a competitor the scoop."

To this end, Hall peppers his colleagues with slogans so familiar around the office that they're known by their abbreviations. "ABBN — always be breaking news," he says. Another slogan is "depth beats speed." Time-strapped reporters squeezed for copy will gratefully accept original, fact-based research because most of what they're inundated with is garbage. "The modern economics of the newsroom don't support big investigative reporting staffs," says Bannon. "You wouldn't get a Watergate, a Pentagon Papers today, because nobody can afford to let a reporter spend seven months on a story. We can. We're working as a support function."

The reason GAI does this is because it's the secret to how conservatives can hack the mainstream media. Hall has distilled this, too, into a slogan: "Anchor left, pivot right." It means that "weaponizing" a story onto the front page of the *New York Times* ("the Left") is infinitely more valuable than publishing it on Breitbart.com. "We don't look at the mainstream media as enemies because we don't want our work to be trapped in the conservative ecosystem," says Hall. "We live and die by the media. Every time we're launching a book, I'll build a battle map that literally breaks down by category every headline we're going to place, every op-ed Peter's going to publish. Some of it is a wish list. But it usually gets done."

Once that work has permeated the mainstream—once it's found "a host body," in David Brock's phrase—then comes the "pivot." Heroes and villains emerge and become grist for a juicy

Breitbart News narrative. “With *Clinton Cash*, we never really broke a story,” says Bannon, “but you go [to *Breitbart.com*] and we’ve got 20 things, we’re linking to everybody else’s stuff, we’re aggregating, we’ll pull stuff from the Left. It’s a rolling phenomenon. Huge traffic. Everybody’s invested.”

Over the summer, Hillary Clinton failed to emerge as the overwhelming frontrunner everyone expected. She’s been weighed down by the Clinton Foundation buckraking and the revelation that she kept a private e-mail server as secretary of state and destroyed much of her correspondence. Recently, the scandals have merged. In August e-mails surfaced showing that Bill Clinton, through the foundation, sought State Department permission to accept speaking fees in such repressive countries as North Korea and the Congo. A poll the same day found that the word voters associate most with his wife is “liar.” On Oct. 22, Hillary Clinton will testify on these matters before the Select Committee on Benghazi. Her troubles aren’t going away.

Veteran Democrats such as Lehane concede that Bannon and his ilk have been more effective than conservatives who targeted Bill Clinton 25 years ago. “They’ve adapted into a higher species,” he says. There’s more on the way. “We’ve got two more waves of stuff on Clinton corruption,” says Bannon, including a focus on how the donors highlighted in *Clinton Cash* violated many of the principles liberals hold dear: “You look at what they’ve done in the Colombian rain forest, look at the arms merchants, the warlords, the human trafficking—if you take anything that the Left professes to be a cornerstone value, the Clintons have basically played them for fools. They’ve enriched themselves while playing up the worst cast of characters in the world.”

While this is surely unwelcome news for Clinton, Lehane argues that where the Clintons are concerned, their opponents invariably become consumed by partisan zeal and undermine their own cause. “Remember the old *Pink Panther* movies when Clouseau would walk in and the chief inspector would be there, and he’d just start losing his marbles, no matter what?” he says. “That’s how these guys are.”

Bannon does, indeed, have a touch of Clinton Madness. When we met in January, Bill Cosby’s serial predations had just exploded into the news after laying dormant for many years. Bannon was certain this signaled trouble for Bill Clinton, whose own sexual history some conservatives long to revive as a way of hampering his wife’s campaign. His conviction stems from the group of young, female *Breitbart News* reporters whom he’s dubbed the Valkyries. When I expressed skepticism about the value of reintroducing old scandals, Bannon countered that the Valkyries—a sort of in-house focus group of millennial voter sentiment—were unfamiliar with Clinton contretemps that most older people consider settled. “There’s a whole generation of people who love the news but were 7 or 8 years old when this happened and have no earthly idea about the Clinton sex stuff,” he says.

It’s impossible to predict how Bannon’s plots and intrigues will ultimately affect the presidential race. It’s not even clear on whose behalf he’s acting—his own or someone else’s? Are *Seinfeld* royalties enough to take on Clinton and Bush? Or do others have a stake? Solov, the CEO, won’t say. “I can’t go into that,” he says. “It’s privately owned.” Bannon wouldn’t comment either. However, a prominent conservative says Robert Mercer, the reclusive co-founder of hedge fund Renaissance Technologies and a major donor to Texas Senator Ted Cruz, has invested \$10 million. Mercer’s daughter, Rebekah, is listed in 2013 tax documents as a GAI board member.

Even without knowing the identity of his backers, Bannon’s designs are clear enough. While he’d blanch at the comparison, he’s pursuing something like the old Marxist dialectical concept of “heightening the contradictions,” only rather than foment revolution among the proletariat,

he's trying to disillusion Clinton's and Bush's natural base of support, recognizing, as Goldman Sachs taught him, that you're more effective if others lead the way.

To succeed, Bannon will need to activate the anger and disgust with cronyism that's as powerful among supporters of Sanders as it is among fans of Trump. In Tallahassee, as GAI's phone keeps ringing, the vehicle for achieving this is clear. Editors and reporters at prominent magazines and newspapers, including ones that had passed when approached with *Clinton Cash* revelations, are calling to ask when the next salvo will arrive—and might they arrange an exclusive?

For many, the answer will be yes. “We’re going to go to the investigative units, not the political reporters, and just give them the stuff,” says Bannon. “We have faith they’ll take the stories and do the additional reporting.” The thought pleases him, and he grins. “Just like last time, we’ll go out and say, ‘Hey, here’s what we’ve got. You guys take it from here.’”

IBD

Late Night Humor

Ben Carson support in Iowa traced to evangelicals and both blacks

by Andrew Malcolm

Fallon: A study found one of the most popular searches during the Democrats' debate was, “Is Bernie Sanders Jewish?” The most popular response on Google was, “Come on.”

Meyers: During the debate, Democrat candidates mentioned the middle class 11 times. Once for each remaining member of the middle class.

Meyers: Donald Trump said he might boycott the next GOP debate unless it allows opening and closing statements. Lincoln Chafee threatened to boycott the next Democrat debate if there are any questions.

Meyers: US Airways' final flight came today before it becomes part of American Airlines. Wait! Nope. It's been [delayed until next week.](#)

Fallon: In the debate, Bernie Sanders said he strongly opposed war when he was young. Of course, he was talking about the Trojan War.

Meyers: Trump said as a politician, you have to “get along with everybody.” So, he retired from politics.

Meyers: CNN had an extra podium ready for Joe Biden at the Las Vegas Democrat debate. Now the empty podium is polling ahead of Martin O'Malley.

Meyers: For Columbus Day in honor of Christopher Columbus, I went to a grocery store and got lost looking for spices.

Meyers: Ben Carson made news saying the Holocaust could have been averted if European Jews had guns. Though I'm pretty sure what he meant to say was, “I don't want to be president.”

Meyers: North Korea held a military parade celebrating the 70th anniversary of its communist party. People at the parade called it “amazing” and “mandatory.”

Meyers: The White House released Michelle Obama's Spotify playlist: Beyonce, Demi Lovato and Esperanza Spalding. While Joe Biden's playlist is, “Now That's What I Call Train Sounds: Volume 12.”

Meyers: A 22-year-old Connecticut man was sentenced to a year in prison for calling in fake emergencies which led to false SWAT team deployments. Said the man, “I get one phone call, right?”

Fallon: New York City Mayor De Blasio signs a bill requiring stores to keep their doors closed when the air conditioning is on. So apparently De Blasio is not only our mayor, he's also our dad.

Fallon: Joe Biden said he considered showing up at the Democratic debate. But at the end of the day, his head was stuck in a banister.

Meyers: The Vatican has announced that Pope Francis will visit Mexico next year. Now that he's met all the Catholics in the United States, he wants to see where they're from.

Meyers: New Jersey police say they seized 11 pounds of cocaine someone tried to ship through the mail. Authorities became suspicious when the mailman left a note saying he attempted delivery at 9:30, 9:41, 9:52, 10:07, 10:20, 10:27.

Meyers: Today is World Vegetarian Day. So if you're a vegetarian... we know, we know. You already told us.

Meyers: Taco Bell has opened a new line of more upscale restaurants they are calling “cantinas,” featuring open kitchens. It's pretty cool. [You can see both microwaves.](#)

Conan: Anthropologists released more information on remains of a recently discovered extinct human species. They say the species lived in trees, had brains the size of an orange and plans to vote for Donald Trump.

Fallon: Yellowstone National Park has set a visitor record. Officials credit cheap gas, good marketing and kids being so distracted by their phones that you can drive them anywhere.

Meyers: Executives of toy-maker Hasbro say the Transformers movie franchise will get four more films in the next decade. Unless their demands are met.

Fallon: I read that Hillary's staff is starting to worry that her campaign still doesn't have an official theme. Then Hillary said, “Yes it does -- Revenge.”

Fallon: Russian President Vladimir Putin celebrated his 63rd birthday the other day. He had a nice party, but it got awkward when two of his friends got him the same country.

Fallon: Happy Birthday to Hillary Clinton, who turned 68 last week. Asked what her favorite gift was, she said, “Donald Trump.”

Fallon: A sweet story: A 73-year-old man turned in his collection of a half-million pennies he found on the street in his life, over \$5,000. Asked what he'll do with the money, Bernie Sanders said, "Finance my campaign."

Meyers: Donald Trump said yesterday, "I don't like being second. Second is terrible to me." "Hey, believe me, [third is even worse.](#)" [said Melania.](#)

Conan: Russia is planning to send four monkeys to Mars. Not as preparation for a human mission. But because the monkeys criticized Vladimir Putin.

Fallon: Both the World Series and the new NBA season started on the same night. Or as most people put it, "Damn, there's no football on!"

Fallon: Massachusetts police are seeking two men who stole \$1,400 from a Bingo night. They say the men were last seen driving west on I-90....I-90.

Conan: The doctor called the "Father of Botox" has passed away at age 70. His patients are grief-stricken but have no way to express it.

Meyers: Hillary Clinton's 68th birthday party was the first time anyone has ever blown out the candles on a birthday cake and nobody wondered what they wished for.

Conan: There is a new app that will tell you before you buy a house if there was ever a meth lab in it. All the app does is ask, "Is the house in Florida?"

Fallon: Apple TV has a new feature where if you ask Siri, "What did that character say," the TV will rewind to 15 seconds earlier. They're calling the feature, "Watching TV with Mom."

Meyers: Trump asked an Asian-American audience member if he was from South Korea. The man said he was born in Texas. Trump was so embarrassed that his face turned red 20 years ago.

Conan: A high school student hacked the AOL email account of John Brennan, the director of the CIA. In other words, the student correctly guessed that the password of anyone still using AOL is "password."

Fallon: New research shows China has a bigger middle class than America, more people there living what we would call the "American Dream." That's when you know things are bad -- when even the American Dream is made in China.

Meyers: A new study finds that cats shown affection by humans are healthier than those who aren't. While humans who are shown affection by cats don't exist.

Conan: According to NASA, a massive asteroid passed very close to Earth on Halloween. In the spirit of Halloween, it was dressed as a slutty asteroid.

Conan: First Lady Michelle Obama invited Vine stars to the White House. The meeting lasted six seconds.

Conan: The new 'Star Wars' movie trailer made its debut on "Monday Night Football." Star Wars fans called it a titillating glimpse into the new franchise. Football fans called it the stupidest beer commercial they've ever seen.

Conan: Donald Trump was asked by Matt Lauer if he is nice enough to be president. Trump answered, "Of course, I'm nice enough, baldy."

Meyers: With the New York Mets in the World Series briefly, a lot of New Yorkers were standing in front of a mirror saying, "I've always had this hat."

Conan: The San Diego Chargers have announced plans to move to Los Angeles. However, they're taking Interstate 5, so they won't get there for eight years.

Conan: Ben Carson now holds a 14-point lead over Donald Trump in Iowa. Experts say Carson appeals to Iowa's conservatives, Iowa's evangelicals and both of Iowa's black people.





THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS

WHEN EVERY KID GETS A TROPHY

