THE BLAIR REVIEW

Writings
of
Blair Speakers

Summer 2010
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The Blair Review

The Blair Review is back in business! From 1985-2000, an annual edition showcased the writing of various Blair community members: current teachers and former students, alumni and visiting lecturers. Simply stated, the aim was to share ideas with a wider audience. So much of the Blair intellectual experience cannot be instantaneously translated into a thoughtfully conceived, accessible package for those off campus; hence the rationale for this journal. Quoting from the 2000 introduction: “What is heard in, say, a relatively small lecture forum has limited impact; what is produced in a classroom for a particular course is invariably lost to the community. Papers are filed away without much thought, and speeches are given and fade from memory. Well, the Review represents one small effort to reverse this situation.”

After a hiatus of fully a decade, the organizing principle of a resurrected Review will be a bit more focused than that of the past. The potential pool of contributors were the Tuesday evening Society of Skeptics speakers (2009-2010) and the members of the June 5, 2010 Alumni Day panel on American Foreign Policy Challenge: The War in Afghanistan. Their general writing and pieces directly related to the Blair programs were considered fair game. The Review writers of 2010 include: former faculty member Elliott Trommald (H’65) on John I. Blair (part of a series first published in the 80’s); Robert Textor (’40) discussing his experience as an post-World War II administrator in occupied Japan; former New Jersey Governor Christie Whitman on the decline of the moderate Republican center; Wall Street Journal columnist Bret Stephens analyzing American policy in Afghanistan; political writer Doug Bandow shedding light on an enigmatic North Korea; an excerpt from Jean Korelitz’ novel *Admission*; and business titan David Sokol musing on subjects ranging from fatherhood to integrity. The goal is to project discrete lectures and panel discussions into a wider arena. May it be received as a worthwhile project.

MARTIN MILLER
*Editor*
Summer 2010

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*Layout:* Ann Williams
Blairstown Presbytery Academy.
Dr. Elliott Trommald (H’65) taught at Blair 1962-1968 and 1977-1985. During the last stretch, he created the Society of Skeptics and later received the most meaningful diploma of his career when he was inducted into the Blair class of 1965 as an honorary member. He taught 1970-1977 at the University of Queensland in Australia where he developed an American Studies Program and finished his teaching career at Middlesex School in Concord, Massachusetts. Since retiring in 2000, he has been an adjunct lecturer at the University of Massachusetts and at Clark College in Vancouver, Washington specializing in Lincoln, foreign policy, and Crisis of the American Dream. He is a commissioner of the Oregon Lincoln Bicentennial Commission and continues to lecture on Lincoln throughout the state. In terms of ongoing community building, Elliott remains a mainstay of the “Thirsters” weekly intellectual forum (Portland, Oregon’s McMenamin’s Tavern), led by Bob Textor (’40). Since the late 1980’s, Elliott contributed a series to The Review on Blair’s founder: John I. Blair: Getting Started (1989); John I. Blair: Life with Father (1991); John I. Blair: From Nails to Rails (1992); and John I. Blair: The Railroad King of Iowa (1998). And he recently held forth at Blair’s Alumni Day panel (June 5, 2010) on American Foreign Policy Challenge: The War in Afghanistan. It is fitting that he leads off our 2010 Review with a look at the political side of our famous founder, John I. Blair.
1868: Entrepreneur as Political Candidate

As the pace of railroad building heated up after the Civil War, Blair shrewdly accumulated title to appreciating lands along the roads he built and in the fast growing railroad towns, many of which he organized and named. As roads were built, construction companies gobbled up land grants whose salable market value was intended to furnish the funds for building. By 1868 Blair already was President of the CR&MRR and the Iowa Railway Contracting Company and in charge of more than a million acres of granted land. He had been the effective if not legal President of the SC&P since its inception in 1864, and on February 25, 1868, when the Sioux City Rail Road Contracting Company was incorporated, became its president and the recipient of another generous land grant. Later that year he assumed another large land grant when he organized the Iowa Falls and Sioux City Railroad that would build east from Sioux City connecting it with Chicago. Blair was now arguably the central figure in Iowa railroad activity. To more efficiently manage his diverse interests, Blair built in 1868 what was then the largest building in Cedar Rapids, the Blair Building. At last he had a home office for his bank, railroads, construction companies, coal companies, and land companies. In 1868 he was at the top of his career, and the New Jersey Republican Party hoped it could build on that career when it nominated him to be its candidate for Governor.

On accepting the nomination, Blair, now 66 years of age, seemed willing to split his time between entrepreneurial interests in Iowa and the commitments of a political campaign in the east. But that willingness weakened when he learned first hand that his political reputation at home lacked the luster he enjoyed in Iowa, and to the disappointment of his supporters he spent little time during the campaign trying to brighten it. The campaign was launched in July when Republicans of Newark met to elect delegates to the State Gubernatorial Convention. Blair was the strong favorite of the eastern cities. The western part of the state, including his own county and district, was less enthusiastic for reasons that are understandable. Warren County was a democratic stronghold. Less understandable was Blair’s lack of support from local Republicans and from a township in which he might have been considered a favorite son.

Blair’s political activity prior to 1860, when he attended the national Republican convention in
Blair’s interests in Iowa took time away from his campaign in New Jersey.
Chicago, is at best sketchy. In the 1820s he had been sympathetic with Jeffersonian ideas but by the 1830s had publicly repudiated the Jacksonian Democrats and become a strong Whig. His conversion is documented by a public repudiation of a pledge made during the 1834 congressional election. He wrote a public affidavit that subsequently became the basis for a declaration to the citizens of Warren county:

This pledge I did Sign, with Reluctance, and without Mature Consideration, and as the pledge Reads, I am, Rather Bound, to support the Measures of General Jackson. Right or Wrong. Now, I hereby solemnly declare to You, and to the Citizens of the County of Warren, that I will not support any Measure of General Jackson, unless I Believe it to be for the Interest, of the Country and this State. I am opposed to the present Charter of the United States Bank, I am in favour of a National Bank, properly Restricted.

And with that, Blair drafted a lengthy notice giving his support to Doctor Lewis Condict of Morris, whose two brothers had figured prominently in Blair’s life: Doctor Isiah Condict, the first principal of Blair Academy, and Doctor John Condict, one of the original founders of the Academy. The “True Whig Ticket”, said Blair, saved us from slavery to England following the War of 1812. Condict, he wrote, had led New Jersey in assisting Henry Clay and John Quincy Adams to pass tariff legislation from 1818 to 1824. That alone had undermined England’s plot to ruin grain farmers and destroy cotton and woolen factories by forcing Americans “to Send our Silver out of the Country” to purchase England’s goods. Moreover Condict had supported Henry Clay’s 1832 Land Bill, vetoed by General Jackson. Jackson's veto in effect, said Blair, forced New Jersey to give away all rights, title, interests, and claims to that land, “and give the whole of it to the New States where it Lies -- without fee or Reward. . . . New Jersey’s share this Year would have been Seventy Thousand dollars. This money would Have paid all our County and State Taxes and the Land Sales would have continued to do it for a Century to Come.” Blair ends his communication to the citizens of Warren County with what more than likely is the strongest public political statement he made during his lifetime. After praising the talents and tireless efforts of Doctor Condict, the True Whig, to fight for tariff legislation and land policies beneficial to the eastern states, Blair denounced the Jacksonian ticket.

Butt Look at the Jackson Congress Ticket -- Headed with four Torrys Known as the old Federalist; not a Solitary principal to Recommend them, wolves of the most Savage Kind, dressed in Sheeps clothing. These are the
men that... have always opposed the Republican party. These are the men that are in favour of General Jackson... and have known to sustain him Right or Wrong. They are still the Tories. They know the King can do no wrong... . . . Now look at it citizens. here is men pledged to support the party Right or Rong -- . . . and us to be sold as slaves and our Country with us for the sake of party -- Sacrifice our New Lands, Sacrifice our Tariff -- Sacrifice everything for the sake of Party -- Citizens of Warren. to the Poles, to a man, and put down The Tory, and go for Whig principles.

In the 1836 election he favored the Whig ticket and remained a staunch supporter until he became a Republican in the late 1850s. There is no evidence that he joined the strongly anti-Catholic, anti-foreign Know Nothing Party in the 1850s, but that would not stop his accusers from declaring a connection while he ran for Governor in 1868.

With the Republican campaign launched and Blair a leading figure, Warren and Sussex County Republican delegates were less than supportive. In fact, an element in Sussex County had favored Socrates Tuttle, a popular Republican of Passaic. The Newark Daily Advertiser, however, wrote glowingly of Blair’s business achievements and generosity: how he had spent $40,000 to help build the Academy when it burned the previous winter; how he had endowed a professorship at Princeton with $30,000 and gave Lafayette College $10,000; how he had remained “active and liberal during the war” and given substantial monetary aid to the Sanitary Commission. Blair, the Advertiser proclaimed, combined “pure moral character with indomitable and successful energy and lavish liberality.” Before the Republican Convention met in Trenton to choose its nominee, the other candidates withdrew giving Blair the nomination unopposed. Some influential Republicans upset by Blair’s absence from the state believed Cornelius Walsh, Esq. of Newark, would be a better candidate, but Walsh endorsed Blair in July, pointing out that Blair was on a visit to the West primarily to arrange his business to give more time to the coming campaign. “Our job,” said Walsh was to make this “honest, energetic, patriotic, strong, unostentatious” individual known in the state. A week later the Democratic Convention chose Theodore Randolph, 24 years younger than Blair, as its standard bearer. Both candidates were seen as gentlemen. Both came from Whig backgrounds, but the younger Randolph had chosen the Democratic Party after a brief flirtation with the Know Nothing Party in the 1850s.

Two issues dominated the election: finance and race. The Democratic platform favored equal taxation and payment of the public debt
in “lawful money,” which included inflated Civil War greenbacks, while the Republican platform sought to reduce taxes and eliminate depreciated currency as legal tender. The more volatile issue was race. The Democrats favored immediate restoration of all states to rights in the Union and abolition of “all political instrumentalities designed to secure negro supremacy.” The Republicans were dubbed “nigger lovers” for their backing of Congressional reconstruction and support of equal suffrage to all loyal men in the South.

Blair had little to say about either finance or race. He was on the Republican ticket but chose not to respond to charges that “John I. Blair, Esq., is pledged to force Negro Equality on our state” or to hear the chants of “down with Grant and Blair the nigger lovers.” Just before the election, voters in Blair’s home territory were warned of dire consequences if the Republicans, “who are wholly committed to mongrelism,” won.

Voters, remember that John I. Blair is pledged to have the word “white” stricken out of our State Constitution, and to have negro suffrage and negro equality fastened on the people. Don’t give him a chance to do this. . . . Do not be deceived by supposing that if you vote for John I. Blair, you do not vote for negro suffrage. (If the Republicans triumph) then will follow negro suffrage, negro domination, national decline, and the overthrow of Constitutional Liberty.

Virulent racial attacks on the Republican party dominated coverage by Democratic papers. Lurid stories about negro brutality and rape were tied to radical Republican victories in the North. A prominent Republican charged with reviving anti-foreign Know Nothingism was quoted as saying “he would rather trust a nigger, any day, than an Irishman.” And a week later, on the eve of the election, the Blair ticket was denigrated by scurrilous actions of Belvidere Republicans attending a torch light procession in Easton. “In order to show their love for the colored race,” wrote the reporter, the Republicans brought along “six or eight colored wenches. (We knew Republican hearts) yearned toward the Negro, as a man and brother, but now we have the evidence right here in our midst, that the colored sisters, also come in for a share of their love. . . . Dark alleys as well as dark maidens, were at a premium among the excursionists.” The Republican press countered with stories of Ku Klux Klan outrages in Newark and Belleville, of threatening letters sent to prominent citizens, and of violent disruptions of orderly Republican demonstrations. The Republicans warned that only their victory could avoid anarchy, brutality, and a return to slavery.

In Blair’s home territory (Warren, Sussex, Hunterdon counties),
Trommald
the Warren Journal and Washington N.J. Star added a third issue by carrying on a caustic campaign impugning his character and tarnishing his achievements. Both were adept at embellishing or creating stories to undermine favorable press coverage. In the early days of the campaign, press stories created an impressive public image of a staunch Republican laboring in the West to build railroads. The Tom’s River Courier noted that during the War, Blair had given soldiers money to get home and had contributed heavily to hospitals. The Somerset Unionist recounted how following Lincoln’s renomination in 1864, Blair had gone to Washington with other Jerseymen to congratulate the President. At the time, Jay Cooke and Secretary of the Treasury Salmon Chase were seeking buyers of government bonds. According to the story, Blair took Lincoln by the hand, said New Jersey stood behind him, and as a test of Jersey’s faith in the cause, Blair handed Lincoln $200,000 as his subscription to the bond issue.

The Warren Journal saw it differently. Blair had indeed taken $250,000 in government bonds, but he had profited handsomely and paid no taxes on them. If he had, the Journal claimed, it would have diminished the tax of the people in his own township by 5%. At best, the paper gave Blair credit for his activity, but none for his political morality. The New Brunswick Times mocked Blair’s recollection of being “within sound of the cannon at Gettysburg.” Stretching the truth but making a point, the article continued,

He doesn’t tell us whether this was before or after he had emptied his old stockings, etc., to get together the $200,000 which he patriotically lent his country, and out of which he made nearly $300,000 profit.

Blair was described as a rapacious, self-centered mogul: “his

Press stories created an impressive public image of a staunch republican

whole life has been spent in driving sharp bargains, even to the very verge of cupidty.” The Journal was not alone in believing that the Republicans nominated Blair because they needed a man “with plenty of cash” who would deem the honor of nomination “a fair equivalent for electioneering expenses” in the fall. “It is calculated,” ran one article, “that John I Blair will bleed to the tune of one hundred thousand dollars.” Later estimates suggest he had invested $90,000 of his own money. The month before he won the nomination, the same paper explained Blair’s frequent trips west as a con-
venient way to “avoid the constant raids made upon him, for money, by the Republican leeches.” When he returned in August from a trip west, a Journal story began: “Greeenbacks will be plenty as blackberries wherever he goes.” If the Democrats were worried about defeating Blair, it was because of “his immense money power” and the potential for bribery.

But those worries were unwarranted. Early in the campaign Republican papers bewailed the lack of Republican speakers and public meetings blaming it on lack of money. Blair “must distribute more sugar” complained the Jersey City Journal. Still the Warren Journal continued to hammer away promising publication of the names of Democrats offered bribes by Republicans intent on a Blair victory. The Washington Star reported the erosion of voter confidence in the Republican candidate by quoting one of Blair’s neighbors: “I vote for John I. Blair, who calls his neighbors copperheads and traitors! No, I would see him gutted first.” While the quote may well have been contrived, there was no doubt about the editor’s piece headed “Supposed Soliloquy of John I. Blair:”

What a blessing it is to be rich! It was my wealth that induced the Republican party to nominate me for Governor. They delight in honoring wealthy men and in keeping down the poor. It is true I feathered my nest nicely during the war... I have millions of dollars in government bonds on which I pay no taxes. ... I have hundreds of mechanics and laborers who work 10 hours a day to pay the taxes which I escape. ...

Blair chose not to respond. Less than a week before the election, the New Jersey Herald reported having a signed affidavit by six men swearing that John I. Blair had said in Blairstown that “If Jesus Christ was a candidate on the Republican ticket for Governor, and he (Blair) a candidate on the Democratic ticket, he could beat Jesus Christ two votes to one.” Blair was quiet, apparently content to leave the pro Blair Sussex Register the task of trying to contradict what it called “infamous fabrications.” Attacks such as these dogged Blair right up to the election, and it is likely they received a sympathetic hearing given the election results.

At best, Blair was ineffective as a campaigner. Traveling back and forth to Iowa, Chicago, and Washington was only one problem; the main problem was that Blair was not comfortable on the stump. He did not understand and could not control political issues the way he had business issues. Consequently he was happy to let others speak for him. Horace Greeley assisted the Blair campaign but was unimpressed with the candidate’s oratorical skills. “John I. Blair’s check,” he claimed,
“is good for $5,000,000, but his speeches ain’t worth a damn.” During the early part of the campaign Blair was not in New Jersey. On May 14 he left Blairstown for Chicago and the Republican Convention to support the nomination of Grant. Following the Convention, he went west to Iowa on railroad business and to oversee construction of the Blair Building in Cedar Rapids. He returned in late June and remained long enough to be in Trenton to accept the nomination for Governor, but four days later he was on a train for Iowa -- where he remained July 13 to August 7.

Once he returned, he chose to pass up one speaking opportunity after another. In August following a rousing reception for Senator Frelinghuysen, the crowd went to the home of Cornelius Walsh to hear from Blair who was meeting with a number of prominent Republicans. Five gave political speeches, but the crowd went away disappointed after Blair briefly thanked the crowd for its compliments. Blair was scheduled to speak in September at the dedication of the Republican Wigwam in Newark, but he didn’t. Instead, Socrates Tuttle, Joseph P. Bradley, Senator Frelinghuysen, and Chauncey Depew of New York held forth. Three days later in Morristown he spoke “briefly, humorously, and sensibly” in support of the Republican nominee from the 4th Congressional District. Of his speech, all that was noted was a caution to the people at the polls in November not to confuse the two Blairs. [Francis Preston Blair, Jr. was the Democratic nominee for Vice President.] Even in October Blair gave no major speech. October 8 he was reported to have given a spirited but short attack on Democratic financial policy, but the main speaker was James G. Blaine of Maine. Blair said nothing specific about the issues, just exhorted the crowd to “vote for the Jersey Blair.” In the week before the election, he attended six mass meetings. Press reports give no evidence of one speech by Blair dealing with the issues. At the Vineland Agricultural Society Fair, the Evening Mail simply reported that Blair told people “to vote for a man about my size.”

To the end of the election, Blair remained detached from the campaign. He must have hoped that his reputation would carry him into office. In August, shortly after his return from the west, he had given his only major speech. Horace Greeley spoke for more than an hour. Blair then rose to give briefly his views. He declared that the Party must

**At best, Blair was ineffective as a campaigner**
redeem “our state” from disloyal hands and champion “Loyalty, Liberty, and the Rights of Man,” the inscription on the flag of the Republican Party. “I am,” he continued, “a stranger to many of you here...(but) I am a true native of New Jersey. I have been tendered the nomination without seeking it and I see it my duty to . . . carry the State to victory.” No doubt he was content to have others speak about him as they did at the dedication of the Great Wigwam in Jersey City. By setting apart lands for the establishment and support of churches, observed one speaker, Blair was “founding a new population on the solid basis of religion and morality.” This refrain was heard again and again.

But praise does not win elections. New Jersey was one of only two northern states (New York was the other) that did not go for Grant. Horatio Seymour defeated Grant 82,766 to 79,882 while Randolph overcame Blair 83,951 to 79,333. The eastern seaboard and cities could not overcome Democratic strength in the rural and western part of the state. Blair lost Warren county 4,122 to 2,620 and carried only two of its townships, Frelinghuysen and Greenwich. Surprisingly, he lost his own Blairstown by 9 votes. Republican officials demanded a recount and investigation into fraudulent voting in Hudson and Essex counties. Republicans had been defeated, wailed the Newark Daily Advertiser, “by fraud, by perjury, by every device that meanness can invent. . .” Ultimately they accepted the loss but only after noting widespread ballot stuffing, second naturalization papers, one week residences, repeat voting, false identities, and double ballots.

When it was all over, the Warren Journal that had attacked Blair so zealously softened, even sympathized with his loss -- but not with the Republican Party’s. It quoted Republican papers that in the wake of defeat questioned the wisdom of having nominated Blair. According to the Warren Journal the Elizabeth Journal, a Republican paper, suggested that “If Blair had stayed at home, and kept his mouth shut, the result would have been far different. The day has not gone by yet when modesty is at a discount.”

The Elizabeth Monitor was quoted as pushing the same line. “Had (Blair) remained in Iowa, or

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Republican leaders intended to get Blair’s money and then allow him to be defeated.
John I. Blair portrait
some other distant locality, during the canvass, he would have received a larger vote. . . . From the moment he opened his mouth the cause was damaged.” The Monitor hoped that at the next convention the Party would nominate a candidate “for something else beside his money.” Whether or not these are accurate quotations (they probably are not) they opened the way for the Warren Journal to attack what it most opposed, the Republican Party. The paper believed that Republican leaders intended to get Blair’s money and then allow him to be defeated.

He was traded off in Newark, by the friends of Senator Frelinghuysen, for votes for members of the Assembly. He was sacrificed in all quarters by the Frelinghuysen interest. . . . (Blair entered this canvass) honestly for the furtherance of the Republican Party; but he little knew the set of thieves and sharpers with which he had to deal, and while no man in the United States can excel him in building Rail Roads, or managing financial affairs, he was no match for these harpies.

The Warren Journal continued to be the chief organ of the Democratic party, but its interest in Blair subsided. It never reported rumors circulating in November that Blair would be called to be Secretary of Treasury. Doubtless it had sullied Blair’s reputation, mobilized racial feelings in northwestern Jersey, and helped to defeat the Republican candidate.

As for Blair, there is no recorded evidence of any disappointment following defeat. While he had not helped himself by remaining aloof from the campaign, he may well have been relieved when it was over. He took no interest in the effort, led by the Jersey City Times, to contest the election. Instead he turned his mind to matters he knew best, and the matter that most interested him was building the Iowa Falls & Sioux City and obtaining its land grant. Following business meetings in New York and Boston and a few days in Blairstown, he left for Iowa on December 17, not returning until the first of the new year. “I gave Mrs. Blair $5.66” was his last entry on December 17 and the only mention of his wife in that year’s Memorandum book. On his way west, he stopped in Easton to give a gift of $7000 to Lafayette college and dispatched his personal secretary (Charles E. Vail) to Princeton to leave a donation of $18,000. December 19 and 20th he was in Chicago; December 21-24 he was in Cedar Rapids organizing his holdings in the newly constructed Blair Building on Eagle Street; December 25, Christmas Day, he traveled
to Moingona to check on newly acquired coal mines; December 26-27 he went to Fremont, Nebraska and “to the end of Track and then up to Sioux City”; December 28-30 he was in Sioux City organizing construction of the IF&SC before returning to Cedar Rapids and then leaving for Chicago and home the evening of December 31. It was the end of an eventful year. Blair’s business fortunes and future never seemed brighter, but competition and railroad consolidations were beginning to change the business environment. To this date Blair had never lost a major business battle. This was not to be true in the 1870s.

_Elliott Trommald in his prep school teaching days._
Christine Todd Whitman, first woman Governor of New Jersey (1994 - 2001) and former head of the Environmental Protection Agency under George W. Bush, was the Society of Skeptics speaker during a special Monday evening program on November 16, 2009. She focused on “Republican Politics” and, among a number of topics, spoke passionately about the demise of a moderate Republican center.

Whitman is president of The Whitman Strategy Group (WSG), a consulting firm that specializes in energy and environmental issues. She is also co-chair of the Republican Leadership Council (RLC) which she founded with Senator John Danforth. She is the author of a New York Times bestseller called *It’s My Party Too* published in January of 2005 and released in paperback in March 2006.

The following article appeared in *The Record* of Bergen County on February 2, 2010 and is reprinted with permission courtesy of The Record (Bergen County, NJ) / NorthJersey.com.
Republicans Are Back
But Can We Stay?

The Republicans are back! Just a year ago, as Barack Obama was taking the oath of office as the 44th president of the United States, the Republican Party was struggling on the brink of irrelevancy. Today, we have regained footing.

But can we stay here?

First, we need to understand what caused the change. In 2008, voters showed that they wanted to move away from the politics of divisiveness and the hyper-partisanship that was defining Washington. They were tired of out-of-control spending and the ever-increasing reach of government. They were tired of war.

Voters wanted a new approach and Barack Obama articulated that message in a way that appealed. He wasn’t George W. Bush and that was enough for many.

Unfortunately, the Democrats interpreted their victory as a mandate to move the country to the left in accordance with their long pent-up frustration with Republican policies. They felt - and feel -- they know best and their goals would be achieved by acting fast without hesitation.

Warning signs

The warning signs started to appear right away but, in the echo chamber that is our nation’s capitol, they were dismissed as the uninformed grousing of the far right. The fact that Republicans allowed themselves to be portrayed as the party of “No” only gave more momentum to House and Senate leadership.

Now we have an unanticipated shake-up that even the hierarchy in D.C. cannot ignore.

GOP victories

Republican victories in New Jersey and Massachusetts (and less so in Virginia) have reshaped the landscape. But before the Republicans get too comfortable and certain of this rebirth, it would behoove us to take a good, hard look at just what happened and why.

To begin, we had two good candidates in Chris Christie and Scott Brown. They were articulate and knew their state’s voters and issues. They worked hard and took nothing for granted.

There is no denying, however, that the Democrats’ agenda in D.C. played a large role in voter anger - especially in Massachusetts, with Scott Brown’s promise to kill health care reform.

Far from getting the open government that we had been promised during the presidential campaign,
major bills were passed with little time for discussion.

Instead of reaching out to Republicans, the Democratic majority used their power to almost gleefully ignore the opposition party.

And instead of trying to control spending, Washington seemed to be on an even greater spending spree than in the past. The voters wanted to be heard in D.C., and New Jersey and Massachusetts gave them a voice.

This is the perfect time for the Republicans to seize the initiative. Rather than just stop the health care reform bill, they should now push their version -- calling for reduced costs to make care more affordable, addressing tort reform and stripping out the pork for Louisiana and Nebraska.

They can look responsible, focused on pocketbook issues and dedicated to solving an issue that needs work. In short, they can look like leaders.

**Win back seats**

On the political front, these recent victories mean we can win back House and Senate seats and we can return control of many state governments to the GOP this November. If Republicans field good candidates, giving voters men and women who reflect their constituents’ values and who articulate a message of fiscal responsibility and a limited, yet well-defined, role for government, we can win.

What we cannot do is field only the candidates who pass “purity tests.” If we want to be successful, we cannot pose a litmus test on 10 items expecting to reflect the country at large.

**Sticking to principles**

As Henry Barbour, a committee member from Mississippi and former Republican National Committee Chairman Haley Barbour’s son, noted in Wednesday’s Washington Post, “We need to stick to our conservative principles without telling folks in the Massachusetts GOP that their choice for a U.S. Senate nominee cannot receive funding because of some litmus test.”

Scott Brown was wise when he said, “This Senate seat belongs to no one person and no one political party -- it belongs to the people of Massachusetts.” Each seat represents a different set of people; ignore those voters - who have demonstrated they will act when necessary - at your own peril.

Our country needs a vibrant two-party system. We’re close to having that again, but how we handle this opportunity in both Washington and across the country in candidate recruitment will determine whether or not the Republican Party is that second party.
Republicans Are Back
Jean Hanff Korelitz, author of Admission, was the featured Society of Skeptics speaker on February 23, 2010. Korelitz drew upon her personal experience as an outside reader of admission applications at Princeton University to write her novel. According to The New Yorker, “The book centers around Portia Nathan, a 38-year-old admission officer at Princeton University, a place so discriminating that it can afford to turn down applicants who are ‘excellent in all of the ordinary ways’ in favor of the utterly extraordinary – ‘Olympic athletes, authors of legitimately published books, Siemens prize winners, working film or Broadway actors, International Tchaikovsky Competition violinists.’ Portia compares her job to ‘building a better fruit basket’ and achieves career success by helping her institution pluck the most exotic specimens, but her personal life is permanently on hold because of a traumatic incident from her own college years that she has never come to terms with. Although the reader may unravel the mystery of Portia’s past before the plot does, the novel gleams with acute insights into what most consider a deeply mysterious process.”

One challenging aspect of her Society of Skeptics talk was a heartfelt call for students and parents to relax a bit during the admittedly arduous college admissions process—no small feat.
Admission

Portia hauled her bags of folders through the FitzRandolph Gate. Nassau Hall, Princeton University’s nerve center and, for a few heady months in 1777, home to the infant US Government, looked majestic in the failing light, with its great preening tigers and fluttering ivy, and behind it the campus unfurled, stalwart buildings linked by deserted walkways. Looking up at West College she saw no lights at all: not Clarence’s corner office (he and his partner were in New Haven with friends), not Dylan’s (visiting his parents in Houston), not Corinne’s (with the kids, on some island). That she was here after nightfall was not, in itself, unusual. In January, February and March, as the intense period of reading gave way to the still more intense period of committee meetings, all of them frequently worked late into the night, percolating along in a fittingly collegial rhythm. She had sometimes, certainly, been the last one out the door, intent on making it through western Oregon or the Archbishop Mitty School or the imperious baseball coach’s most urgent requests before allowing herself to head for home. But coming in like this, alone, in the darkness, to an empty building – in all these years, it was a first. The unbroken line of dark windows was definitely disconcerting, but at the same time she felt some relief. There would be no one up there to question her.

She opened the door with her own key and went first to the administrative warren in the back of the building, passing the abandoned receptionist’s desk. She turned on the lights as she went, bathing the nondescript corridor in harsh fluorescent illumination that picked up every dink and mark on the walls, passing the silent photocopier in its alcove. Against one wall, two of the fax machines were lit and humming, neatly depositing pages and pages into their trays. In the cubicles, screensavers pulsed and danced. The smorgasbord of ill-judged baked goods had been cleared away, only a spattering of crumbs left behind. On Martha’s desk, a phone purred forlornly, five times, six times, then went silent. It was all, in fact, very silent.

She hoisted her bags onto the counter below the staff mailboxes and began to lift out handfuls of files. There were a few she’d flagged to remove at this point, and she went hunting for them now, quickly locating the florescent pink Post-Its on their covers. These were folders she had questions about, for one reason or another, small items she might already have dealt with if Susannah were not such a Luddite,
who refused to own a computer. Because she was, however, and because she did not, and because Portia had declined to drive into Hanover to undertake this sensitive business on some public terminal in Baker Library, she had merely flagged the files to come back to.

One of these was a boy from a private day school near Boston, whose guidance counselor – a woman Portia had met when she’d visited the school last spring – had declined to answer two notable questions on the Secondary School Report: Has the applicant ever been found responsible for a disciplinary violation at your school, whether related to academic misconduct or behavioral misconduct, that resulted in the applicant’s probation, suspension, removal, dismissal, or expulsion from your institution? To your knowledge, has the applicant ever been convicted of a misdemeanor, felony, or other crime? Almost always, the answer to these questions was no. Sometimes it was yes, and sometimes that was not, in itself, the kiss of death. There were kids who’d made mistakes and grown from them. There were victims of excessive “zero tolerance” school rules, suspended for carrying a loaded water pistol or pointing a finger and declaring “Bang.” There was even the occasional Jean Valjean crime of necessity. (She had never forgotten the boy from Oregon who had shoplifted liver for his family. Liver! If only he had been a stronger student.) But she could not remember a single instance in which the guidance counselor had declined to answer the questions. It could, of course, be an oversight – a typo. But at this school? With tuition upward of twenty-five grand a year and a student parking lot crowded with Lexus and BMWs? Portia suspected not.

Another worrying application was from a Rhode Island girl whose complex, mellifluous essay was somewhat at odds with her low English grades and poor score on the writing section of the SAT, not to mention that fact that the favorite book listed in the “Few Details” section was “Pride and Privileged” by “Jane Austin”. Portia, accordingly, wanted to check the girl’s tribute to Fannie Lou Hamer against their databank of essays-for-sale. (These were mainly gleaned from Internet sources – where they were billed as teaching tools and slathered with disclaimers – but supplemented by an Iowa entrepreneur with an essayist-for-hire business. This unpleasant individual had decided to publish his expertise in book form, and closed up shop by mailing his entire backlist of custom essays to every college his clients had ever attended, plus People Magazine.) Of course, the Rhode Island girl might simply have risen to the challenge of her essay, taking her time, thinking through her points and checking her sentences carefully to avoid
grammatical errors, but there was something in the ease of the language that worried Portia. Correctness, after all, was achievable with sweat, but it was, in her experience, nearly impossible to drill grace into prose.

There was also a boy from Boston Latin who had furnished a list of Princeton philosophers he wanted to work with, and an essay of such dense philosophical prose that Portia had had no idea what he was talking about. (In fact, she could have sworn, when she'd read it at Susannah's kitchen table days earlier, that it had something to do with zombies. What next? She thought. Mummies and vampires?). She had decided to send the essay to David and ask him to sort it out. Philosophers seemed to have a knack for recognizing their own kind, as well as the impostors in their midst.

And finally, there was the Connecticut boy whose long list of school government offices, dramatic roles, community service projects and baseball positions had ended with the words “National Judo Champion.” It might, of course, be true, but in Portia's previous dealings with bona fide National Judo Champions (and not a few had indeed applied to Princeton), this accomplishment did tend to be noted in recommendations, and to require enough practice time to preclude student government, drama, and varsity baseball. National Judo Champions also had a tendency to write about being National Judo Champions. They solicited their coaches for references and supplied newspaper reports attesting to the fact that they were...well...

**Why anyone would bother to lie in the age of Google was baffling.**

National Judo Champions. It would easily be settled by Google, Portia thought, finding the file at the very bottom of the stack, and setting it aside. Why anyone would bother to lie in the age of Google was baffling.

“We are trusting skeptics,” her first Dean of Admissions her told her, years before. “We believe what they tell us, but they’d better be telling us the truth.” This was Harrold McHenry, the soon to be former Dean of Admissions at Dartmouth, who had hauled her aboard the profession in the spring of her final Dartmouth year. Harrold's sense of fair play -- fair play he sweetly assumed everyone else likewise embraced -- had been one of his most endearing qualities. He had a horror
of the so called “new rules” of admissions, the outsmarting and end runs and decoding that was now rampant out there, the snake oil salesmen promising to package and sell your kid to his or her school of choice. For as long as he could (and longer, perhaps, than he should have) Harrold stubbornly regarded each application as an open, invigorating conversation between his staff and the applicant, in which there could be no dissembling on either side.

He expected total candor from each applicant, and maintained that expectation even after the little wild fires of scandal broke through the industry in the 90s – kids getting other kids to take their SAT’s for them, applicants who wrote their own recommendations, people pretending to be Rothschild and ranch hands. These events had been personally wounding to Harrold, but he had stayed the course, doing his best to ride the new waves, trying to maintain his personal honor code.

There was something a little haunting about this terribly ordinary room, she decided. Portia tried, for a moment, to see it not as the generic office it absolutely was but as the epicenter of so much fervent speculation, by students, teachers, counselors and parents. To them, this utilitarian space was the holding pen where their child and all his antagonists were gathered, vetted, directed, shunted into narrower and narrower corridors leading to smaller and smaller vestibules, where they were commanded to wait in mute distress, face to face with their most closely matched fellow aspirants: wrestlers here, legacies there, Pakistanis to the right, woodwinds, novelists, witheringly brilliant mathematicians, faculty kids, staff kids, movie star kids, movie stars, ordinary decent kids, good debaters, great debaters, boys who wanted to be Brian Greene, girls who wanted to be Stephen Sondheim, or Meg Whitman, or Quentin Tarantino. There was, for instance, one tiny chamber in which the diver from Wisconsin sat knee to bandaged knee with the diver from Maine, the annex where the girls from the MIT Women in Technology summer program were briefly, uncomfortably, reunited, the claustrophobic cubicle where the classically trained soprano from Florida eyed the classically trained
soprano from LA and the classically trained soprano from Cleveland. That it didn’t actually work like this was not even relevant, because Portia understood the symbolic power of this place, banal as it was. That power was even greater, she suspected, than the symbolic power of their individual offices upstairs, the conference rooms, even Clarence’s comfortable lair with its non-working fireplace and Asher Durand.

She had been inside the machine for so long that she sometimes forgot how this – this applying to college thing – had looked from the outside, but it did come back, vividly back, when she tried to remember. It had been like watching a mass of seemingly identical sheep cram themselves into a great black building with no windows, knocking against one another, stepping on one another’s hooves and over their panicked bodies when they fell. At the other end of the building, only a thin line of sheep trickled out into bountiful fields. And who were these sheep, which looked, to all intents and purposes, exactly like every sheep who had crowded in? What made them special? Why should they get the meadow when those others were barred? What happened inside that box was a mystery, a secret shielded from the light. She remembered how the class ahead of her in high school had been sorted, with the most cerebral Latin geek shut out from every college he’d applied to while the class’s drug dealer of choice had his pick of Harvard and Brown, how the valedictorian who was also the student body president retreated in humiliation to his safety school while the dull as dishwater football player trotted off to Cornell. Who were these people in the admissions offices of Swarthmore and Williams, and what could they have been thinking when they accepted Camilla Weldon, Portia’s soccer teammate and the most superficial girl she had ever met, but passed over Jordana Miles, who wrote her own column in the school newspaper and had actually published three short articles in Seventeen Magazine? But there was perhaps no mystery as baffling as that of her own admission to Dartmouth.

She had been a worried high school senior lacking in...well, anything special, really. A pretty good student, pretty good soccer player, pretty good writer and all around nice person, Portia knew exactly what would happen to her own college application if it arrived, through some warp of time and space, in this room today. With her strong GPA and merely quite good scores, busy athletic schedule and character building volunteer efforts, Portia Nathan’s application would have left this room with a fatal designation of Academic 3/Nonacademic 4, meaning that in the real world her
scholastic skills were solid, but in Princeton’s supercharged applicant pool they were unremarkable, and that while she had been busy within her school community, she had not been a leader within that community (NonAc 3), nor distinguished herself at state level (NonAc 2), let alone accomplished something on a national or international scale (NonAc 1). NonAc 1’s, of course, were rather thin on the ground, even in Princeton’s applicant pool. They were Olympic athletes, authors of legitimately published books, Intel winners, working film or Broadway actors, International Tchaikovsky Competition violinists, and yes, National Judo Champions, and yes, National Judo Champions, and they tended to be easy admits, provided they were strong students, which they usually were. But Portia’s application would have landed in the great moving tide of similar applications: great kids, smart kids, hard-working kids who would certainly do great at whatever college they ended up going to, which almost certainly wasn’t going to be Princeton.

The secret of her own mediocrity was quite likely similarly held by men and women all over the industry. To wade through these best and brightest seventeen year olds was to be, at once, deeply reassured by the goodness and potential of the American near-adult population and deeply humbled by one’s own relative shortcomings. These students were absolutely going to make scientific discoveries, solve human problems, produce important works of art and scholarship, and generally – as so many of them pointed out – give back to their communities and make the world a better place. She, on the other hand, was fit only to make life-altering decisions on their behalf. And how could that make sense?
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This year Doug focused on how to best deal with the North Korean leadership’s endlessly provocative and bizarre behavior. The following articles are a sampling of his writings on this often bewildering totalitarian state taken from the National Interest Online.
Special envoy Stephen Bosworth has returned from Pyongyang after what he called “exploratory talks, not negotiations” over North Korea’s nuclear program. Before that the so-called Democratic People’s Republic of Korea was on the agenda in both Seoul and Beijing during President Barack Obama’s trip to East Asia. Administrations change and years pass, but the threat of a nuclear North Korea continues.

No one, other than Kim Jong-il and a few devoted acolytes, wants the DPRK to develop nuclear weapons. However, what the world wants doesn’t matter much to Kim.

Unfortunately, there is no easy way to restrain him. Even if military strikes eliminated his nuclear facilities, they likely would trigger a destructive war in which South Korea would suffer almost as much as the DPRK. Tighter sanctions would hurt the population, but the North Korean elite was unmoved by mass starvation in the countryside. And without Chinese backing, tighter sanctions in theory won’t be much tighter in practice.

Which leaves diplomacy.

No one should be optimistic about Pyongyang’s willingness to negotiate away its nuclear program. There is increasing pessimism among U.S. policy makers. Polls indicate that the South Korean public doubts the North will disarm. Even Chinese analysts who once assumed Kim Jong-il was using brinkmanship to enhance his negotiating leverage now suspect he intends the DPRK to become a nuclear power. It’s a daunting prospect. But the proper response is realism, not surrender.

The Obama administration’s objective is complete denuclearization. Even the most pessimistic policy makers hesitate to admit the obvious: their efforts may be doomed to fail.

A back-up strategy is necessary. Washington should work with South Korea, in particular, and Japan to develop a package of benefits as part of a “grand bargain”—peace treaty: diplomatic recognition, trade and aid. The proposal should be presented to China along with a request for the latter’s assistance. Beijing insists on a peaceful resolution of the issue, achieved through U.S. engagement with North Korea. Washington should indicate that it is willing to take this approach, but needs Chinese help. Not just to get Pyongyang to the negotiating table, but to get results at the table.

Even so, unless the People’s Republic of China is willing to risk its
relationship with the North, prospects for success seem bleak. Warn John Park of the U.S. Institute of Peace and Drew Thompson of the Nixon Center, North Korean-Chinese “interdependence is growing, a trend having implications for U.S.-led efforts to denuclearize North Korea.”

Thus, Washington should bargain for the verifiable elimination of Pyongyang’s nuclear program, but consider accepting the DPRK as a limited nuclear state if necessary. It’s an obvious second best, but most other alternatives are worse.

The essential point is simple: not all nuclear threats are equal. The creation of a North Korean nuclear capability would generate obvious unease throughout Northeast Asia. Kim is an unpredictable—though not irrational (and certainly not insane)—actor. His is not a regime that should be trusted with nuclear weapons.

Nevertheless, possession of a small arsenal would not much change the regional balance of power. The North would face destruction if it attacked South Korea or Japan; the former would receive no support from China but would face massive retaliation from the United States. The more promiscuous North Korea’s threats to use its limited arsenal, the greater would be the temptation for Seoul and Tokyo to create their own weapons, and the greater would be the incentive for America to acquiesce in such a development.

Pyongyang still might feel more secure with nuclear weapons, and thus be more willing to engage in other provocative behavior. However, if its ability to expand its arsenal was capped, it would have only limited ability to engage in further geopolitical extortion. Kim’s most potent threat today is to produce more nuclear materials and make more bombs. A few weapons also would satisfy the other presumed objectives of a regime that does not appear bent on suicide; by all accounts Kim prefers his virgins in this life rather than the next one. The purpose of the DPRK’s nuclear program always appeared to be more deterrence and defense rather than aggression and offense. Even a limited arsenal would fulfill these goals. (The North would have less ability to engage in extortion, but a Western benefits package would address that urge.)

Most important, buying off the North’s potential for future production would limit the threat of proliferation. Possessing the globe’s most potent conventional and nuclear forces, America need not fear a minuscule DPRK nuclear capability. However, Washington cannot be so sanguine about the prospect of the spread of nuclear weapons.

First, if Pyongyang proceeds to develop (and continues to expand) a larger arsenal, moving it
toward mid-range nuclear powers such as India, Israel, and Pakistan, neighboring South Korea and Japan would feel greater pressure to develop countervailing capabilities. They could reasonably believe that an otherwise North Korean defensive potential would eventually turn into an offensive capability. Fearing national destruction, they might prefer to develop the ability to defend themselves rather than rely on Washington’s willingness to go to war on their behalf.

Second, if Pyongyang regularly produces nuclear materials, the regime might be tempted to take over the old Pakistani franchise of Nukes-R-Us and sell both materials and expertise around the world. North Korea already has supplied missile technologies and conventional arms to Iran and other nations. Such sales have been an important source of hard currency for the cash-poor regime.

There are charges, backed by varying degrees of evidence, that the North has cooperated on nuclear matters with Burma, Syria and Iran. The first is an improbable nuclear power and the second is an ugly rather than frightful potential nuclear weapons state; the third, however, poses as great a geopolitical challenge as North Korea. Iran probably could develop a nuclear capacity on its own, but Pyongyang could accelerate the process.

A greater fear is that the North might sell nuclear materials to terrorist groups. Absent unique circumstances, nation states, since they possess “return addresses,” can be deterred. It is much harder to retaliate against groups and movements. Worse, some of them welcome or at least do not fear martyrdom.

The possibility of proliferation requires attention irrespective of the state of nuclear negotiations with Pyongyang. The United States should work with allied states to interdict any nuclear shipments from the DPRK while informing the regime that proliferation to non-state actors would be a casus belli. Kim should be made to understand that there are far safer ways for the North to make money—particularly if he makes a deal.

Moreover, Washington should not let the perfect become the enemy of the good. In any negotiations halting future North Korean nuclear development should be a higher priority than eliminating the DPRK’s existing nuclear materials. The Obama administration should pursue full denuclearization. However, if this effort proves unavailing, the United States should raise the possibility of offering more modest benefits in exchange for more modest objectives.

As part of this effort, the United States should concentrate on enlisting Beijing’s assistance to support the diplomatic process. Washington should point out that proliferation
likely would result in the very regional instability which the PRC gives as a reason not to enforce tough economic sanctions against the North. While American policymakers most fear the possibility of out-of-area nuclear sales, China likely would most fear regional proliferation, leaving Seoul, Tokyo, and potentially even Taipei with nuclear weapons. North Korea’s nuclear program remains a grave geopolitical challenge.

There may be no answer. There certainly is no easy answer. But in formulating its strategy, the Obama administration should remember that the greater danger is Pyongyang’s potential sale of nuclear materials.

Ultimately, America might have to live with a second best solution involving the North’s nuclear program. But second best would remain far better than the other possible outcomes.
By any normal standard, the two-Kim rule has been a catastrophe for the North Korean people. Kim Il Sung launched the Korean War in 1950. Decades of cold war competition left the impoverished Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) well behind the South economically. During the late 1990s famine claimed a half million or more lives in North Korea, as industrial production and economic activity shrank sharply. Even the carefully constructed totalitarian state began to crumble as the regime was unable to provide basic necessities to the North Korean people. Observes Andrei Lankov of Seoul’s Kookmin University, “state-run industry collapsed, the rationing system ceased to function, and free-market activity, though still technically illegal or semi-legal, became more citizens’ major source of income.”

Pyongyang subsequently relaxed internal controls and slightly opened the economy to the outside. Under South Korean Presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun the Republic of Korea engaged in the so-called Sunshine Policy, aiding and investing in the DPRK. Since the 1994 Agreed Framework, the North also has engaged in an on-and-off negotiation with North Korea’s neighbors and the United States over ending its nuclear program. This process has significantly increased Pyongyang’s contact with the West.

Even so, a negotiated settlement remained out of reach. Despite the common assumption that the North was willing to deal, Pyongyang had reason to reject even a seemingly generous offer. Observes analyst Balbina Hwang: “For the regime itself, isolation of course serves to preserve its own power and legitimacy which would immediately be undermined by openness.” Lankov points out that the Kim regime is particularly vulnerable given the proximity of South Korea, with a prosperous and free people who share the same culture and speak the same language.

Still, hope of a solution rose in the aftermath the October 2007 de-nuclearization agreement. Alas, the accord crashed and burned last year. North Korea has subsequently denounced the arrangement, expelled international inspectors, announced that it will not return to the six-party talks, begun to rebuild its nuclear program and restarted reprocessing activities, renounced the 1953 Armistice, nullified boundary-demarcation accords, terminated bilateral political cooperation and reconciliation agreements, and voided economic arrangements with the
South. Earlier this year, Pyongyang conducted a nuclear test and several missile tests. As international criticism increased, the DPRK ratcheted up its rhetoric, threatening military retaliation in response to varied South Korean, U.S. and UN actions.

None of this means that North Korea could not come back to the table. However, today there is far less expectation that the DPRK will ever be willing to abandon its nuclear program, let alone yield up its existing nuclear materials. Nuclear weapons offer the North security assurance, international status and extortion opportunities. If Pyongyang can still be bought off, the price has likely risen sharply.

North Korea’s current internal instability will make reaching a deal even more difficult. Despite common claims that Kim is “crazy,” the evidence indicates that he is evil, not insane. His strategy is consistent with regime preservation.

The military is central to Kim’s rule. He long has pushed a “military first” policy. Even as the regime lost authority, it continued to funnel resources to the armed forces. Nevertheless, in their prime both Kims may have had sufficient authority to sacrifice the military’s most powerful weapon as part of a political deal. A seriously ill and perhaps dying Kim Jong Il may not. A transitional collective leadership likely would not.

As noted earlier, the North already is moving in reverse on several fronts. The regime has been restricting private markets—limiting their number and what they can sell. Able-bodied men and women have been barred from the market trade. “Slowly but surely, plans to close all general markets are becoming a reality,” warns the charity Good Friends.

The little private space that had opened up is closing: cell phones have been banned and their use now can result in a large fine and internal exile.
yang seems to be enforcing the role of the party, prioritizing regime solidarity and implementing conservative policies at home and abroad in the aftermath of failed liberal economic policies (albeit partial and limited) over the last decade.”

Pyongyang has tightened border controls, cracked down on corruption among border guards on the north and periodically closed the border to the south. The North also reintroduced the state monopoly over food supplies and restricted activities by the World Food Program. (The WFP warns of impending food shortages, though Open Radio for North Korea, a South Korean group with contacts in the DPRK, reports the opposite.)

The North also is threatening to pull the plug on the Kaesong industrial development, which hosts 106 South Korean companies (one of which has pulled out) and employs forty thousand North Koreans. Pyongyang has torn up the agreement covering Kaesong and demanded a massive increase in rent and wages (which are pocketed by the regime). The North also arrested a South Korean in March for allegedly criticizing Kim Jong Il and has held him incommunicado. The regime appeared to back away from its expressed willingness to close Kaesong during the most recent bilateral negotiations, but the development’s future remains in doubt.

Unconfirmed reports indicate that Choe Sung-choi, the official responsible for North-South relations, was executed last year, allegedly for corruption; the more serious offense, some observers suspect, is the deterioration in inter-Korean relations. All told, notes Lankov, “Though a complete return to the 1980s system has not occurred (being perhaps impossible), the backlash has been partially successful in reversing the changes.”

Equally significant is the rising influence of the military. Cheong Seong-chang, director of the Inter-Korean Relations Studies Program at the Sejong Institute, argues that “Since the appearance of health issues with Kim Jong-il last year, the North Korean military became more influential.” Kim may have decided he must placate an institution capable of ratifying or blocking any leadership transition; the military may have become more demanding in the wake of his incapacity; both phenomena may be occurring simultaneously.

This would explain the rapid multiple international provocations, punctuated by the nuclear and missile tests. Moreover, the National Defense Commission (NDC), one of Pyongyang’s most powerful military bodies, is gaining internal authority. Responsibility for foreign intelligence apparently was recently moved to Commission. Open Radio for North Korea reports that strategic weapons development also
was shifted to the NDC (from the Korean Workers’ Party). The group concluded: “The move is an indication that the National Defense Commission is expanding its role beyond being a policy council for the senior insiders, transforming into a real power with enforcement agencies under its wings.”

Indeed, Rodger Baker of Stratfor Global Intelligence goes further, telling Fox News: the NDC has really solidified as the central leadership body of North Korea, so it sits over top of the Workers Party, over top of the military, over top of the parliament, in general terms of power. It becomes the place where Kim Jong-il is able to shape his policies, where he’s able to make sure that he has all the strongmen of North Korea in one location.

Even more problematic is the leadership transition. Although it is hard to know how actively involved and in control Kim remains—there is evidence of organizational changes designed to limit his workload—the ruling elite almost certainly is thinking about future contingencies. This can only complicate Pyongyang’s dealings with the rest of the world.

The uncertainty created by Kim’s condition is compounded by the age of many other top officials. Indeed, Kim is relatively young compared to some of those around him. For instance, eighty-one-year-old Kim Yong-nam is chairman of the National People’s Assembly and nominal head of state.

The NDC, however, is the single most important state institution and provides Chairman Kim Jong Il with his only formal position. The NDC’s first vice chairman, Vice Marshal Jo Myong-rok, is seventy-three. General O Kuk-ryol, seventy-eight, spent some time in political purgatory in the early 1990s, but was recently elevated to vice chairman of the NDC. Another vice chairman is Vice Marshal Kim Yong-chun, the seventy-three-year-old defense minister. Thus, irrespective of Kim Jong Il’s condition, significant changes within the ruling elite are inevitable in coming years.

Even more problematic is the leadership transition.
Nothing seems to upset North Korea more than being ignored. Hence Pyongyang’s second nuclear test, punctuated by the separate firing of several short-range missiles.

Although the nuclear test reinforces the North’s irresponsible reputation, the blast has little practical importance. North Korea has long been known to be a nuclear state and tested a smaller nuclear device over two years ago. The regime’s missile capabilities also are well-known. Moreover, the tests may be tied to internal political considerations. “Dear Leader” Kim Jong-il suffered a stroke last August, raising questions as to who would be his successor. Although he appears to have recovered, both his ample gut and bouffant hair have thinned noticeably. He has yet to groom anyone to be his heir, as his father did him.

Kim may be attempting to make up for lost time. He recently added his brother-in-law, Jang Song-taek, to the National Defense Commission (NDC), currently the most important fount of state power. Twenty-seven-year-old Kim Jong Un, the youngest of Kim’s three sons, is reportedly being prepared for a leadership position. Kim may be flaunting more hard-line international commitments—not only tossing out the six-party process, but also investment accords with South Korea—to solidify military support for his succession plans. In fact, by expanding the NDC’s power Kim has enhanced the standing of NDC Vice Chairman General O Kuk Ryol, now seen by many as the regime’s de facto number two.

In any case, Washington has few options. The U.S. military could flatten every building in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), but even a short war would be a humanitarian catastrophe and likely would wreck Seoul, South Korea’s industrial and political heart. America’s top objective should be to avoid, not trigger, a conflict. Today’s North Korean regime seems bound to disappear eventually. Better to wait it out, if possible.

Which forces the United States to rely on diplomacy. John Bolton, among others, argues that the North’s actions prove that the country is not interested in a negotiated settlement. Yet brinkmanship has always been Pyongyang’s favorite modus operandi. Kim likely hopes that the tests will move his nation to the top of President Barack Obama’s “to do” list, as well as raise the price Kim can charge for his cooperation. A deal certainly is further away—indeed, more unlikely than...
ever—but is still possible.

Unfortunately, President Obama got off on the wrong track by overstating the danger when he declared that "North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic-missile programs pose a great threat to the peace and security of the world." In fact, the DPRK’s missiles are no different from those possessed by a number of countries, and Pyongyang does not appear to have yet mastered the nuclear-weaponization process, let alone the miniaturization procedure necessary to marry warhead and missile.

Instead, Washington should treat the North’s latest actions as an opportunity to reprogram the latter’s negotiating formula. The United States should not reward Kim with a plethora of statements beseeching the regime to cooperate and threatening dire consequences for its bad behavior. A Russian official correctly warned against a “hysterical” response. North Korea undoubtedly is gratified at becoming the center of international attention. America, South Korea and Japan all have had to focus on what otherwise would be an impoverished, starving and irrelevant political backwater.

Similarly mistaken was the emergency UN Security Council meeting. There was no emergency: the North Korean tests changed nothing and threatened no one. True, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton “stressed the importance of a strong, unified approach to this threat to international peace and security,” said Department spokesman Ian Kelly, but then, the secretary took the same position last month after the North’s long-range missile test. Then, after a week of meetings, the Security Council came up with a nonbinding statement urging members to really enforce the sanctions previously approved. That likely caused more contempt than fear in Pyongyang. A repeat will do neither America nor its friends any good.

Nor is it obvious that tighter sanctions would work very well. A regime that has allowed at least a half million, and perhaps more, of its citizens to starve is not likely to worry about its people suffering further hardship. Perhaps the People’s Republic of China (PRC), which supplies much of the North’s food and fuel, could bring the Kim regime to heel. But maybe not.

Anyway, thus far the PRC has worried more about the consequences of a North Korean economic collapse than a North Korean nuclear weapon. Beijing said that it “is resolutely opposed to the test,” but whether that means it is willing to adopt a tougher stance toward the DPRK remains to be seen. Senator John McCain has already called on China to put more pressure on the North and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi plans on raising the issue during her current visit to Beijing. Bruce Klingner of the
Heritage Foundation even argues that far from praising the PRC for its aid, the United States should criticize Beijing’s “obstructionism to carrying out the will of the international community as expressed in two U.N. resolutions.”

It is easy for the United States and other states to dismiss China’s concerns. However, imagine how Washington would react if countries a continent away demanded that the United States adopt policies that could wreck Mexico and send millions of starving refugees across America’s southern border. U.S. officials might react less than enthusiastically.

The better hope might be to encourage China to use whatever clandestine influence it possesses over the North to promote internal regime change. Whether the PRC has the ability to do this is an obvious question which even Beijing might not be able to answer with any certainty. The late Kim Il-Sung very effectively wiped out any faction loyal to anyone other than him. But if there is anyone inside the North with the ability and willingness to “solve the problem,” so to speak, now is a good time to act—as Kim’s succession is not yet solidified.

The risks to China are obvious: a new regime might prove no better even if a coup was successful. Failure would harm the Chinese-North Korean relationship, but there is little love between the two governments today anyway and Pyongyang could ill afford to refuse the aid it presently receives. As my colleague Ted Galen Carpenter has pointed out, the Obama administration could reassure Beijing that the United States would not take geopolitical advantage of any resulting turmoil in the North or seek to reunify the peninsula. There would be no NATO-like advance to the PRC’s borders; to the contrary, U.S. forces would come home from the South. And if the result of Chinese efforts was collapse and a refugee flood across the Yalu, Washington would be prepared to help financially.

Assuming no Chinese deus ex machina appears, the administration will be left with diplomacy. The Obama administration should explain that the United States is interested in forging a more positive relationship with North. In fact, progress—such as direct talks and perhaps even diplomatic relations—is possible without agreement on the nuclear issue. But no improvement will be possible so long as North Korea flouts American concerns.

Washington should encourage South Korea and Japan to take a similar stance. Multilateral discussions through the six-party talks are worth reviving, if possible, but should not inhibit both formal and informal bilateral discussions. But these should happen only if Pyong-
yang reciprocates. Additional provocations by the DPRK in the future should elicit bored contempt rather than excited concern. If the North is determined to isolate itself, then there is little its neighbors can do. If the North decides to shut down the quasi-capitalist Kaesong industrial complex, so be it. There should be no generous last minute deals while Pyongyang is violating past commitments. Equally important, the United States should step back and suggest that Beijing, Seoul and Tokyo take the lead in dealing with the DPRK. North Korea is years away from possessing missiles capable of accurately targeting the United States. Moreover, the North would never strike: Kim Jong-il wants his virgins in today’s life, not the afterlife, and knows that America really could turn his entire country into the “lake of fire,” as his regime once threatened to do to the South.

More worrisome is the prospect of proliferation, but Pyongyang could hardly be a greater problem in this regard than our ally Pakistan has been. Washington should make clear to the North that sales to non-state actors would be a casus belli; no amount of money received would be worth the resulting risk. Especially since engagement would create increased financial opportunities elsewhere.

However, North Korea’s activities do threaten its neighbors. Although Russia’s relations with Pyongyang have warmed a bit recently, Moscow would not like a nuclear-armed North Korea on its border. Even Beijing, the North’s long-time ally, long ago lost patience with Kim’s belligerent behavior and might be willing to adopt a tougher policy.

To encourage the PRC to take a more active role, the Obama administration should share America’s nightmare scenario with the Chinese. Secretary of State Clinton should have a private chat with Chinese officials, indicating that if the DPRK builds a nuclear arsenal, the United States is not inclined to remain in the middle, maintaining a nuclear umbrella over Pyongyang’s neighbors. While Washington might not affirmatively favor a decision by South Korea and Japan to exercise the nuclear option, the United States would not likely prevent them from doing so. Thus it really would be in the PRC’s interest to help halt the North Korean nuclear program. The goal, of course, would not be to encourage proliferation, but to use the threat of proliferation to help roll back the DPRK’s program.

Pyongyang seems unlikely to ever give up its nuclear capability, but it may still be willing to bargain away future nuclear production. Washington should retain the former as its formal goal, but focus policy on achieving the latter.

The DPRK’s latest nuclear test
further demonstrates that North Korea is a problem likely to long be with us. The administration should recognize the limitations inherent to any policy towards the North. Washington should offer the prospect of improved relations as a reward for improved North Korean behavior, but should let the North’s neighbors, most notably China, take the lead in managing this most difficult of states. North Korea is a nightmare, but a far worse one for other nations than America.
President George W. Bush famously said that he “loathed” North Korea’s Kim Jong-il. Yet the United States might come to miss the brutal dictator, with his abundant gut and bouffant hair. Resolving the North Korean nuclear crisis through diplomacy was never going to be easy; with an impending leadership change in Pyongyang, diplomatic solutions are likely to become near impossible.

Reports suggest that Kim Jong-il may have pancreatic cancer; some analysts predict he could die within the year. Since the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) was established in 1948, only two men have held supreme power: Kim Il-sung, who died at age eighty-two in 1994, and his son, Kim Jong-il. The monarchical succession from the former to the latter faced opposition at home and in China, the DPRK’s closest ally, but Kim Jong-il’s rise to power was carefully orchestrated by his father in a process that took more than two decades. Who now will take the throne?

North Korea has evolved into the modern equivalent of the Ottoman Empire. “Great Leader” Kim Il-sung was married twice and had many other relationships. Kim Jong-il apparently has had four wives or long-term mistresses. The result has been several children from different spouses as well as a number of illegitimate children.

Family members have played a significant role in the regime. Kim Jong-il faced political competition from his uncle, Kim Yong-ju, who eventually was sidelined by Kim Il-sung. Kim Jong-il also pushed aside his younger half-brother, Kim Pyong-il, who since 1979 has been posted as ambassador to several European nations, keeping him out of domestic North Korean politics. When the elder Kim died in July 1994, Kim Jong-il appeared to face little opposition to taking control.

Until Kim Jong-il fell ill, he appeared to give little thought to his succession. However, STRATFOR’s Roger Baker believes that Kim “has a very strong fear that after he dies, if the country changes direction, that his family may be on the receiving end of vigilantism or punished or killed.” That’s plausible, though Kim may simply desire to cement his legacy by choosing someone who would have little choice but to venerate Kim’s rule. Observes Atsuhito Isozaki of Tokyo’s Keio University: “Since Kim had a stroke last year, North Korea appears to be in a hurry in naming his successor.” Earlier this year Kim apparently designated twenty-six...
year-old Kim Jong-un, his youngest son, as his heir.

Reports indicate that Kim Jong-un was recently shifted from his position at the Korean Workers’ Party to the National Defense Commission (NDC). Party and military officials have been tasked with promoting the younger Kim, jokingly referred to by some observers as “Cute Leader”; he is being called “Brilliant Comrade” and “Commander Kim” by the North’s media. Open Radio for North Korea reports that diplomats and military leaders have been informed of his new status and promotional efforts have been launched, including party and military propaganda campaigns.

Reports are circulating that the succession may be confirmed at an upcoming party conference in October of this year or next. Another theory is that the process may be formalized in 2012, the centenary of the birth of Kim Il-sung.

Kim Jong-un is a virtual unknown outside of North Korea. Only one photo of him exists, taken when he attended the International School in Bern, Switzerland. During his two years there he apparently demonstrated some proficiency in English, French, and German, enjoyed skiing and watching Hollywood action movies, and favored the National Basketball Association. Classmates say he showed no political interest, though he was only in his mid-teens then.

However, unless Kim Jong-il survives and rules for at least several years, the younger Kim is unlikely to have an easy time claiming his political inheritance in a culture that typically reveres age—and in which potential rivals are many. The regime number two appears to be the elder Kim’s brother-in-law, Jang Song-taek, who disappeared in a purge a few years ago but recently reemerged. Kim Jong-il recently named Jang to the NDC.

Jang is only four years younger than Kim and his independent authority is hard to assess. Jang, backed by the NDC’s O Kuk-ryol and Kim Yong-chun, is thought to have been tasked to act as Kim Jong-un’s principal mentor. However, he might not be satisfied playing a secondary role in the event of Kim Jong-il’s death.

Many other senior officials have been waiting for years and even decades to take charge. Their loyalty to Kim Jong-il might not survive his death. Especially since there are more than a few Kim family members available to front for competing factions.

For instance, Kim Jong-il’s oldest son is thirty-eight year-old Kim Jong-nam, who apparently fell into disgrace after he was discovered traveling on a forged passport while attempting to enter Japan in order to visit Tokyo Disneyland. He now lives in Macau. Although he seems
out of the power equation and in a television interview voiced his support for Kim Jong-un, reports recently surfaced that his supporters were being purged and that Kim Jong-un’s aides organized an assassination plot, busted by China. (If true, this would seem to mimic the Ottoman practice of new sultans eradicating male family members who could challenge their ascension.)

Kim Jong-un has an older brother, Kim Jong-chol. Their mother, Ko Yong-hui, is said to have been Kim Jong-il’s favorite wife. Before she died of cancer in 2004 she reportedly was promoting both sons as potential heirs. The twenty-eight year-old Kim Jong-chol is supposedly sickly and viewed as effeminate by his father. Nevertheless, he apparently runs the Party Leadership Department, traditionally a critical position. However, some of the department’s functions apparently have been transferred to Jang. Although Kim Jong-chol has formally pledged to support his younger brother, that could change and the former could be used by a competing faction.

Kim Jong-il’s current wife/mistress, Kim Ok, and her relatives, though currently unimportant politically, also conceivably could play a role in providing a family connection in any ensuing power struggle. So could Kim Pyong-il, Kim Jong-il’s half-brother who is currently serving as the DPRK’s ambassador to Poland. More distant family members are not likely to dominate the North’s political future, but still might play a role in any factional struggle.

How this international soap opera will turn out is anyone’s guess. But it could have a significant impact on Pyongyang’s relations with the rest of the world—and not for the better.

Given the horrors perpetuated by Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, it is hard to imagine the situation getting worse in the DPRK. However, overt factionalism, a brutal power struggle, and political instability would add an incendiary element to peninsula affairs. Observes Dennis Blair, Director of National Intelligence: “Any time you have a combination of this behavior of doing provocative things in order to excite a response—plus succession questions—you have a potentially dangerous mixture.”

At the very least, an insecure leader, weak collective rule, and/or a de facto military government all likely would make North Korean concessions on the nuclear issue even less likely. A new, more responsible and forward-looking regime—one that recognized real international influence requires significant reform—might eventually emerge. However, counting on that result would let hope trump experience.
The United States should continue diplomatic efforts, both bilateral and multilateral. Moreover, Washington should intensify its efforts to engage China in a concerted campaign to pressure Pyongyang and/or seek to effect regime change. At the same time, however, policy makers must realistically assess the future. The United States and North Korea’s neighbors had better prepare for the possibility of an even more unsettled and dangerous future.
Bret Stephens is the foreign-affairs columnist of the *Wall Street Journal* and deputy editorial page editor, responsible for the editorial pages of the Journal’s European and Asian editions. He was editor-in-chief of the Jerusalem Post from 2002 through 2004. Bret Stephens was born in 1973 and grew up in Mexico City. After graduating from Middlesex School, Stephens went to the University of Chicago and the London School of Economics. Stephens began his career at the *Journal* as an op-ed editor in New York and later worked as an editorial writer for the *Wall Street Journal Europe* in Brussels. In 2006 he took over the “Global View” column from George Melloan, who retired. He is the winner of the 2008 Eric Breindel Award for Excellence in Opinion Journalism. In 2005, Stephens was named a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum, where he was previously a media fellow. He is a frequent contributor to *Commentary* magazine.

In the past, Bret spoke at the Society of Skeptics on The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Who Killed Palestine? and War in Iraq: Support for the Surge. He was slated to participate in the Alumni Day (June 5) panel American Foreign Policy Challenge: The War in Afghanistan.

Iraqis Embrace Democracy; Do We?

In 2002, a presidential election was held in Iraq. Saddam Hussein won it by a margin of 11,445,638 to zero. “Whether that’s because they love their leader -- as many people said they do -- or for other reasons, was hard to tell,” reported CBS News’s Tom Fenton from Baghdad.

You can’t say they aren’t fair and balanced over at CBS.

Another election has now been held in Iraq, this time involving 19 million voters, 50,000 polling stations, 6,200 candidates, 325 parliamentary seats and 86 parties. In the run-up to the vote, the general view among Iraqis and foreign observers alike was that the outcome was “too close to call.” Linger over the words: “Too close to call” has never before been part of the Arab political lexicon.

But democracy has finally arrived, first by force of American arms, next by dint of Iraqi will. It’s a remarkable thing, not just in the context of the past seven years of U.S. involvement, or the eight decades of Iraq’s sovereign existence, but in the much longer sweep of Arab civilization. Paleontologists have described similar moments in evolution, when some natural cataclysm permits a nimbler class of animals to take the place of the planet’s former masters.

Just so in Iraq: the Cretaceous period of the T Rex and the pterosaur is at last drawing to a close. George W. Bush, in all his subtlety, was their mass-extinction event.

In the West it’s a different story. Among the most remarkable trends of recent years has been the disenchantment with the very idea of democracy.

It’s a trend that expresses itself in various ways: the admiration for authoritarian (typically Chinese) efficiencies; the sense that democracies are incapable of rising to the “challenges” of health care and global warming; the distaste for the tea parties in the U.S. But nowhere has it been more consistent than in the West’s commentary about Iraq.

It began nearly on the day that Saddam’s statue in central Baghdad was brought down by American soldiers as jubilant Iraqis looked on. “This war was not worth a child’s finger,” wrote the English novelist Julian Barnes in a Guardian op-ed. That was published fully a year before the insurgency got underway, when the argument could not be made -- as it was later made -- that democracy is all well and good but that order of any kind, even tyrannical order, is much to be preferred.

For the next seven years, the insurgents murdered coalition soldiers and Iraqi civilians with equal
abandon, right up to the morning of
the election. Yet somehow the kill-
ing sprees (grotesquely replete with
the cutting off of children’s fingers)
were treated by the world’s great
opiners not as the acts of evil men
to be confronted and stopped, but
purely as a function of the Ameri-
can presence in Iraq.

In this strange moral calculus,
all the blood that was shed -- in-
cluding American blood -- was on
America’s hands. It was also, by im-
plication, a stain on America’s “ex-
periment” of “imposing” democracy
on so obviously unwilling a people.

In the midst of those blood-
baths, the U.S. ceded civilian control
to Iraqi authorities, who then con-
ducted four democratic elections.
I still remember the incredulity
among the war’s opponents, border-
ing on open dismay, when the par-
liamentary elections five years ago
proved an inspiring success.

But the critics could relax, at
least for a few years: The killing in
Iraq did not abate. Successive Iraqi
prime ministers were treated with
none of the deference Western dip-
lomats would routinely accord the
masters of Egypt or Vietnam or
even Syria. The division of Iraq was
a respectable topic of conversation.

And yet throughout all of this,
Iraqis somehow held fast to their
idea of a democratic country. How
was that possible? How could they
not behave according to type, as in-
veterate sectarians and anti-Ameri-
cans? Didn’t they perhaps miss the
political clarity that dictatorship
uniquely provides?

The late Michael Kelly knew
the answer, and the answer was
that Iraqis, unlike most of us in the
West, knew tyranny, and therefore
also knew what it meant to thirst
for freedom. Writing just before
his untimely death on the road to
Baghdad, he observed:

“Tyranny truly is a horror: an
immense, endlessly bloody, endless-
ly painful, endlessly varied, endless
crime against not humanity in the
abstract but a lot of humans in the
flesh. It is, as Orwell wrote, a jack-
boot forever stomping on a human
face.

“I understand why some dislike
the idea, and fear the ramifications
of, America as a liberator. But I do
not understand why they do not
see that anything is better than life
with your face under the boot. And
that any rescue of a people under
the boot (be they Afghan, Kuwaiti
or Iraqi) is something to be desired.
Even if the rescue is less than per-
fectly realized. Even if the rescuer
is a great, overmuscled, bossy, self-
ish oaf. Or would you, for yourself,
choose the boot?”

I still miss Kelly. Sunday’s elec-
tion was his vindication, too.
Iraqis Embrace Democracy; Do We?
Dr. Robert Textor graduated from Blair in 1940. In his senior year he served as President of the International Society, and somehow managed to win letters in Soccer and Hockey. A volunteer in WWII, he was trained in Infantry Heavy Weapons, and ended up in the Military Intelligence Japanese Language School. In 1946-48 he served in Japan as a civilian official in Military Government where he was second in charge of administering General MacArthur’s policies on education and the media for one-third of Japan. Bob earned his doctorate in Cultural Anthropology at Cornell in 1960 (with a dissertation on Thai religion) and after post-doctoral appointments at Yale and Harvard joined the faculty at Stanford, taking early retirement in 1990. He has lived and worked for nine years in Asia and two in Europe and studied four Asian languages. In 1961 he was one of the founders of the Peace Corps, which next year will celebrate its golden anniversary. Bob’s current scholarship focuses on developing a method he has invented, called Ethnographic Futures Research, which helps the individual to visualize alternative mid-range futures for themselves or their society. In 2006 he edited and provided an introduction and commentary to a volume on Margaret Mead: The World Ahead: An Anthropologist Anticipates the Future. Bob participated in the Alumni Day panel (June 5, 2010) on American Foreign Policy Challenge: The War in Afghanistan.

He also heads a Portland, Oregon weekly intellectual forum called the Thirsters. Note his gracious invitation to any all members of the Thirster salon!

Reminder to Thirsters: We foregather at our Toping Table EVERY Thursday of the year except holidays -- rain or shine, earthquake, fire or flood -- anytime between 7 and 11 PM. Pop in when you wish, leave when you wish. We meet at McMenamin’s Tavern, 1716 N.W. 23rd Ave at Savier St., opposite Besaw’s Restaurant. There is never an agenda, so no special “preparation” is needed or possible. Whenever logistics permit and mood conduces -- which we hope will be often -- please feel free to join us at our Table. – Bob

The following article was written forty-five years after his memorable experience during the US occupation of Japan.
The last time I was in Tokyo I paid a sentimental visit to the Dai Ichi Building. I took the elevator to the sixth floor, there to find the inevitable uketsuke (receptionist). I asked the old man if I could see Maakaasaa Gensui no jimusho, and promptly -- as though long accustomed to receiving nostalgic gaijin visitors like me -- he slipped on his sandals led me down the hallway.

There it was: a pleasant room with paneled walls. I looked everywhere for some kind of marker or plaque. There was none. Yet, out of respect for its history, the company that owned the building kept the room clean and tidy but unused, except for an occasional company reception. For this room, from 1945 to 1951, had been the office of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur.

Here, I mused, was where a thousand vital decisions had been made -- decisions that would impact upon the entirety of Japanese politics and economics, and indeed upon the very fabric of everyday Japanese life. Here was where policies were developed that freed up liberal Japanese to initiate sociocultural change processes that might not otherwise have taken place as quickly -- or at all.

I stood there alone quietly for several minutes, thinking a thousand thoughts. Then I left the building and strolled across to the plaza in front of the Imperial Palace. Thousands of school children were there on ensoku (school trips). They were smiling, relaxed, spontaneous. I started a conversation with some of them, and was struck by how much easier I found it to speak with these kids in 1983, than with those I had met back in 1946-48. Back then, as an Occupation official, I had made scores of school inspections, during which I had always tried to include conversations with students -- but had usually found them stiff and almost ritualistic in their responses. But on this bright day 35 years later, I said to myself, “Hey, these look like the kinds of kids we hoped Japan would some day have, back in Forties when we were working with Japanese educators.” Here in front of me, I ruminated, stood convincing exemplars of the “New Japan” that we in Military Government had talked about with our Japanese colleagues more than a generation earlier. The future had become the present. It was a good feeling.

This article deals with one person’s experience in working with Japanese educators and media communicators to help build that New

Success in Japan: Despite Some Human Foibles and Cultural Problems
Japan. It deals principally with my “grass roots” work during the first half of 1948 as a civilian official of Military Government (MG) in Wakayama Prefecture. I shall illustrate my experiences by quoting selected excerpts from my monthly reports to higher headquarters.

Ironically, this article reports on events and phenomena of a nature doubtless quite foreign to Douglas MacArthur’s own experience in Japan -- for he defined his role from the start as that of a sort of latter-day shoogun, aloof from the masses of ordinary Japanese. He played that role to perfection. In my view, his aloof stance was not only one that came to him naturally, but one that he should have taken even if it had not come naturally. Given the Japanese political culture at the time, his very unreachability gave him maximal charisma, and hence tremendous influence over political, economic, and sociocultural change processes. It did, though, have the disadvantage that it permitted him no direct opportunity to observe events at the grass roots.

**Enter the Occupationaire**

In 1943 I was a 20-year-old student at Antioch College when the Army of the United States finally decided that it wanted me, on the double, and promptly proceeded to transmogrify me into an infantry heavy weapons gunner. Then, in its wisdom, the military personnel system assigned me to the Army Japanese Language School at the University of Michigan. As the fates willed it, I spent the rest of the war either at Ann Arbor or waiting to go there.

Like millions of young Americans at that time, I believed deeply in America’s war aims, and had volunteered for service. When V-J Day arrived, I felt an irresistible urge to get to Japan as quickly as possible and do what I could to promote a democratic new order. I reported to my separation center three days early, hurried to Washington, and took the first War Department civilian job offered me.

On a sunny April morning in 1946, I arrived in Yokohama aboard an army troop transport ship. Our group was loaded onto busses for the trip to Tokyo. I was shocked beyond forgetting at the sight of this totally flattened city. Little else besides scattered chimneys, steel safes, and stone kura storehouses had survived the holocaust of American fire bombs. This shock, and others like it which followed, only strengthened my resolve to do what I could to promote democracy in Japan -- on the assumption, of course, that a democratic Japan would less likely be an aggressive Japan.

I had been assigned as a civilian interpreter to the Allied Translator and Interpreter Service, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (ATIS/SCAP). However, it was
immediately clear that if I stayed at ATIS, the odds were strong that my duties would be routine and technical -- precisely what I did not want. What I did want was direct contact with those Japanese who were actively working at the intercultural synapse across which Americans and Japanese were attempting to communicate and cooperate in the process of fashioning a New Japan.

Fortunately for me there was at that time a severe shortage of trained Americans on hand to run the Occupation. Tens of thousands of military personnel chafed impatiently to return home for discharge, and only a relative handful of civilians were available to take their places and staff a rapidly expanding Occupation bureaucracy. Given this fluid situation, and the grace of the Almighty, I managed to get myself released from ATIS, and to convince the Military Government Civil Information and Education (MG CIE) Division at Eighth Army Headquarters that my qualifications as a specialist on Japanese language and culture somehow made up for my very limited experience as a teacher.

Thus, unbelievably, at the age of 23 I found myself Assistant CIE Officer, MG Section, Headquarters First Corps, Kyoto. There, my immediate boss, the late Ronald S. Anderson, and I were responsible for overseeing the implementation of Occupation policy for the democratic reorientation of all schools and public media in three MG regions embracing almost one-third of the population of Japan. Similarly, we implemented Occupation policy with respect to religion and the preservation of arts and monuments. Given the priceless artistic and historic treasures of unbombed Kyoto and Nara, this last responsibility was considerable. In pursuit of all these duties, I traveled frequently throughout the three regions.

Anderson and I were also directly involved in the hiring of numerous civilian CIE officers to work in the three regions under our charge. This experience gave us a first-hand awareness of the kinds of Americans who were being posted to 20 of Japan’s 46 prefectures -- their widely varying competences, cultural sensitivity, values, goals, world view -- and the extent of their knowledge of Japan.

After a year and a half in Kyoto, I was given the opportunity to conduct my own operation, as CIE Officer in Wakayama Prefecture, near Osaka. During the following eight months, I gave guidance, assistance, and encouragement to a hard-working group of local educators who, with stunning speed and skill, succeeded in achieving a comprehensive restructuring of Wakayama’s entire public school system, aimed at achieving gender and class equality of access to elementary and sec-
ondary education. This was in effect a bloodless revolution, and will serve as the center-piece for much of the analysis that follows. I also worked with a small group of college professors in designing what is today Wakayama University.

During those heady days I was well aware that I enjoyed a level of responsibility far higher than I deserved, especially in terms of my “paper” qualifications. However, as one who helped hire and supervise numerous CIE officers for First Corps’ 20 prefectures, I soon saw how ethnocentric and culturally naive some occupationaires were, who did have impressive paper qualifications -- e.g., 15 years as a superintendent in an isolated monolingual rural district in the American heartland -- and I felt less inadequate. “We’re all unqualified,” I told myself, “so why not just do your best, and hope it’s good enough?”

Moreover, my enthusiasm for activism rose as I discovered how many key Japanese leaders, officials, and intellectuals were ready for change. Japan had suffered cataclysmic losses in a brutal war, had experienced the utter horror of nuclear attack, and, for the first time ever, had been occupied by foreign troops. All this trauma had certainly rendered many Japanese wide open to new ideas about how to conduct social life. And the fact that the Emperor had instructed them to lay down their arms gave a powerful legitimacy to Occupation efforts to effectuate or catalyze change.

I was also struck by what can only be termed a cultural characteristic of the Japanese: a tendency to search relentlessly for the best way to do something. This tendency had been in manifest operation throughout Japan’s modern period since at least the 1870s, when the Japanese government started sending missions to the West to find out what was the best legal system, the best military system, the best education system, etc., for Japan. And now, due to the exigencies of war and surrender, I found myself besieged daily with questions about the best way to run an organization, a school system, a newspaper, or, indeed, a country. It was a unique and humbling historic opportunity.

So, in the two years that followed, I learned to consider eleven-hour days and six- or seven-day weeks to be a reasonable, and deeply
satisfying, work routine. Throughout this entire period, I was in direct daily contact with Japanese educators, writers, journalists, labor leaders, intellectuals, politicians, and reform-minded citizens. I made scores of school inspections, gave countless lectures to teachers’ groups, youth clubs, civic associations, PTAs, etc., and held numerous press conferences. Frequently, this contact was through the medium of the Japanese language.

Incidentally, Japan reoriented my entire life. When I returned to the States in 1948 I switched career plans and became a cultural anthropologist. In reflecting today on the grass-roots aspects of the occupation of Japan, therefore, I do so primarily as an anthropologist -- though secondarily through the prisms of history and political science.

**Human Foibles on the American Side**

The pace and profundity of daily life in MG at the grass roots readily revealed numerous human foibles on both sides, as well as the patterned ways in which each side defined the other side’s foibles. I will not dwell on these human foibles very long, but a quick summary of a few of them (or more precisely, my imperfect perceptions of them) will serve to create the context for the analysis to follow.

**Unprepared Personnel**

In the early months of the occupation, almost all MG officers were military -- I being, as I recall, the first civilian of officer rank in First Corps Headquarters’ MG section. Gradually, more and more civilians were hired, though the top jobs remained in military hands.

In terms of their fitness for cross-cultural work, MG’s officers, military and civilian, varied from excellent to poor. At the positive end of the continuum one found, among others, a number of officers who had been trained for MG duties at various Civil Administration Training Schools (CATS schools) in the U.S. during the war. Many were citizen-soldiers who could draw upon successful administrative or leadership careers in their civilian past. Some of these officers took discharges in Japan and continued their duties as civilians.

As I recall, all of the CATS alumni that I met were male. Indeed, during the first year or so, MG in the First Corps area was almost exclusively staffed by males. It was only gradually that any appreciable number of women MG officers were hired -- a fact that certainly rendered prefectural and regional teams less sensitive to the needs and problems of Japanese women than would otherwise have been the case.

At the negative end of the preparedness continuum were many officers -- especially career military officers...
who often had exemplary war records, but sometimes were hopelessly unprepared by education or experience, and perhaps temperament, for anything like MG work. They lacked previous cross-cultural experience or knowledge of any foreign language, and were further handicapped by a certain narrowness that hardly fitted them to function effectively in Japan, let alone to supervise or to lead in Occupation affairs. I have described this situation elsewhere, and will not belabor it here. Looking back on all this, I sometimes find myself marveling that MG didn't do more harm. I believe that what saved the organization, in part, was that, for many domains of responsibility, MG officers were formally expected merely to “observe and report” compliance with Occupation directives. This often made it possible for an officer to satisfy higher headquarters while in fact remaining fairly passive -- after all, one could always ask for some statistics from the kenchoo (prefectural government office), and put them into a plausible monthly report that would probably satisfy higher headquarters. Many, perhaps most, MG officers, especially military ones, (and most especially career military ones) were inclined to take this route -- and then relax and enjoy life. This is not to say that many such officers were not conscientious, but it is to say that many were scarcely inclined to go out of their way looking for problems.

By contrast, some military, and more civilian, MG officers did go farther, and became quite ardent activists. I include myself in this category. Instead of simply “observing and reporting,” my philosophy -- shared widely in MG CIE -- was that we should assertively try to encourage positive change processes by “guiding and assisting” relevant Japanese in a consistent and persistent manner.

### Inefficient Structure

The MG structure was a part of the Eighth Army, with headquarters in Yokohama. Under Eighth Army were two corps: the Ninth, headquarted in Sendai, and the First, headquartered in Kyoto. Under the First Corps were three MG regions: Kinki, Tokai-Hokuriku, and Kyushu, headquartered respectively in Kyoto, Nagoya, and Fukuoka. Under each region in the First Corps area were six or seven prefectures, each with its prefectural MG team. At all levels -- army, corps, region, and team -- the commanding and executive officers were invariably military, as were, typically, the holders of many other key posts.

Note that here was a situation of extreme shortage of qualified personnel, yet the military saw fit to maintain five levels of administration for military governance purposes, where three would not only have done the job faster, but saved
manpower for other purposes. The only justification for such redundancy was, I suppose, the unspoken one that it provided niches for military officers who might otherwise have been difficult to place!

**Vagueness of Mission**

Especially in the early days of the occupation, prefectural MG teams were plagued by the vagueness of their mission, and the difficulty of securing urgently needed policy decisions, due in part to the three layers of bureaucracy between themselves and SCAP in Tokyo. And it was SCAP alone which, in theory, made all policy decisions.

Perhaps this theoretical administrative model could have worked, but only in a situation in which the structure was highly efficient and the mission clearly defined and widely understood. In reality, however, such was not the situation. Only in some cases would a prefectural MG officer refer a problem to higher headquarters -- and be prepared to wait weeks for an authoritative decision. In other cases the officer would simply demur, and assume that the problem at hand would somehow solve itself without MG intervention. In still other and numerous cases, however, referral or demurral were not appropriate. Such cases were those in which Japanese officials and citizens would ask MG for clarification as to whether this or that option was permitted by Occupation policy, where not to have given an immediate and clear response would have created more problems, or even danger, than to have referred the matter to higher headquarters. In such cases, MG officers would simply, in effect, make interim ad hoc policy. Technically, however, such officers might well have been exceeding their authority.

In short, MG CIE officers often found the rigid “observe and report” approach grossly inadequate, and often felt that they had no choice but to invoke the more flexible and positive “guide and assist” approach -- and to stretch it considerably.

**Paranoia in the Counter Intelligence Corps**

Another problem standing in the way of a fully successful Occupation was a certain negativism that pervaded both MG and the Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC), but especially the latter. There was an almost paranoid concern, on the part of numerous military officers, over possible subversion among American civil servants working in Japan. Heading the entire surveillance effort was SCAP’s G-2, General Charles A. Willoughby, a man who had been close to General MacArthur for many years, and who was probably the second most powerful American in Japan. It is said that General MacArthur once described Willoughby as “my lovable
fascist”. This sobriquet is consistent with my own findings. In 1951 I wrote:

Not long before Mussolini marched into France, Willoughby wrote a book that was generally sympathetic with Generalissimo Franco and with Japanese military activities in China, and said: “historical judgment, freed from the emotional haze of the moment, will credit Mussolini with wiping out a memory of defeat by re-establishing the traditional military supremacy of the white race, for generations to come.” Had a Japanese written this sort of opinion about the Japanese “race,” he would have been purged by the Occupation.

While the Communist threat was certainly real, and assuredly deserved to be taken seriously, General Willoughby and his sprawling national intelligence network sometimes went to absurd extremes that did serious harm to some of the basic positive goals of the Occupation itself. For example, during much of my time in Kyoto, the CIC would send representatives to “monitor” my speeches to teachers’ groups, civic organizations, and the like. At one point the CIC even decided, for reasons never explained, that I could not go on a routine field trip into upcountry Kyoto Prefecture -- to speak to teachers’ groups, inspect schools and historic monuments, etc. -- unless a CIC officer accompanied me. This decision was especially mysterious because I had been doing just such upcountry work routinely for many months. In any case, my assistant and I obligingly fitted a fourth person into our jeep -- a CIC lieutenant who proceeded to attend every speech I gave, and otherwise to accompany me night and day throughout a three-day trip through back country villages so remote as to have been virtually unaware of (urban-based) Japanese Communism. Lieutenant P had actually been a class-mate of mine at Ann Arbor, and must have known that I had no reputation for being a Communist or fellow traveler. I knew him as a positive person and nice guy and it did not surprise me that he was visibly embarrassed by his assignment. At the end of the trip he apologized: “Bob, I’ve felt bad all during this trip, especially since it is so clear that you are contributing a lot more to the aims of the Occupation than people like me are.” He later sent me a copy of his report to his superior; it not only cleared me, but was actually laudatory. Surely the Occupation could have found ways of harnessing the talents of this Japan specialist -- and numerous other, similarly well-trained and -motivated officers who found themselves in the CIC -- in a more positive and socially useful way.
Human Foibles on the Japanese Side

Especially during the first year and a half of the occupation, Americans at the local level held great de facto power, and often all that was needed to get something done was to say, directly or otherwise, that “the Shinchuugun (Occupation forces) want this...” -- and it would be done. Such informal edicts were gradually supplanted by more formal ones, such as the formal written “procurement demands” that were used to obtain resources to provide all sorts of facilities for occupationaires and their families -- to build or refurbish office space, to hire musicians to entertain Americans in the billet dining room, or to make life more efficient, convenient, or pleasant for the Americans in a hundred other ways.

Democratically oriented change, however, cannot be obtained by procurement demand. If the Occupation was to produce positive results in its more complex, substantive goals for the Japanese future, it had to gain a more complex, more consensual kind of cooperation from key Japanese officials who were credible to both the Occupation and to the local Japanese power structure. In retrospect, what amazes me is not that there were so few such willing and credible Japanese, but that there were so many.

This is not to say, however, that those on the Japanese side were without their “foibles,” at least as I viewed (and oversimplified) them in my American cultural terms. Many educational officials I found myself dealing with were not really educators at all, but general administrators who possessed administrative efficiency, no doubt, but who had no vision of alternative futures for Japanese education -- indeed, in some cases, no apparent vision at all, other than that of a vague maintenance of the status quo.

What heartened me, however, was to discover many Japanese educators, often quite junior in status, who actively hungered for change, and were prepared to take risks with their own careers in order to help achieve it. The challenge for the reform-minded occupationaire was to identify these liberal, change-oriented Japanese, and to work with and through them. This is exemplified by an excerpt from one of my monthly CIE reports from Wakayama to higher headquarters.

The new chief of the Education Department, a man in his forties, appears progressive; his new chief of the School Education Section, a man in his thirties, has apparently been the prime mover and planner in educational reorganization throughout the Ken. Top personnel in the Ken Social Education Section and in the education departments of Wakayama, Tanabe and Shingu cities appear hopelessly unimaginative and ill-equipped for their jobs.
A new crop of “inspectors” has been appointed, including a few women. A few women have been appointed as principals, including one to a new lower secondary school. The Kencho is believed deliberately but humanely making merit promotions and gradually cleaning out dead wood.

**Liberals v. Conservatives**

As a means of bridging from human foibles to the more complex matter of cultural problems, it is first worth taking a brief look at the matter of liberalism versus conservatism among MG occupationaires -- which translates, to some extent, into relative activism versus inactivism in promoting the progressive sociocultural change programs of the Occupation.

The “liberals” in MG, as in SCAP, tended to be people who had matured politically during the Roosevelt period, and who endorsed the broad humanitarian and equity goals of the New Deal. They were comfortable with the general notion that government must intervene when non-governmental institutions leave important problems unresolved. In the MG context, they were not comfortable with merely “observing and reporting,” and were more inclined to “guide and assist.” The liberals were keenly aware of the need (as they saw it) of actively implementing in peace the very aims for which the war had been fought. Hence, they were more likely to “go the extra mile” to contain various Japanese tendencies to revert toward authoritarianism, racism, and ultranationalism -- and then to follow this with positive programs aimed at democracy and peace.

The more conservative occupationaires were more inclined to regard pro-change Japanese as Communist or pro-Communist, and to try to build up conservative elements in the prefecture, so that (as they saw it) the Japanese government and society would serve as a bulwark against the spread of Communism in Asia. Building up conservative elements often meant simply doing little to actively promote many of the reforms called for by Occupation policies. And unsurprisingly, many officers and enlisted men in the Counter Intelligence Corps epitomized this extreme conservative position.

We come now to an important historical fact, namely that in the early months and years of the Occupation, its overall policy orientation was basically liberal in many respects, and frequently offered considerable latitude for Occupation officials to pursue quite liberal goals. This fact is a striking paradox, in view of the generally conservative outlook of most high-ranking military officers of the time. It is even more of a paradox in the case of General MacArthur himself, whose
political views, in the U.S. domestic context, were widely known to have been staunchly conservative.

At the prefectural and regional levels of MG in the First Corps area, my impression was that officers who could broadly be characterized as liberal were more likely to be civilian than military, and more likely temporary military than regular. Conversely, officers who were civilian were more likely to be liberal than those who were military. These characterizations are, though, very rough and approximate; there were many exceptional and ambiguous cases.

The MG officers I knew varied widely in how hard they worked. In general, civilian officers tended to work harder than military officers, and liberals harder than conservatives. Conservatives were more likely to rely on the local Japanese prefectural officials, and to assume that reports from these officials were true and accurate, or at least satisfactory. Liberals were more likely to follow up on aspects of these reports that seemed unpersuasive or unsatisfactory. Many relatively liberal occupationaires were workaholics, and the majority of workaholics were relatively liberal. I classify myself as having been a liberal workaholic.

Though there was a good deal of genuine camaraderie in MG life at the prefectural level, it was not always easy for workaholic liberal civilian MG officers to work effectively with their non-workaholic conservative military colleagues. To the former, the latter sometimes seemed unconcerned with pursuing many of the announced positive goals of the Occupation. To the latter, the former seemed unreasonably, even suspiciously active.

Cultural Problems

It is a truism to say that when we come into contact with people from another culture, the experience makes strikingly clear to us many features of our own culture about which we had previously not been explicitly aware. The truth of this is all the more compelling when we are officially charged with promoting change in the other culture. In occupied Japan, even where American and Japanese foibles were not too great a problem, and even where there was good faith and some degree of consensus between the American and Japanese sides, there still remained many problems of a cultural nature. That is, there were many respects in which the two sides would consistently meet with difficulty in communicating or cooperating, because they viewed the world from different cultural stances. This section will list some of these cultural problems, and illustrate them by quotations, where available, from my monthly reports.

First, however, some background. When I arrived in Wakayama in November 1947, I had an ac-
Bob Textor reprises his 1940 valedictorian speech at the May 15, 2000 Society of Skeptics presentation onstage at Blair.
tive interest in all the areas within the CIE purview. These areas ranged from fostering democratic education, and education for democracy; to promoting responsible investigative journalism; to encouraging democratic civic associations; to fostering research by faculty in tertiary institutions; to administering SCAP policy concerning religion; to preserving Wakayama's precious arts and monuments -- and on and on. While I dealt actively with all these areas, it was clear to me from the beginning that I had to set priorities in order to maximize my overall effectiveness. I determined to give top priority to structural reform, following guidelines from Tokyo calling for a new 6-3-3-4 ladder system -- six years of primary education, three years of lower secondary, three of upper secondary, and four of tertiary -- to take the place of an older system. Therefore, as a matter of priority, I worked with selected Japanese officials and citizens to reform the total system of public elementary and secondary education at one fell swoop, which would take place at the beginning of the 1948-49 academic year in April, 1948. In short, all at once, my Japanese colleagues and I undertook to equalize access to educational opportunity across gender and class lines throughout the prefecture. Doing it all at once, I felt, would cause less net dislocation than doing it piecemeal -- and, equally important, would promote irreversibility.

In the case of gender, I undertook to promote coeducation at every level -- a goal that official Occupation policy broadly and loosely favored, but did not insist upon. In the case of class, also, my efforts were broadly consistent with, but not mandated by, SCAP policy. Specifically, I undertook to:

- promote districting of public schools, with every child in a particular district attending the school in her or his district.
- promote “comprehensive” secondary schools, each to contain both a general (academic) and a vocational curriculum -- as a means of democratizing the total learning atmosphere within a school, and moving away from elite bias.

The above two structural innovations were intended to replace an older system of privilege in which the education of girls was less valued and hence less emphasized, and in which certain secondary schools were widely assumed to be more or less reserved for elite children. For example, the prefecture’s most prestigious secondary school, the Dai Ichi Chuu Gakkoo (First Middle School), located in Wakayama City, was the school to which senior bureaucrats and wealthy people would “of course” send their sons -- to
receive academic rather than vocational education. Some of these boys commuted daily on overcrowded trains from as far away as Tanabe, some seventy miles distant, to attend this elite school.

I realized, of course, that the democratic re-drawing of school district boundaries would not bring about changes in educational practice immediately -- but, I reasoned, it would help to do so in the longer run:

• by causing better educated and socio-politically more influential parents to give their genuine interest and support to the local school -- rather than to a school for the privileged, located in another community; and

• by necessitating that school administrators and teachers actually confront the need to teach all students together: male and female, academically- and vocationally-oriented.

Entire ken has been districted for senior high school purposes. All senior high schools will be coeducational. Out of a total of twenty senior high schools, two will be vocational, all former old system secondary vocational schools will offer general and vocational courses, and former general education old system secondary schools will have a general course with a vocational course or two planned for the near future. . . . Particular attention has been given to securing best possible teachers for junior high schools. Principals of old system secondary schools which became new senior high schools will be transferred.

According to the Kencho, structural change in Wakayama’s school system is as thorough-going as any in Japan. Advising the Kencho, the city hall and civic groups re these structural changes was CE’s biggest job this month. Governor and those whom he appears to represent are patently cool toward reorganization; young teachers, college-graduated citizens and others generally to be categorized as “progressive” are warmly supporting reorganization (April 1948).

This description of the situation Wakayama MG CIE faced will serve to set the context within which we may now examine a number of key cultural problems in which American and Japanese cultural stances were often in opposition.

Open Criticism v. Harmonious Silence

While most adult Japanese were doubtless shocked by their nation’s defeat into feeling that some basic changes in their sociocultural system were needed, many nonetheless manifested a general proclivity NOT to offer overt, public criticism of the status quo. By contrast, the American proclivity was much more
supportive of active public criticism of the status quo.

Perhaps the most thoroughly democratic and profitable discussion series ever held in Wakayama Ken occurred this month in the Social Education Study Conference. WMG and the Kencho wrote a provocative list of questions for each program item. Almost all program items were handled by panels. The list of questions provoked the audience into very wide participation. Some of the attitudes and remarks were caustic and in bad taste, the kind usually associated with enthusiasm mixed with immaturity. For example, one youth group member told a local judge who was serving as panel leader that he thought somebody else should immediately be selected to replace the judge who, he felt, was doing an incompetent job as panel leader. Few youth leaders in the past have ever so addressed a member of the bench. The audience developed the habit of indicating aloud that they could not hear a given speaker, or that a given speaker was long-winded or dilatory in his tactics. One enthusiastic conference participant even attempted to take control of the meeting away from the chairman. This member, who, as far as is known, does not have radical political tendencies, wanted the audience to join him in his enthusiasm to form a new movement aimed at the abolition of the present marriage system and the creation of a free marriage system. WMG at this point suggested that, whatever the merits of the participant's ideas, he should not try to gain acceptance for those ideas through usurpation of the authority of the conference leader.

**Action v. Inaction**

Japanese officials in the kencho were less likely to come up with plans for sweeping action, than were their opposite numbers in MG. In part, the American position reflected a culturally typical value in favor of change-oriented activity in general. And in part, too, it reflected the fact that the American knew that his or her presence in Japan was temporary, and that the malleable situation in Japan, favorable to change, would exist for only a few more short years or even months. Therefore, if action was going to be taken, it had to be taken soon.

**Initiatory v. Maintenance Action**

Although MG was officially expected, at most, to offer "guidance and assistance," in some cases MG’s inclination to initiate action, and to support Japanese initiators, went further, as the following excerpt indicates.

Continued firm but gentle pressure was exerted on Japanese authorities to get consolidated junior high schools [established] wherever geographical conditions permit. Great resistance has been met from local bosses, who pander to local superstition and prejudices.
Individual v. Group Expressiveness

Americans are a nation of individuals, or at least our mythology tells us we are. In expressing themselves and their views, occupationaires tended, relative to the Japanese, to do so as autonomous individuals. Our opposite numbers among the Japanese were, in sharp contrast, not likely to express autonomous opinions that diverged from those of their colleagues, and highly likely to consult their group first, and to work out a group position with which all members of the group could be comfortable.

Rightness v. Appropriateness

Americans, imbued with the notion of “inalienable rights,” were culturally inclined to stress the need for this or that change because it was seen as the right thing to do. Japanese, to the extent that they were inclined to stress the need for change, were somewhat more likely, in my perception, to justify change as *tekitoo*, or proper. This, as I see it, is consistent with a deep tendency in the Confucian tradition to equate politics with ethics, and to preserve harmony at almost any cost.

One problem with the American cultural emphasis is that rightness can merge into righteousness, which in turn can merge into self-righteousness. I am well aware that I was hardly immune to this problem. In my case, the problem was deftly epitomized in the delightful inscription to a copy of Fuzambo’s Japanese-English Dictionary, that

...rightness can merge into self-righteousness

Wakayama’s newspaper reporters gave me as a farewell gift when I completed my service there:

Present to Mr. Textor
From the M.G. Beat Men
Hope you much idealism,
with a little realism.

I still prize this gift, and take to heart its implied constructive advice concerning rigid idealism and self-righteousness. Mea culpa.

Participatory v. Hierarchical Action

In advocating action to produce change, Americans tended to favor a grass roots approach in which many individuals, of varying wealth and status, would participate. To the extent that Japanese officials and politicians favored action designed to produce sociocultural change of any kind, they tended to prefer the kind that let the government and the established power structure manage the action. This way, they doubtless felt, that very structure would more likely persist through time.
Principal [Civil Information] activities [for this month] centered on the case of Mr. [KW], a well known local businessman who failed to file an income tax return despite an obviously large income. CI backed up the team's Legal and Government Section with publicity on the progress of the [K] Case. [K's] agents attempted to lure some of the newspapers off the case with bribes. Military Government backed these newspapers up in their refusal to "do business" with [K]. It is felt that the giving of publicity to the [K] Case will help restore the confidence of small tax payers in their government.

Civic v. Governmental Action

Since at least the time of Jefferson, Americans have been suspicious of too much government. During his celebrated visit to the U.S. in the nineteenth century, DeToqueville was astounded to note the rich variety of American voluntary civic associations. This cultural tradition was readily evident in MG work; Americans, liberal and conservative alike, were far more inclined to look to civic associations to initiate or carry out change, while Japanese were more inclined to leave the initiation, and much of the execution, to governmental officials.

The principal barrier to desired development of organizations in this Ken is believed to be the officials concerned with women's activities. WMG continued to emphasize the need for separation of government and civil organizations; some of the greatest opposition to this came from the women's organizations themselves, which generally are unaccustomed to shifting for themselves.

Equality v. Special Privilege

Fundamental to the American political culture is the notion that all people have been created equal in their basic rights. On the Japanese side, the degree to which people subscribed to this value varied widely. In general, however, the then-extant polity and economy were far from emphasizing equality.

WMG encouraged the Teachers' Union to contact the Governor in an effort to receive an extra appropriation of approximately six million yen as soon as possible for the realization of the "Equal pay for equal work regardless of sex" principle. The principle already has been achieved, the Union says, in about ten of Japan's prefectures. Since the Governor is generally in opposition to equal treatment for women, some delay and trouble are expected.

Gender Equality v. Inequality

Many activist occupationaires -- female and male -- initiated action to promote gender equality. For example, in Wakayama, I stressed that women should have an equal opportunity to enter higher levels
of training in the normal schools. In our attempts to incorporate this principle into serious policy, my Wakayaman colleagues and I found ourselves producing action of the type that, twenty years later, came to be called “affirmative” action in the U.S. Our efforts were, though, hardly free of problems.

The Governor of Wakayama is opposed to co-education, and has publicly said so. The Governor and “old line” interests throughout the prefecture are these days opposing, by all sorts of spurious arguments: co-education, new senior high schools, and equality of educational opportunity. Progressive citizens throughout the Ken have been encouraged by CIE to oppose these interests (February 1948).

The entrance examination for the current school year at the Wakayama Economics College will give maximum permitted weight to intelligence testing and minimum permitted weight to scholastic achievement testing, in an effort to admit as many female candidates as possible.

Critical v. Rote Approach to Learning

Japanese educators were wedded to pedagogical approaches that emphasized rote learning. By the time of the occupation, American educators had long since been emphasizing independent critical thinking and reasoning.

WMG has encouraged the teachers of one county to enter into an essay contest on the subject: “Workable Methods for Encouraging Spontaneous Participation, and Eliminating Memorized Answers in the Classroom.” The winning essay or essays will be submitted to various education magazines for publication.

Individual Happines v. Social Duty

In my perception, the “ultimate” cultural difference that separated Americans from Japanese was this one. The Americans in the Occupation were culturally committed to the fundamental importance of the “pursuit of happiness,” principally on an individual basis, and to the Jeffersonian notion that the duty of government is to permit and foster such pursuit. To the American, duty was also important -- but not, I would argue, more important.

My Japanese colleagues, by contrast, seemed to me to emphasize duty, and the precise, persistent, and consistent fulfillment of obligation, vastly more than individual happiness. Individual fulfillment, to them, was a goal to be realized through pursuing one’s duty in the context of one’s group -- and of the higher groups to which one’s group owed fealty. The task of government was to require and facilitate the carrying out of social duty.
Looking Backward: Giving to Japan

Today, as I re-read the musty pages of my MG CIE reports of 43 years ago, I am reminded that in 1948 I was constantly asking myself whether this or that specific MG intervention was truly justified — especially changes of the type that, I suspected, the voters of Wakayama, if given the opportunity of a referendum, would not have supported. (I was quite sure at the time, for example, that Wakayamans would not have voted consistently to support the radical, “one fell swoop” re-structuring of their schools that in fact did occur in that year — and without incident.) Under what conditions, I would ask myself, should an occupationaire go ahead anyway, on the assumption simply that he or she was right — and that, in the future, the Japanese would come to agree, even if they did not agree now? Asking this question immediately places one on tricky moral ground, for rationalizations of this sort have, after all, been used by dictators and brutal rulers since time immemorial.

I countered my suspicions of excessive ego- or ethnocentrism by reminding myself that soon the Japanese would once again be in control of their own country — and then free, if they chose, to revert to older forms and practices.

I have no systematic data on the extent to which the reforms I helped to catalyze have endured or not. Thirty-five years after I left, however, I was assured by two Japanese educators with whom I had worked closely, that the structural reforms described above have indeed endured and sunk deep roots. I like to believe that this is because, at least to some extent, people have come to value the new institutions and practices, and are now prepared to defend them.

Looking Forward: Learning from Japan

In approaching my closing, I cannot resist a brief commentary on the fact that in recent years thoughtful Americans have become at least as convinced that America must learn from Japan, as they were 45 years ago that Japan must learn from America. I emphatically include myself among them.

Forty-odd years ago Japan did indeed learn a lot from America, and much of what it learned was, I believe, useful. Today, surprising though it may seem to some, those very elementary and secondary schools that American occupationaires helped make democratic and modern, are turning out graduates whose mean achievement scores, especially in math and science, are seriously higher than the American. Today, those same schools are turning out workers who, in many instances, are appreciably more adaptable and efficient at manufacturing
than American workers. And today, many Japanese industrial workers labor under conditions that are fairer than those of their American counterparts -- a reversal of the situation 45 years ago when we in the Occupation fostered democratic unionism -- and indeed a partial explanation for the Japanese industrial miracle.

And a miracle it is. I, for one, am frank to admit that if someone in Wakayama in 1948 had prophesied that within 40 years I would be driving a Japanese-manufactured automobile by choice, I would have doubted his mental stability. Yet today I do drive a Japanese car.

Japanese productive success in the automobile and many other industries has complex implications, and will force Americans to adjust to many new economic and political realities. Making this total adjustment, and making it quickly and adroitly, will certainly not be easy. But adjust we must.

Adjustment can be facilitated by understanding. In seeking understanding, I would argue that the principal reasons why the Japanese are scoring high in scholastic achievement, and in manufacturing, are rooted in Japanese culture. I would further argue that the freeing up of various proclivities that in 1945 were already deeply rooted in that culture, for which the American Occupation was in a primary sense responsible, contributed significantly to various processes of change which in turn help to explain Japan’s excellence in many fields today.

Be that as it may, I regard the present widespread tendency among thoughtful Americans to try to learn from Japanese culture, as wise indeed. Any such efforts bring one quickly, of course, to the obvious conclusion that many elements of Japanese culture cannot borrowed into American culture straightaway, because such borrowing would do damage to too many other aspects of our sociocultural system. Thus, to take but one of many possible examples, there is no way that several million American married women, even if they wanted to, could suddenly become stay-at-home “Kyo-oiku mama-s” (education mothers) -- because most of them have jobs.

Let me speak as a philosophical democrat and say that the occupation was an epochal contribution to world democracy.
that they cannot afford to give up. And so forth.

Nonetheless, even though direct cultural borrowing is not possible in a given instance, a thorough awareness of how the Japanese have been successful in some particular respect can often inspire creative thinking and innovation: if the American mother cannot perform the monitoring, stimulating, and nurturing role, then perhaps American society can find someone else who can. And so forth.

Today, then, it is literally true that America cannot afford not to learn from Japan. At the same time, it is also arguable that Japan still has much to learn from America. Above all, I consider it a matter of the highest priority that we search vigorously, affirmatively, and creatively for new avenues toward positive Japanese-American cooperation in an increasingly interdependent and borderless world.

The Bottom Line: Success in Japan

I conclude as follows. The allied occupation of Japan, which was really an American occupation, was, in my view, the most ambitious occupation the world has seen since the emergence of the nation-state. It was an occupation that demonstrated that American leaders had learned several vital lessons from the post-World War I experience. Far from being an occupation of revenge or reciprocated plunder, it was positive in intent and relatively benign and helpful in effect.

A word is here in order concerning my 1951 book about the occupation, which was widely reviewed, often favorably. The New York Times, for example, selected the book for its list of “Outstanding Books of 1951.” A Japanese language version was published by Bungei Shunju and immediately made the Yomiuri best-seller list.

Forty years later, as I re-read my book, I see many things that I would change -- which is hardly surprising, considering that the book was the first scholarly publication of any kind that I had ever written.

First off, I would change the ill-chosen title: Failure in Japan, which is only somewhat redeemed by the sub-title, With Keystones for a Positive Policy.

However, I am still glad I wrote that book. It said some things about the occupation that I still believe needed to be said at that point in history. And Yes, it did criticize General MacArthur, who, I believed and still believe, needed to be criticized on some scores. And it did criticize U.S. foreign policy, which had reversed our policy of deconcentrating the zaibatsu’s (moneyed clique’s) economic holdings, and vitiated other policies in ways that I still think were not appropriate.

But now that a post-occupation history has accumulated, now that
a more tempered judgment can be rendered, let me speak as an anthropologist and say that, in an overall sense, I think the Occupation was -- as occupations go -- anthropologically well conducted. Let me speak as a philosophical democrat and say that the occupation was an epochal contribution to world democracy. And let me speak as a member of the human species and say that the occupation was, on the whole, humane. Yes, the occupation was a success!

Finally: however much I may have disagreed with him at the time, let me add my conviction that the record of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur as Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers serves well to remind us of the social truth that situations do from time to time arise in which a single individual can significantly influence history. General MacArthur showed far greater wisdom and effectiveness than most other American leaders, civilian or military, of the sort that might have been given his assignment, probably would or could have shown. He achieved clear and definite success in an unprecedented undertaking. He holds a high place in Japanese history -- indeed, a unique one. He deserves that place.

And he deserves honor in our memory.
Bob Textor ’40 (on right) and Mike Habermann ’41 discuss various issues over lunch in the Dining Hall during Alumni Weekend.
David Sokol is the Chairman of the Board and CEO of MidAmerican Energy Holdings Co. (a Midwestern utility owned by Berkshire Hathaway Inc.) and CEO of NetJets. Mr. Sokol, a past Blair parent and Trustee, has held a number of positions in the independent power industry and founded a waste-to-energy company in the 1980s. He holds a B.S. degree in civil engineering from the University of Nebraska, Omaha. Mr. Sokol is often mentioned as a likely successor to Warren Buffett at Berkshire (May 3, 2010 edition of The Wall Street Journal).

Mr. Sokol was the featured speaker at Blair’s Herman Hollerith Lecture on Entrepreneurship on April 20. (The series is named for entrepreneur and engineer Herman Hollerith.) The memorable lessons for students were many: Don’t obsess over admission to the elite colleges, there are a wide variety of fine schools in the US and abroad; Blair students may be handicapped by prosperity and excessive materialism (relative poverty promotes motivation); and integrity, even above intelligence and hard work, is the critical variable for predicting meaningful success in business. In sum, David Sokol challenged the students in a special way. He distributed his book *Pleased, But Not Satisfied* to those who remained after the lecture for extended discussion. Enjoy the foreword by Warren Buffett, and two chapters by David himself, excerpted from his book.
Before reading a how-to book on any subject, it’s important to examine the credentials of the author. What Ted Williams writes in The Science of Hitting should be taken seriously by would-be sluggers. If I were to pen a book on that subject, it would make no sense for anyone to go beyond the first page. With an occasional exception – after all, you don’t have to be dead to write a praiseworthy obituary – some successful accomplishments in the field should precede teaching.

Dave Sokol scores at the top in this respect. He brings the business equivalent of Ted Williams’ .406 batting average to the field of business management.

I know this because I’ve had a front-row seat for eight years, watching him manage MidAmerican Energy. There he has negotiated and executed a variety of successful acquisitions and led his many operating companies to outstanding financial performances. In the process, these companies have delighted their customers and met – indeed, often exceeded – the expectations of their regulators. All this was done by consistent application of the business principles he sets forth in this book.

I believe deeply in the business attitude he learned from Walter Scott – after each success, be “pleased, but not satisfied.” But I have a small confession to make: by the standards of personal behavior and his value to Berkshire Hathaway, I am more than pleased and fully satisfied by all the experiences I have had with Dave.
Over the years, I have enjoyed teaching a management and leadership course to our executive team and the high-potential managers who have been identified through our succession planning process. This course has evolved to include our ever-expanding range of experiences, but the fundamentals of successful business management have remained the same. Given this reality, I felt it was useful to commit these fundamentals to writing in order to use them more effectively and share their value more broadly.

While Pleased, but Not Satisfied is the title of this book, it is much more than a title. In reality, it is a state of mind, recognition that the job of running a business or a department is a journey never finished. Additionally, in today's fast-paced, globally connected business environment, it is enormously important to emphasize that business basics are still fundamental to creating value in an enterprise. While business journalists constantly bombard us with headlines about the latest private equity fund, hedge fund or hybrid security, conservative economic analysis and disciplined, detailed management practices are the keys to creating long-term value.

In order to effectively understand my perspective, it is worthwhile spending a short time discussing my background, as well as the various individuals who have impacted my thought process and from whom many of the lessons in this book ultimately flow.

I was born in 1956 in middle America in Omaha, Nebraska, the youngest of five wonderful brothers and sisters. We were a close lower-middle-income family with a strong work ethic that clearly flowed from our parents. My mother was a stay-at-home mom whose family was her first and constant priority. My father was a man of high integrity who would gladly help you whenever needed. However, he would not do your job for you.

I can remember when I was 10 or 11 years old and desperately wanted to build a go-cart. My dad encouraged me to save my money to buy four matching wheel and two rods for axles. He further encouraged me to make a list of the other parts I would need, such as lumber, a steering wheel and so on, then to spend time looking for them whenever possible. After several weeks, I accumulated all the necessary bits and pieces, including the all-important wheels. But when I announced to Dad that I was ready to build the go-cart, to my dismay he responded, "Well go ahead and build it. I am not going to do it for you!" To say
the least, I was not pleased. I knew he could build it much more quickly than I could, and hopefully, I could use it right away.

But off to the garage I went to build the go-cart myself. Many hours and several bruises later, its maiden voyage down the driveway was a disaster. Two wheels and several parts fell off less than 10 feet down the hill. As I picked up the pieces and dragged the disabled go-cart back up the hill, I noticed Dad watching from the window. Back in the garage, he appeared and asked, “What do you think went wrong?” Following a few comments under my breath, I said I wasn’t sure. He then helped me identify the problems and remedy them. That was his way of teaching. Try first. Show me you care enough to try. Then I will help you.

I learned a great deal from Dad through his demonstrated work ethic and his extraordinary perceptive skills. He was a country boy with only a high school education, but he was anything but ordinary.

As a fairly rambunctious child with a love of sports, I often found myself bruised and mildly in trouble. Back then, they said I was “bored” or “inquisitive,” but Mom and Dad always encouraged me to try new things. One comment Dad made has always stuck with me. He said, “David, good judgment comes from bad experiences. But you don’t need to have all those experiences yourself. Watch and observe others’ mistakes, so you do not repeat them.”

Another wonderful thing about my dad was his clear and absolute belief that we were lucky to have been born in America. Having fought in World War II, he believed to his bones that the freedoms we enjoy are gifts from God that must never be taken for granted. Sunday meals often revolved around stories of great accomplishments by determined men and women throughout our society. His message was simple and clear. In America, if you work hard and are determined, you can be successful. It was a great foundation for a young man.

I attended a Catholic grade school and a public high school, balancing my time between sports, work and school – with the latter usually squeezed by the other two. My grades were poor in elementary school, better in high school and decent in college. I attended the University of Nebraska at Omaha and earned a Bachelor of Science...
degree in civil engineering. I married Peggy during my junior year in college, and we soon had two wonderful children, Kelly and David, Jr. Peggy could best be described as the Mother of the Century. Through Peggy’s tireless efforts, Kelly and DJ excelled in their school work, actively participated in various sports, learned to view life as being filled with endless possibilities and fully developed their compassion toward all people, irrespective of their backgrounds.

My business career has been impacted enormously by six individuals – Abe Baker, Charles Durham, Ralph Ablon, Walter Scott, Jr., Greg Abel and Warren E. Buffett.

Abe Baker was the owner and president of Baker’s grocery store chain in Omaha. I started as a part-time clerk at Baker’s while in high school and worked my way up to night/evening manager while I was in college. Baker’s was a great place to work for several reasons. First, it was a clear meritocracy. The harder you worked, the faster you were promoted. Second, they paid a significant amount of your college tuition if you worked a minimum number of hours per week and achieved at least a B average. Perhaps most important, you learned to deal with customers, marketing, warehousing and the importance of attention to detail.

Mr. Baker was well-known for his focus on customer satisfaction and attention to detail. He taught me a lifelong lesson about customer satisfaction one Thursday night when I was the evening manager. I was called to a check stand to approve a return from a customer. As I approached, I recognized the customer as a woman who for each of the past several weeks had returned a quarter-pound of fat purportedly from a 10- or 12- pound high-end roast. Each time, she claimed the roast was no good and demanded her money back. It was clear that no one could be consistently that unlucky, and so I explained to her that I could not continue to refund her money. She was clearly unhappy with my decision and stormed out of the store. Certain I had done the right thing, I went on with my work and forgot the incident. A week later, when I was checking in to work, there was a note on my time card to immediately go to Mr. Baker’s office. I had no idea why I was being summoned, but I knew that very few positive surprises came from such a note. As I entered Mr. Baker’s office, he kindly asked me to be seated and began talking about the complaint he had received from the woman with the bad roast. Assuming that I could quickly clear up the incident, I explained to Mr. Baker that the woman was obviously lying about the roasts being bad, and therefore I put an end to it. I could tell from his expression that I was not very persuasive. He held up a copy of the Sokol
Baker’s supermarkets slogan: “The Customer Is Always Right!” Then he asked me which part of this customer commitment did I not understand. Stupidly, I once again tried to explain. But he stopped me and said, “David, I know she was lying. She’s been doing it for a long time. But the other customers who heard you didn’t know she was lying. They just knew that our slogan doesn’t mean a damn thing!” Then he said, “Son, you’re a find young man, and you do a good job for us, but if you ever fail to honor our customer commitment again, you will have to leave.” Message received. It had never dawned on me that other customers may have heard my conversation with the woman about her roast. My actions, while well intended, sent an unacceptable message that contradicted the hallmark of the Baker’s Supermarket chain, I have never taken a customer interaction for granted since.

After graduating from the University of Nebraska at Omaha in 1978, I left Baker’s and joined the architectural engineering firm of Henningson, Durham and Richardson (HDR), which was led by Mr. Charles Durham. While I was only at HDR for four years, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to get to know Mr. Durham, or Chuck, as he was known, quite well. Chuck had grown HDR from a small regional form to one of America’s largest and most successful architectural engineering companies. He was driven and accepted no nonsense, but he was exceedingly fair. After about a year and a half with HDR, I was asked to join a new division of the firm that was focused on “independent engineering analysis.” We provided independent technical, contractual and business assessments to clients interested in third-party analyses of new technologies or business initiatives. Our clients were often investment bankers or commercial banks who were considering loans to such endeavors and wanted outside, unbiased views of the undertakings.

This opportunity fit me like a glove. I was given the chance to not only look at pure engineering questions, but also environmental permitting considerations, construction estimates, financial structures, accounting issues and operational questions. Would the market develop for product? What about competition? This was a virtual MBA program in action, and I loved every minute of it. I was very fortunate to have Mr., Durham as a mentor.

I have never taken a customer interaction for granted again
through this period, and he remains a close friend to this day.

My next opportunity arose from my work at HDR. While working for a client I had met through my independent engineering work, I was offered the chance to develop a business in the waste-to-energy field, utilizing a technology I had researched extensively at HDR. I could not have been more excited to have the opportunity to start a business from the ground up, and I felt particularly lucky for it to be in a field I thoroughly understood. The company was called Ogden Projects, Inc. and the parent was Ogden Corporation, which provided the venture capital for this startup. We were fortunate to get off to a running start with our first project in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and a second project three months later in Salem, Oregon. Soon, we went from a dozen employees to more than a thousand, and it was clear that our little business was creating a considerable value for Ogden Corporation.

By 1989, only six years after a standing start, Ogden Projects, Inc. had become a billion-dollar corporation with a very bright future. I could not have been more proud when Ralph Ablon, chairman and CEO of Ogden Corporation suggested that we take my subsidiary public. The public offering was a great success. It demonstrated that Ogden’s startup of this business was a wise decision and that substantial value had been created for the parent corporation’s shareholders. All seemed to be perfect. Here I was, 32 years old and CEO of a New York Stock Exchange company. The public response to our company was tremendous and our future plans held great promise. Then, a real dose of the ugly side of human nature showed up.

First, let me explain that several years prior to the firm’s going public, Mr. Ablon had elevated me to co-president (in hindsight, a ridiculous title) with this son Richard as the other co-president of Ogden Corporation. I ran my business and Richard ran the food services and aviation fuel businesses. While going public was a great experience and significant recognition for our team’s hard work, it had one unintended consequence – it exposed quite clearly how unappealing the other Ogden businesses were. Within 12 months, I was bought out of my contract and asked to leave rather unceremoniously after,
as a board member, I refused to vote in favor of several ill-conceived acquisitions proposed by Richard. It became clear that Mr. Ablon placed family interests well ahead of shareholders’ interests and that bad decision making consistently resulted from poor analysis and even worse execution. In fairness, I acknowledge that Mr. Ablon gave me an enormous opportunity. He supported me at every turn until 1989, when his vision seemed to become blurred by nepotism. By forcing me out of the business, Mr. Ablon allowed me to move on and execute the business plan that has become today’s MidAmerican Energy Holding Company. Ogden Corporation, subsequently renamed Covanta, filed for bankruptcy in 2002, following many years of poor operational execution compounded by terrible acquisitions.

On a positive note, virtually the only assets of value that emerged from the Ogden bankruptcy were the Ogden Projects power plants, which are still operating successfully. Another positive from this experience was my enormous good fortune in meeting Walter Scott, Jr. who was the chairman and CEO of Peter Kiewit Sons’, Inc., in Omaha. Kiewit is one of the world’s premier construction companies and it is employee-owned. Through my relationship with Mr. Scott and the extraordinary performance of the Kiewit team, we built a number of waste-to-energy facilities throughout the United States.

Within weeks of my leaving Ogden in October 1990, Mr. Scott called to inquire about my interest in continuing to grow a business in the energy field. When I replied that my interest remained strong, he said, “So get back here to Omaha, and let’s get something started!” That phone call and my partnership with Mr. Scott led to what has become MidAmerican Energy Holdings Company. From the beginning, Mr. Scott was the largest individual shareholder in MidAmerican. Today, he is second only to Berkshire Hathaway. He is a man of complete integrity and enormous business wisdom. With all his successes, he remains one of the most compassionate men I have ever met.

One of the many lessons I have learned from Walter is that business, like life, is a journey, not a destination. There is always something new. There is always a better way. And the sun always comes up tomorrow. Deeply embedded in my every thought process is a saying Mr. Scott uses often, which he credits to Peter Kiewit, his predecessor. When reviewing the results of an expansion, a completed power plant or perhaps the year-end financials, Mr. Scott is often heard to say, “I am pleased, but not satisfied.” If I leave you no other wisdom, make this statement part of your basic business philosophy.
In addition to Walter, I have been fortunate to have two other extraordinary business partners – Greg E. Abel and Warren E. Buffett. Greg joined MidAmerican in 1992 with an accounting background, but his broader business acumen and unequaled understanding of operations enabled him to rise rapidly to our company’s presidency. He is a great communicator, highly perceptive and a pleasure to partner with. His friendship has been unparalleled during my own periods of crisis over these past 15 years. We think alike in many ways, and we feel free to challenge each other until we agree on a course of action. I learn from Greg every day.

In 1996, having had the opportunity to run a public company for approximately 10 years, I began to grow weary of the excessive focus public equity markets placed upon quarterly earnings. While I am a strong believer in measuring every aspect of our business against our plans in order to ensure the successful achievement of our goals or to recognize when corrective actions are necessary, I also know that equity analysts’ unrealistic focus on short-term performance can cause management to make poor long-term decisions.

By the fall of 1999, I had concluded that the public market had been rewarding bad behavior by many of our competitors, Enron being an obvious example. I was hopeful that we could find a way to go private, although I was unwilling to severely leverage our company in a traditional leveraged buyout fashion. Following a board meeting at which I was authorized to look into going private, Mr. Scott recommended that we sit down with Mr. Warren E. Buffett. Within six months, Berkshire Hathaway owned essentially 80 percent of MidAmerican, with Mr. Scott, Greg and me owning the remainder. A better decision has never been made.

Operating as a subsidiary of Berkshire Hathaway for the past eight years has been an extraordinary experience. There is little I can say about Mr. Buffett or Berkshire that hasn’t been said already by many others. A large portion of our success stems from what we call the Berkshire halo, which opens doors to many opportunities. Warren has created a perfect haven for businesses that want to grow in a sensible manner. Berkshire Hathaway companies avoid the public market pressure of quarterly earnings guidance, fads or short-term trade-offs.

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**Warren has created a perfect haven for businesses that want to grow in a sensible manner.**

grow weary of the excessive focus public equity markets placed upon quarterly earnings. While I am a strong believer in measuring every aspect of our business against our plans in order to ensure the successful achievement of our goals or to recognize when corrective actions
versus long-term superior results. Warren creates a climate for business managers akin to playing in the Pro Bowl, but where individual performance takes a back seat to team performance. There are no most valuable player awards, just the satisfaction of being among the best in the world. Warren is a kind and considerate man who genuinely cares about people. He is as soundly based in the fundamentals of business as any human in history. All of us at MidAmerican are honored to be a part of Berkshire Hathaway.

The final and most compelling influences on my life and business philosophies were and are my son, David L. Sokol Junior or DJ, as we knew him, and my daughter, Kelly. DJ exemplified courage, kindness, tenacity and compassion in everything he did. He taught me to “chill out” and see the good in every person. His ambitions and dreams made tomorrow more exciting because of what he might accomplish. He died 13 days after his 18th birthday, on June 11, 1999, following a three-and-a-half-year fight with cancer. Kelly, DJ’s older sister, has been a dynamo since birth. She possesses a very high intellect, enormous energy and a kind heart. She and her husband, Clark, an outstanding young man, recently brought our first grandchild into the world, Lucille Adelaide Avery, or Lucy, as we know her.

My experience as a member of a normal family growing and struggling to create and mold an uncertain future have played a significant role in who I am as a person and as a chief executive officer. DJ taught me about strength of will and courage. His tragedy reinforced one of the world’s great realities – life is not fair and no one ever promised that is would be. Life is a journey, a journey that only lasts a short time. Yet each of us has the freedom to shape this journey, and to a great extent, we can mold it to our liking. The key is to focus on the things we can meaningfully affect and to spend as little time as possible trying to change those things we cannot control.
Over the past 30 years in business, I have witnessed or worked with many enormously talented individuals. I have been asked numerous times what I believed set many of these people apart in their field, given so many talented individuals in the world. To answer this question, it is important to recognize that there are very few individuals like Warren Buffett and Bill Gates, who are blessed with inherent skills and capabilities that most humans will never duplicate, no matter how hard they try. In some ways, they are like Tiger Woods of Albert Einstein, in that they were blessed with a set of abilities that hard work has turned into extraordinary talent. Let’s set those few individuals aside, and talk about the rest of us.

As I have observed intelligent, passionate people of high integrity over the years, I consistently have found that four traits seem to get them noticed and recognized. 1. They always give at least 110 percent to everything they do. 2. They have a professional manner about them. 3. They trust and listen to their instincts. 4. They accept responsibility and accountability for their actions.

Early in my career, I recognized that I was not always the smartest individual in the groups I worked in, but I had a driving fear of failure that caused me to always give 110 percent no matter what the task was. I would come in earlier, stay later and do whatever I could to create a better result in whatever I was assigned to do. Early on, I think this was because I figured if I worked harder, I at least would be the last person to go if such an eventuality occurred. But it wasn’t long before I realized that I was getting noticed and being asked to take on more and more responsibility. Commensurately, I received greater opportunity. I also realized the benefit that those to whom you gave 110 percent support became career-long cheerleaders who wanted you to succeed. Without question, you occasionally will come across a small-minded person who will try to hold you back or be jealous of your success. But these people usually are of little consequence. Over the years, many people have insinuated to me that I have been lucky in my career. Indeed, I have been lucky in a myriad of ways. The truth is, luck is equal parts preparation and hard work. It is amazing how much luckier you will become if you approach every day well-prepared and willing to outwork the competition.

When someone gives 110 percent all the time, he or she is a...
pleasure to work with. And I have enjoyed watching, identifying and guiding such individuals in their career growth.

Consistently performing at the 110 percent level will begin to set you apart quickly from the average person. But there are other, equally important differentiators that require more introspection into your personality traits and tendencies. Think of these differentiators as proper professional mannerisms. At the outset, these mannerisms must be genuine and sincere or they will be of no value to you. They require you to check your personal ego in your bathroom mirror at home and leave it there. Let me be clear about what I mean regarding your personal ego. The personal ego is the part of us that makes us arrogant and conceited and gives us the mistaken belief that we are better, in whole than others around us. You’re not better, and I am not better and neither is anyone else. We all were born into this world as humans. Each of us is subject to the many unknowable and unforeseeable vagaries of life, which we do not control, such as disease, earthquakes or a drunken driver. We may have been more or less fortunate, born into poverty or affluence, or live in a democracy or dictatorship. Fifty percent of the world’s population (3 billion-plus people) survive each day on less than $2 per person. We may have been given certain talents, such as the ability to compose music, educate young people or explore

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quire more introspection into your personality traits and tendencies. Think of these differentiators as proper professional mannerisms. At the outset, these mannerisms must be genuine and sincere or they will be of no value to you. They require you to check your personal ego in your bathroom mirror at home and leave it there. Let me be clear about what I mean regarding your personal ego. The personal ego is the part of us that makes us arrogant and conceited and gives us the mistaken belief that we are better, in whole than others around us. You’re not better, and I am not better and neither is anyone else. We all were born into this world as humans. Each of us is subject to the many unknowable and unforeseeable vagaries of life, which we do not control, such as disease, earthquakes or a drunken driver. We may have the cosmos. However, on the bottom line, we did not get to choose our parents, our place of birth or the skills we would possess. Therefore, feelings of superiority are baseless and lead to many of the problems in our world today.

Unlike a personal ego, a professional ego can be acceptable within reasonable boundaries. You should be proud of your professional skill base and your efforts to constantly achieve greater proficiency in maximizing your skills. If one doesn’t care about being good and getting better at what he or she does, then one rapidly will become mediocre. Continually striving to be better at your chosen field does not mean you are superior to other humans. It just means you are a great accountant, engineer, musician or businessperson. Professional ego – OK; personal ego – not OK.
With the aforementioned understandings, I believe that the key professional mannerisms that set people apart are grounded in a fundamental respect for everyone they deal with.

Be early or on time for meetings.
Be courteous to everyone.
Be respectful of other people’s time.
Be honest and candid in our communications.

These traits are relatively straightforward, but worthy of discussion. In my view, early is on time, on time is late and late is inexcusable. Why? Because when you are late, you fundamentally are telling the other parties to the meeting or occasion that your time is more valuable than theirs. That attitude is simply and obviously disrespectful. Meeting your commitments on time or early is equally important. If you are asked to produce a report by June 10, and you accept the request, you must deliver it on time or early. Why? Because you committed to do so, and the party making the request will be setting time aside to review the report. If you are late, you have failed on your commitment and negatively affected those expecting you to deliver. Schedules and commitments matter – always!

Given that we are eliminating our personal ego issues, it’s obvious that we should be courteous to everyone we encounter, whether the person is a maintenance technician, an executive assistant, a grocery clerk or the president of a company. First of all, everyone deserves to be treated courteously. Second, you likely will meet everyone you encounter in life at least three times. People are likely to remember how you treated them.

Being respectful of other people’s time means that, in addition to being on time for a meeting, you are properly prepared for the meeting. It means that, in addition to delivering a work product on schedule, you make it your best work so you don’t waste someone else’s time correcting your typos or mistakes. You should assume that the other participants in the meeting will be evaluating you, your preparation or your work product in each instance. Do not leave a poor impression.

Respecting others means treating them the way you would like to be treated. This can be understood by recognizing that we would like our boss, customer or associate to communicate with us in an honest and candid fashion so we can understand their expectations and endeavor to fulfill them. As such, remember always to provide the same courtesy to others. Soft-selling, misleading or indirect communications never are useful, and they virtually always lead to exacerbating problems and delaying the recognition of the inevitable reality. Be candid, honest and forthright, and nobody
will have to guess where you are coming from.

God has given each of us a more subtle set of tools to use in life, but we often are unsure of their existence or their accuracy. They are the instincts and perceptive skills that exist in us and grow stronger with life’s experiences and their utilization. Unfortunately, many people do not realize their existence or trust their value. And they are making a mistake. These instincts and skills, when augmented by hard work, can significantly enhance one’s ability to make sound decisions. I have known a great many, very smart people who struggle making decisions. They have all the necessary data in front of them, but they can’t pull the trigger. Often, I believe, they even know the correct decision but just can’t bring themselves to execute on it. Then, when someone else suggests the same decision and gets credit for it, the first person feels as though he or she was not noticed.

This kind of paralysis is most often manifested in personnel decisions. To be fair, personnel deci-
sions always are difficult and should involve great consideration, given the impact they have upon the individuals involved. But delaying the inevitable, whether a promotion or a firing, is never useful or helpful to the individual. I recently experienced this lack of decision-making capability when I was mentoring a young CEO. He had seven executives reporting to him, and prior to my meeting any of them, I asked the CEO to rank each one on a scale of 1 to 10. A ranking of one meant the executive should be terminated, and a ranking of 10 meant the executive was as good as it gets. In ranking these seven individuals, he gave one a 2.5, one a 5 and the rest a ranking of 6.5 or 8. I then had the opportunity to meet and spend time with all seven executives. I agreed with the 2.5 ranking, thought the 5 was overrated and generally agreed with the other rankings. When I sat down with the CEO and compared my rankings to his, I asked him about Mr. 2.5. The CEO told me he was planning to terminate him in eight to 12 months. Why wait? When I pointed out the obvious ridiculousness of waiting to terminate Mr. 2.5, the CEO without hesitation agreed to remove him the next week. When I pointed out my concerns with Mrs. 5, the CEO said he wanted to take that under advisement, but her agreed the person was weak and probably in the wrong job. Three weeks later he removed Mrs. 5.

Decision paralysis was a consistent problem for the CEO in other elements of his business. He knew what needed to be done. He had the data, but he wouldn’t pull the trigger until it was nearly too late. Such a lack of decision-making comfort is almost always fatal for a CEO, whose job is based upon the need to make informed and timely decisions.

The last trait that sets individuals apart in a most positive fashion is the willingness to accept responsibility and accountability for a given assignment. Many times, people want responsibility, but they shun the accountability that comes with it. “I deserve the title of project manager” might be heard from a young engineer. However, that same engineer might be unwilling to accept the time, travel or performance commitments that accompany such a title. Individuals who ignore titles...
and commit themselves to being accountable and responsible virtually always are noticed and promoted.

We recently had an excellent example of such a situation. A group of poorly informed but well-meaning citizens chose to cause a special community election to challenge the extension of one of our franchise agreements. We felt that the election would be difficult to win, given the David and Goliath approach the citizen group had taken. We were having an internal meeting discussing this situation among perhaps 10 team members, when it was suggested that we needed a point person to plan and execute our information campaign. It was acknowledged to be an uphill battle, and success in the election would be anything but assured. We discussed the proposed budget and tactics at length, and then I asked for a volunteer to take on the challenge. Interestingly, only one hand emerged, and it was the hand of one of the more junior members of the team. Some thought the decision to appoint Christy to lead this effort was ill-conceived, given her lack of political experience. I could tell from the look in her eye when her hand went up that she knew what she was getting into and was prepared to be accountable. She did an outstanding job and won the election soundly. Equally important, she did so on budget and in a positive and image-enhancing way for our company. Frankly, while the victory was great, I never really expected to win the election. All I was hoping for was a good showing with no damage to our reputation. Christy knocked the ball out of the park. Why did she run the risk of raising her hand? First of all, she really did not feel it was a risk. She knew it was an important issue for the company and that someone needed to run the effort professionally and effectively. She also knew that, while winning would be great, all we really wanted was the great effort she was prepared to give. In her mind, there was opportunity, not risk.

Accepting accountability and responsibility always is an opportunity, and it gets you noticed. Those who say they want responsibility but try to avoid the accountability that goes with it almost always get noticed as well, but for the wrong reason.

Give 110 percent all the time. Treat people respectfully. Trust and nurture your instincts. Accept accountability and responsibility. And you will get noticed and recognized.
Dave Sokol takes time to meet with students and answer questions after his Skeptics presentation.