

THE SHIITE GALLOWS

To taunt and curse a condemned man who is about to meet his Maker is one of the lowest forms of human depravity. The practice, commonly associated with lynching, brings to mind the quasijudicial bestialities of Dzerzhinsky and Roland Freisler's Volksgerichtshof, Parisian *tricoteuses*, and various ethno-tribal atrocities down through the ages.

The hanging of Saddam Hussein in the early hours of December 30 evoked all of the above. The vindictive gloating of his executioners, clad in black leather jackets and balaklava helmets like members of a death squad, was captured on a clandestine camera. They shouted, "Go to hell!" as the deposed dictator stood on the gallows with the noose around his neck. Hardly audible above the uproar, but standing erect and composed, Saddam responded by condemning the "traitors" and the "gallows of shame." An official was heard appealing for calm, but the Shiite guards and witnesses responded by chanting, "Moqtada! Moqtada! Moqtada!"—the name of the radical Shiite cleric whose private militia has killed hundreds of Sunni Arabs and whose supporters are believed to have infiltrated Iraq's security services. "Moqtada," Saddam replied, smiling contemptuously. "Is this how real men behave?"

The mayhem continued through the execution itself. A shout of "The tyrant has fallen! May Allah curse him!" was heard as Saddam's body swung lifeless, his neck broken and his eyes popped out. On balance, as the *New York Times* has noted, Saddam—a mass murderer—appeared dignified and restrained, and his executioners, representing the Shiites who were his principal victims, looked like bullying street thugs.

It was an ugly spectacle but worthy of the judicial process preceding it. Its integrity was compromised from the outset when Ahmad Chalabi, now disgraced but still on the Iraqi Governing Council at the time of the former dictator's capture, made the unambiguous statement, "Saddam will be punished for his crimes": He did not qualify the statement with "if found guilty," and he did not have a jail sentence in mind. Mouwafak al-Rabii, a Shiite member of the council, added that Saddam should be "resurrected

hundreds of times and killed again."

The trial itself was as good as their word. Rules for presenting evidence and introducing witnesses were improvised in a manner reminiscent of The Hague Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Political interference in the case never stopped: One presiding judge resigned in protest after being accused by the government of excessive leniency to the accused, and another was summarily fired by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki for the same reason. The court's independence was further undermined by the lack of protection for defense witnesses and lawyers, several of whom were killed by persons unknown but widely assumed to be connected to Moqtada and the Shiite-dominated Interior Ministry. Even the upholding of the death sentence was announced by Mouwafak al-Rubaie, Iraq's national-security advisor, before the appeals court itself had a chance to do so.

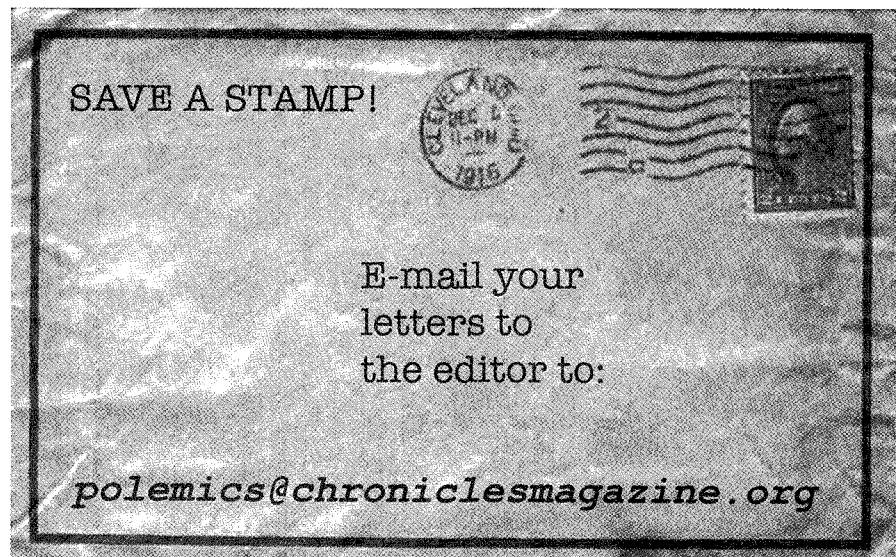
In the final week of December, Al-Maliki violated a series of constitutional, legal, and religious norms to ensure a speedy execution. Iraq's constitution demanded the approval of the hanging by the three-man presidency council. Yet President Jalal Talabani—who opposes the death sentence on principle and who, as a Kurd, wanted to see Saddam tried for additional crimes against his people—refused to sign the decree upholding the sentence. In addition, a Saddam-era law stipulated that no executions can be carried out during the Eid al-Adha holiday, which began for Iraqi Sunnis on December 30, and for Shiites on December 31.

Al-Maliki "resolved" that problem by calling the *marjaiya*, the supreme religious council of Iraqi Shiites in Najaf. The ayatollahs duly decreed that the execution was in order.

In December 2003, at the time of Saddam's arrest, it was claimed in Washington that his trial by an Iraqi court would be "cathartic" and contribute to the country's stability. What the world witnessed instead, on December 30, was a scene paradigmatic of the country herself almost four years after "Operation Iraqi Freedom": a violent, lawless, hopelessly divided place that is doomed to sink deeper into a civil war.

Saddam's hanging will be remembered as a landmark event in the history of that war. The trial, and especially the execution, are now widely seen as Shiite revenge not only on Saddam but on his fellow Sunnis. The consequences are already clear. The sectarian strife is getting bloodier by the day, and a dignified American exit is even less likely than at this time last year. A viable exit strategy demands the development of a working rapport with Iraq's six million Sunnis, who provide the backbone of the insurgency. By seeing that they cannot expect fairness or justice from this or any other Shiite-dominated government, those Sunnis who have taken up arms will have their resolve stiffened; and many others will be more motivated than before to join their ranks.

Caught between the Sunni rock and the Shiite hard place—both of his own making—Mr. Bush has decided to throw



in his lot with the Shiite majority. His partners, Mr. Al-Maliki included, are steeped in an Islamic ideology that would make the late Ayatollah Khomeini proud. They are controlled from Tehran more effectively than anyone in Washington wants to admit. They can hardly believe their luck that American arms, blood, and treasure have given them what they could never hope to achieve on their own. In the meantime, the war will continue, and, although we do not know how it will end, we can predict with near certainty that the winner will be Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

—Srdja Trifkovic

CONSERVATIVES IN THE CREASE

Vice President Dick Cheney's lesbian daughter, Mary, found a way to impregnate herself so that she and her lover, Heather Poe, whom Mary met while playing ice hockey 15 years ago, can rear a child. Grandma is thrilled. "Dick and I both are very much looking forward to this new baby," said Lynne Cheney. Mary will be a "great mom." President Bush told *People* that he was happy to hear the "good news," adding, "I think Mary is going to be a loving soul to her child. And I'm happy for her."

So, it would seem, are *National Review's* John Podhoretz and Jonah Goldberg. When Concerned Women for America's Janice Crouse called Mary's behavior "unconscionable," Podhoretz huffed, "This is disgusting. The birth of a child is never unconscionable. Adults who say such things about the impending birth of children are." Goldberg, who has "for years" endorsed civil unions for homosexuals, agreed and one-upped Podhoretz's *non sequitur*: "Count me as a member of the Pod camp when it comes to Mary Cheney. . . . My guess is that Mary's kid will do better in life than Britney's."

Mary Cheney's pregnancy is a logical step in the career of a woman who has already run the homosexual-outreach program for Coors and published a memoir of her life as a lesbian Republican. Next, she will serve as vice president for advocacy at AOL.

Whatever her intentions, Mary's deviant behavior is nothing less than an attack on the institution without which society cannot survive—the family. We live in an age when that word requires definition. *Contra* Barbara Bush, a family is not whatever you want it to be. The un-

natural relationship of Mary and Heather is not a marriage. When the child is born, the three will not be a family. As Tolkien observed, evil cannot create; it can only mock.

The diabolical institution mocking conjugal unity and its purpose is the sperm bank, the likely source of Cheney's pregnancy. Like all of the post-Christian world's reproductive technologies, it is eugenic in nature and a thumbing of the nose at the divine plan for human procreation. That this plan is ordered to a natural end is made obvious in the mountain of data showing that a marriage built on mutual self-giving is the best environment for the mental and physical health of children. The plan is directed at a supernatural end as well: cooperation in the creative nature of God, which can only occur when the marital embrace is open to life.

The lesbian couple's need to use a sperm bank is a reminder of this divine plan: Two women are not equipped to bring life into the world. The fact that Mary Cheney still needed a man to become a mother has received scant attention from those heaping accolades on her for her courageous efforts on behalf of social progress.

That a father was required will become a matter of great concern, if only for Baby Cheney (or is it Baby Poe?), when the child realizes his household is abnormal. If he asks, Mary could tell him that he was the product of a gravely immoral laboratory procedure that allowed her and Miss Poe to realize their selfish desires.

She will not, of course. Nor will the proud grandparents, the President, or the editors of *National Review*. There is some chance the child will figure it out, however. Several days after Mary Cheney broke her happy news, a column appeared in the *Washington Post*. "My Father Was an Anonymous Sperm Donor" was written by Katrina Clark, a college freshman and one of 30,000 children who are conceived with the help of a sperm bank each year.

"When she was 32," wrote Katrina, "my mother allowed a doctor wearing rubber gloves to inject a syringe of sperm from an unknown man into her uterus so that she could have a baby. I am the result: a donor-conceived child." Then she exposes the horror of her existence. "[E]veryone focuses on the 'parents'—the adults who can make choices about their own lives. The recipient gets sympathy for wanting to have a child. The donor

gets a guarantee of anonymity and absolution from any responsibility for the offspring of his 'donation.' As long as these adults are happy, then donor conception is a success, right?"

"Not so. The children born of these transactions are people, too. . . . I'm here to tell you that emotionally, many of us are not keeping up. We didn't ask to be born into this situation, with its limitations and confusion. It's hypocritical of parents and medical professionals to assume that biological roots won't matter to the 'products' of the cryobanks' service, when the longing for a biological relationship is what brings customers to the banks in the first place."

Perhaps Mary Cheney's baby, as Jonah Goldberg predicts, will fare better than Katrina. After all, if he plays ice hockey, he will have no shortage of coaches.

—Christopher Check

IGNORING MANUFACTURING

Sen. Ted Kennedy's alleged "populism" and liberal policymakers' newfound embrace of states' rights are comic diversions in the ongoing debate surrounding the federal minimum wage. But the prize for most absurd should be awarded to Congress, which continues to give the American people the spectacle of political haranguing over an extra 70 cents per hour in wages in 2007. This, at a time when congressional leaders of both major parties continue to avoid the real issue: the loss of millions of jobs in a private-industry sector (manufacturing) where the average hourly earnings for nonsupervisory personnel in November were \$16.91 per hour, which amounts to triple the federal minimum wage.

U.S. manufacturing employment, since its most recent peak nearly nine years ago (March 1998), has declined by 3.4 million jobs, a loss of nearly one in five positions in the sector. In the current U.S. economic expansion, which started in November 2001, manufacturing employment has declined by nearly 1.7 million jobs, the greatest decline in an expansion in the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics time series, which dates to 1939. By contrast, manufacturing employment fell by 206,000 in the record ten-year expansion between March 1991 and March 2001. Losses this cycle have occurred in both Durable Goods and Non-Durable Goods Manufacturing. Some of the states hardest hit are in the industrial

North, where five states (Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois) have lost a combined 1.05 million manufacturing jobs since peaking before the 2001 recession. The losses, in historical terms, are unprecedented and have contributed to Republican electoral losses in these states, as voters conclude that existing economic policies are not working. In 1998, these five states, with the exception of Indiana, all had Republican governors. A complete reversal has occurred: Today, the Hoosier State is the only one headed by a Republican.

There is little in the way of policy proposals to suggest that Democrats will do any better, having taken control of Congress last month. Have they announced plans to address the flawed tax, regulatory, trade, fiscal, and monetary policies that have all played a role in manufacturing's problems, which started during the presidency of Bill Clinton? No, the Democrats' fast-track proposal, sponsored by Senator Kennedy, is a \$2.10 increase in the minimum wage over a three-year period, to \$7.25 per hour. The current standard of \$5.15 per hour has been in effect since September 1997, when it was increased from \$4.75. Republicans argued then that any increase would price

unskilled workers out of labor markets, an idea still debated by economists in academic journals. Eighteen states, however, now have minimum wages greater than the federal rate, leading Richard B. Freeman, a Harvard University labor economist, to tell the *New York Times* that "The left is uneasy about states' rights, but people are becoming more progressive at the local level. They can see what is happening to their neighbors, and they are more sympathetic toward the poor, whom they can also see." Kennedy told the *Times*, in a written statement, that "States have always been the laboratories of democracy, and I am proud of the leadership they have shown on this issue." He vows to continue pushing for a minimum greater than the \$7.25 per hour supported by congressional Democrats.

The irony is that another New Deal legacy has been undermined. The federal minimum wage has its origins in FDR's National Industrial Recovery Act (1933) and the Fair Labor Standards Act (1938). One of FDR's policy goals was to have the federal government establish a wage floor. The federal government no longer serves that role. Instead of looking to Washington, D.C., Kennedy and other liberals must look to the state of Wash-

ington, which has the highest minimum (\$7.63 per hour) in the United States.

—Greg Kaza

OBITER DICTA

Our poet this month is **Catharine Savage Brosman**, professor *emerita* of French at Tulane University and honorary research professor at the University of Sheffield. She has published numerous works of poetry and prose, including her latest, *Range of Light*, which is due from LSU Press in March.

Our cover art is provided by our interior artist, **George McCartney, Jr.** Mr. McCartney studied at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and received a bachelor's of art from the State University of New York at Geneseo. Since 1997, he has worked in various media in the fields of illustration, graphic design, and textiles. George currently resides in North Carolina with his wife, Kristin, and his son, William.

Our interior art is provided by **Melanie Anderson** and **Nicholas Garrie**. Mrs. Anderson, our designer, received her B.F.A. from Northern Illinois University. Mr. Garrie, who works in a variety of media, hails from Rockford.

Black Sea Sketches

BLACK SEA SKETCHES is a travel book written for serious travelers, including armchair travelers. Although the author may take an occasional swim or walk the beaches, the book is much more about the history and prehistory, the culture and the contemporary scene than about recreational opportunities. It is the kind of book you would want to read before or during your own travel in these fascinating countries.

The five countries—Ukraine, Rumania, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Georgia—often share military and economic history, but cultural contrasts abound: different alphabets and languages, different religions. While most of Ukraine, Rumania, Bulgaria, and Georgia embrace the Orthodox faith, Turkey is largely Muslim, as is part of the Crimean population. All five of the countries reflect, especially architecturally, the common past of ancient Greece and, most of them, of the later Genoan commercial empire.

Rising above the glittering monuments of the past, however, are the people Mills met and the stories of their lives, often of great courage under pressure and of generosity to a stranger and a traveler.

Comments about other works of William Mills

"William Mills' stories draw the reader deeply into the hearts and minds of men and women to reveal the essential nature of Man in a world governed by forces so primal there is no resisting their call, no mitigation of their judgment."

—Gordon Weaver

"Seldom have I found a contemporary poet so intensely and humanly convincing. Mills' voice is very near the fraternal and memorable sounds we all want to make, and say."

—James Dickey

Black Sea Sketches



William Mills

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Pigs Is Pigs

Politics is like the weather: No matter how blue in the face we talk ourselves, no matter how many virgins we sacrifice to Odin, our leaders do not improve, and the drought continues. The fates who determine the destinies of nations are no more obedient to our words than the little gods of wind and rain that ruin crops and spoil picnics. Every two years, an election cycle rolls through our part of the continent, and, like a late-summer low-pressure system that kicks up tornadoes, disrupts communications, and sends pigs and chickens into conniptions, this politicking raises our blood pressure and sours relations with friends and family—but nothing else.

From late summer until Election Day, my serene study of Gregory the Great's *Magna Moralia* or *Commentary on the Blessed Job* was interrupted by rumors of the political wars going on. Inevitably, I framed the issues in terms Saint Gregory might have understood. Poor Gregory (pope from 590 to 604) was caught between attacking barbarian Lombards and the unreliable Byzantine authorities who were supposed to protect Italy and the Church. What would Gregory think about the attacks we suffer from our own barbarians who threaten this ruined civilization (I mean, of course, the Democrats and other socialists) or, worse, the treachery of supposedly loyal allies, such as the emperor in Constantinople (or Washington, D.C.)? A Lombard is always a Lombard, I tell my friends, and a politician is always a politician. Our motto here is *Nolite confidere in principibus*, put not your trust in princes—particularly the princes who have to finance costly election campaigns.

One such interruption came from a wealthy caller who is still foolish enough to seek my advice. Though an octogenarian, he is still active in the business he founded; he is also a staunch conservative and, since the Goldwater campaign, a loyal Republican. The caller complained to me that George W. Bush has been an unmitigated disaster for the party and for the nation. Over the next two years, he insisted, our duty is to find a conservative third-party candidate to run against the evil Democrats and the just-as-evil leaders of the Stupid Party. In the midterm elections, however, he was voting straight-ticket Democrat just to teach the GOP a lesson.

Voting for the enemy is a foolish, maybe even a wicked, tactic—doing evil in the hopes that good may come of it—but I wonder, how many conservatives did something similar? My caller was not the only longtime Republican who told me he was voting for Democrats. Others took a more radical approach. My wife, from a staunch Republican background (I believe her parents voted for Herbert Hoover), picked whatever Green Party candidates were on the ballot. Here in Illinois, the Green Party gubernatorial candidate picked up 11 percent of the vote, mostly from frustrated members of the ruling parties. In Winnebago County, this socialist, as one Republican friend told me, got 24 percent.

The Democratic governor's administration is plagued by

scandal, but his Republican challenger, a cross between Hillary Clinton and a wolverine, was a close associate of former governor George Ryan, convicted not so long ago



on 18 counts of corruption. Sending governors to prison is one of Illinois' finest traditions, and the only one that connects us with the great state of Louisiana. The Land of Lincoln and Ryan and the Land of Long and Edwards are only outstanding examples of the American culture of political corruption. Corruption is the very lifeblood of party politics. In the best of times, the faction or party is, at best, "a conspiracy against the nation," as the Marquis of Halifax observed; in America today, the parties have taken the next step. They are, for the most part, criminal conspiracies.

Illinois voters could not possibly think that the demotion of Denny Hastert and the consequent promotion of Dick Durbin will do any real good. How could they? The Democrats voted to give the President the power to wage a war that some (if not all) of them knew was unjustifiable, and, as the war was mismanaged from the beginning and top officers were sacked, demoted, or disciplined for telling the truth, the Democrats were content to snipe at the President and the Miles Gloriosus he put in charge of the Department of Defense. At this stage of the game, they can only speak of a phased withdrawal without any consideration for the country we have ruined, for the damage being done to our prestige, or for the added risks our troops will run once we have given the insurgents the game plan. Do not ask me what to do. We said, some time before the war, what would happen if we invaded Iraq, and the fact that it has happened just as we predicted gives us no pleasure. We should have got out soon after we staged the pictures of the Iraqi flag coming down. Now, it is not so simple.

It would be nice to believe in the scenario that is being sketched out by some conservative Republicans in the aftermath of their much-needed defeat: The party has learned its lesson and, with a little effort, the policies of Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan will be restored. Moderate voters, confronted each night by the scary faces of Nancy Pelosi, Harry Reid, and Dick Durbin, will rally round the conservative flag. "First we take back the party; then we take back the country. All that is required is a return to basic Republican principles." I sincerely hope they are right, but there are considerable roadblocks on the road to reform.

Some alcoholics, stricken with the remorse that only a hangover can cause, quit drinking every morning, but after two beers at lunch and a few cocktails before dinner, they postpone their reform to a more convenient occasion. There may be more, though perhaps not better, reasons for going to bed drunk than