

August 31, 2010

Ed Morrissey kicks the day off with a rundown of Obama's self-congratulatory address on the US forces reduction in Iraq.

Yesterday, I wrote that Barack Obama had an opportunity to at least share a little credit for the close of combat operations in Iraq with George W. Bush, who wrote the plan for drawing down American troops in Iraq that Obama has followed to the letter, rather than go for Obama's repeatedly promised all-out 16-month retreat plan from 2007. If his [weekly address](#) is any indication, the American electorate will have to wait for some other opportunity for its Chief Executive to show a little class. ...

Total mentions of Bush: zero. Total mentions of victory: zero. Total mentions of "I" in speech: six...

Conrad Black, in the [National Review](#), takes an interesting walk through America's history to see where things went off track.

...The great U.S. economy, a stupefying engine of productivity and applied talent, became a mighty Ponzi scheme, as the whole nation, addicted to debt-paid instant gratification, spent the future on consumption and non-durable assets. Except for a few academic flakes, no one — business, government, academia, the financial press — saw what was coming. And so there is no obvious body of vindicated opinion to take over now; it is a terrible and vacuous crisis of leadership. And courage fled, arm-in-arm, with official judgment. The Congress and successive administrations ignored illegal immigration until border-state frictions made it an explosive issue, and have failed to address it seriously since. They ignored abortion, leaving it to the ill-qualified bench to determine when the unborn attain the rights of a person. They ignored income disparity, until the recession started to shrink the disparity by reducing everyone's net worth, and they ignore the debt bomb. Annual increases of \$750 billion to \$1.4 trillion in the money supply stretching forward a decade will destroy the currency and Weimarize America, and there is not a hint of an official preventive response. The Keynesian injection of spending has been shot, in a hare-brained stimulus package designed by cynical Democratic congressional-committee chairmen. The recession is still here, and most tax increases and spending reductions are hazardous to economic growth. No one leads and no one knows.

...What is needed is a colossal reorientation of the country away from consumption and toward investment, the cleaning out of the morass of the plea-bargain justice system and attendant vacuum cleaners of the legal and prison industries (and the gigantic fraud of the War on Drugs), drastic education reform, genuine health-care reform, a redefinition of U.S. national interests in the world to what is essential and defensible, and then restructured alliances to reflect shared interests. Until those issues are addressed, all talk of the American superpower is rubbish. Obama's is the fourth consecutive failed administration, and each succeeding one will make the festering problems more dangerous and difficult. As the problem is misdirection, not internal degeneracy or imperial overreach, it is a decline that will end in recovery, not a fall. It is like a non-terminal illness: America awaits a correct diagnosis, a curative plan, and a competent professional to supervise the recovery. ...

Jennifer Rubin comments on an article about Obama's unease with military aspects of the presidency.

It is not that we didn't know this before, but reading the [New York Times](#) — surely designed to be as favorable toward Obama as the reporter could possibly manage — one is left slack-jawed. Obama doesn't like being commander in chief, isn't good at it, and has relied [on] one tutor, Secretary of

Defense Robert Gates, who is leaving next year. The report should be read in full. But a few low-lights:

...Even as he draws down troops in Iraq, he has been abundantly willing to use force to advance national interests, tripling forces in Afghanistan, authorizing secret operations in Yemen and Somalia, and escalating drone strikes in Pakistan. But advisers said he did not see himself as a war president in the way his predecessor did. His speech on Tuesday is notable because he talks in public about the wars only sporadically, determined not to let them define his presidency.

A former adviser to the president, who like others insisted on anonymity in order to discuss the situation candidly, said that Mr. Obama's relationship with the military was 'troubled' and that he 'doesn't have a handle on it.' ...

...This was a man not only unprepared to be president but disposed to shirk the most important aspect of the job. It is a measure of his hubris and stubbornness that he has refused to, as Feaver succinctly puts it, "embrace" the role, that is, to commit in word and deed his full attention and effort to leading the country in war. He doesn't want to be a wartime president? Well, sorry — he is.

In [Contentions](#), [J.E. Dyer](#) discusses a strategy that he sees the Obami employing. Evelyn Gordon's [post](#) from Thursday highlights a Team Obama method that increasingly comes across as precious, annoying, and insidious. I'm not sure there's a single word to describe it, but it involves a sort of inversion by which the administration of policy conveniently supersedes the purpose and substance of policy. In some cases, obstacles are allowed to dictate outcomes as if the U.S. administration has no discretion over them. In other cases, [bureaucratic arcana](#) serve as dodges. And in others, like Obama's approach to Iran, procedural checklists are wielded as surrogates for policy, generating a kind of lottery in which we all watch to see what fate the procedures will eventually confer on us. ...

[George Will](#) writes that improving educational achievement for black children requires significant changes outside the classroom.

...Now, from the Educational Testing Service, comes a report about ["The Black-White Achievement Gap: When Progress Stopped,"](#) written by Paul E. Barton and Richard J. Coley. ...

...the ETS report says: "It is very hard to imagine progress resuming in reducing the education attainment and achievement gap without turning these family trends around -- i.e., increasing marriage rates, and getting fathers back into the business of nurturing children." And: "It is similarly difficult to envision direct policy levers" to effect that.

...Two decades have passed since Barton wrote "America's Smallest School: The Family." He has estimated that about 90 percent of the difference in schools' proficiencies can be explained by five factors: the number of days students are absent from school, the number of hours students spend watching television, the number of pages read for homework, the quantity and quality of reading material in the students' homes -- and, much the most important, the presence of two parents in the home. Public policies can have little purchase on these five, and least of all on the fifth.

In the [WSJ](#), [Eric Felten](#) writes about a Harvard professor in evolutionary psychology who thinks like a global warming scientist.

Harvard University announced last Friday that its Standing Committee on Professional Conduct had found Marc Hauser, one of the school's most prominent scholars, guilty of multiple counts of "scientific misconduct." The revelation came after a three-year inquiry into allegations that the professor had fudged data in his research on monkey cognition. Since the studies were funded, in part, by government grants, the university has sent the evidence to the Feds. ...

...Evolutionary psychologists tell elaborate stories explaining modern life based on the conditions and circumstances of our prehistoric ancestors—even though we know very little about those factors. ...

...Mr. Hauser had boldly declared that through his application of science, not only could morality be stripped of any religious hocus-pocus, but philosophy would have to step aside as well: "Inquiry into our moral nature will no longer be the proprietary province of the humanities and social sciences," he wrote. ...

...It's important to note that the Hauser affair also represents the best in science. When lowly graduate students suspected their famous boss was cooking his data, they risked their careers and reputations to blow the whistle on him. They are the scientists to celebrate. ...

The [Economist](#) has more on the Harvard problems, the associated charges and the consequences for science.

...So far, none of this constitutes conclusive evidence of fraud. Slapdash lab work is not the same as fabricating data and Harvard has kept mum about the precise nature of the charges, citing concerns about privacy. Many researchers, however, fear that this silence itself makes things worse—and not just for Dr Hauser and Harvard. The uncertainty about which of his results (for he has been a prolific researcher) are up to snuff means others in the field are finding it hard to decide what to rely on in their own work. And despite Dr Hauser's professed sole responsibility, a sizeable number of his present and former wards may unfairly be tainted by association.

At the least, then, Dr Hauser stands accused of setting the study of animal cognition back many years. Trying to discern an animal's thought processes on the basis of its behaviour is notoriously tricky and subjective at the best of times. Now, his critics fear, no one will take it seriously. As Greg Laden, one of Dr Hauser's former colleagues, laments in a blog, "the hubris and selfishness of one person can do more in the form of damage than an entire productive career can do in the way of building of our collective credibility." ...

Hot Air

[Obama: Iraq begins and ends with I, I, I](#)

by Ed Morrissey

Yesterday, I wrote that Barack Obama had an opportunity to at least share a little credit for the close of combat operations in Iraq with George W. Bush, who wrote the plan for drawing down American troops in Iraq that Obama has followed to the letter, rather than go for Obama's repeatedly promised all-out 16-month retreat plan from 2007. If his [weekly address](#) is any indication, the American

electorate will have to wait for some other opportunity for its Chief Executive to show a little class. Try to count all of the self-references as Obama sprains his shoulder through overly enthusiastic backpatting:

"On Tuesday, after more than seven years, the United States of America will end its combat mission in Iraq and take an important step forward in responsibly ending the Iraq war.

As a candidate for this office, I pledged I would end this war. As president, that is what I am doing. We have brought home more than 90,000 troops since I took office. We have closed or turned over to Iraq hundreds of bases. In many parts of the country, Iraqis have already taken the lead for security.

In the months ahead, our troops will continue to support and train Iraqi forces, partner with Iraqis in counterterrorism missions, and protect our civilian and military efforts. But the bottom line is this: the war is ending. Like any sovereign, independent nation, Iraq is free to chart its own course. And by the end of next year, all of our troops will be home."

Total mentions of Bush: zero. Total mentions of victory: zero. Total mentions of "I" in speech: six, including the three in the excerpt above.

And that promise to have all troops home at the end of 2011? It's certainly possible, although very unwise. The Iraqis still don't have much of an air force or navy, and it will take years to build both. They face pressures from Iran and Syria, and while their army can maintain internal security now, they won't be any match for Iran or Syria alone, let alone together, if the two countries decide to subjugate Baghdad. I'd put that promise in the easier-said-than-done category, where the promise to close Gitmo wound up. If we're not involved in combat operations, the political pressure to withdraw those forces drops to about the same level of class shown by Barack Obama in this address.

National Review

Decline, but Not Inevitable Decline

The U.S. is in deep but not irreversible trouble.

by Conrad Black

For decades, I have been a militant anti-declinist in terms of America's place in the world. The United States is a proud, determined, hard-working, talented, patriotic nation and people, and it is not over-extended in the manner of empires of the past that took over the lands of others and eventually collapsed under the weight of the over-ambitious hegemon. Thus came the twilight of all previous empires, from the Persian to the Russian, including several versions of the Chinese, and even the astounding nautical and commercial empire of Holland, built on the acumen and enterprise in the 17th century of scarcely a million avaricious and seafaring Dutch.

But the United States merely uprooted the native Americans (to make way for imported slaves, initially) and then swamped, thinned, or drove them into Canada before the riptide of settlers moving west. It had no interest in hanging on to Cuba, unfortunately for the Cubans, or the Philippines; President Cleveland was opposed even to accepting Hawaii as a territory; and the acquisition of Alaska by Pres. Andrew Johnson was seen as a "folly" for decades. There is no immutable or irresistible force of history ringing down the curtain on America. Yet the country is in decline. It is not logical and is certainly not irreversible, but that is not entirely relevant, because it is happening anyway.

The half-century from 1939 to 1989 was a golden American strategic age, though the execution deteriorated after the early Sixties. The defeat of the Nazis and Japanese imperialists — with the

Russians taking most of the casualties; Germany, France, Italy, and Japan joining the West as flourishing democratic allies; and the Soviets being compensated with rather second-rate and restive strategic acquests — was followed by the containment of Communism, which caused the Soviet Union to implode and encouraged China to become a teeming hive of state capitalism, with no fire exchanged between the major protagonists.

As this was happening, the seeds of future problems were being scattered. The U.S. — dragging, by its magnetic influence, the whole Western world behind it — became a service economy, where comparatively little that was useful was actually produced or done, and a trillion dollars was spent annually in legal fees. Millions of unskilled laborers were allowed to enter the country illegally as millions of low-skilled jobs were outsourced. Trillions were borrowed from China and Japan to buy cheap manufactures from China, luxury goods from Japan and Western Europe, and oil at ever-rising prices and in steadily larger quantities, much of it from the chief sponsors of terrorism. Respected Federal Reserve chairmen and Treasury secretaries put the U.S. economy into a power dive, as the annual current-account deficit topped \$800 billion, the oil price bracketed \$100, gold (the canary in the mineshaft) shot over \$1,000, and, in pursuit of increased family homeownership, interest rates were brought and held down, saving eliminated, and trillions of dollars of worthless mortgage-related debt were issued, rated as investment grade, and peddled all over the world in an orgiastic St. Vitus's Dance.

The great U.S. economy, a stupefying engine of productivity and applied talent, became a mighty Ponzi scheme, as the whole nation, addicted to debt-paid instant gratification, spent the future on consumption and non-durable assets. Except for a few academic flakes, no one — business, government, academia, the financial press — saw what was coming. And so there is no obvious body of vindicated opinion to take over now; it is a terrible and vacuous crisis of leadership. And courage fled, arm-in-arm, with official judgment. The Congress and successive administrations ignored illegal immigration until border-state frictions made it an explosive issue, and have failed to address it seriously since. They ignored abortion, leaving it to the ill-qualified bench to determine when the unborn attain the rights of a person. They ignored income disparity, until the recession started to shrink the disparity by reducing everyone's net worth, and they ignore the debt bomb. Annual increases of \$750 billion to \$1.4 trillion in the money supply stretching forward a decade will destroy the currency and Weimarize America, and there is not a hint of an official preventive response. The Keynesian injection of spending has been shot, in a hare-brained stimulus package designed by cynical Democratic congressional-committee chairmen. The recession is still here, and most tax increases and spending reductions are hazardous to economic growth. No one leads and no one knows.

The bizarreries of modern American foreign policy began when the Kennedy-Johnson Democrats plunged into Vietnam, mismanaged the war, and insisted on inflicting a crushing defeat on America after Richard Nixon had brought a durable non-Communist South Vietnam within reach; and then, for good measure, they crucified Richard Nixon, the most successful president between Roosevelt and Reagan. Johnson allowed the USSR to pull even with the U.S. in nuclear arsenals, on the theory that this would facilitate serious arms-control discussions. It didn't. Nixon revived American superiority through technological advances, called "nuclear sufficiency," and arms control did make unprecedented progress at SALT 1. President Carter generously threw out America's greatest ally in the Middle East, the Shah of Iran, "like a dead mouse," in the words of his national-security adviser, and acknowledged that he had "learned a lot about" the Kremlin from Russia's invasion of Afghanistan. Having secured the grudging agreement of the Western Europeans to deployment of the neutron warhead, he then unilaterally declined to deploy it, which doubtless told the Kremlin (and our NATO allies) a lot about Jimmy Carter too.

Ronald Reagan produced the golden Indian summer of American grand strategy. His brilliant poker playing bankrupted the USSR with the non-nuclear SDI missile-defense concept, which was ridiculed on the U.S. center-left as an unworkable boondoggle (which was irrelevant since he didn't actually try to build it) and abhorrent to most of America's so-called allies, who wished the tightest possible strategic balance between the U.S. and the USSR to confer on themselves the maximum influence for the least effort. President Bush Sr. rightly and very effectively ejected Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, but left him in place in Baghdad. And President Clinton imposed irritating but ineffectual embargoes on India and Pakistan because they had the temerity to develop nuclear weapons. George W. Bush had perfectly adequate international-law arguments to dispose of Saddam Hussein and did the world a favor by doing so, but his attempt at nation-building mired almost all of America's ground-forces military capability in Iraq for most of his term and hundreds of billions of dollars were wasted by the blundering of the Pentagon and the tinkers sent to remake an ancient land.

President Obama has completely fumbled the discouragement of Iran's nuclear program, while the U.S. beseeches the assistance of the Russians and Chinese in the imposition of porous sanctions on Iran. China operates North Korea like a mischievous robot bedeviling the world (to the assumed amusement of the ghost of Douglas MacArthur), and the U.S. is on both sides of the War on Terror, assisting the Saudis (who finance jihadism) and the Pakistanis (who maintain terrorist factions in Afghanistan). Iraq, the war Obama opposed and Senate majority leader Harry Reid declared to be lost three years ago, is now pronounced a success by Vice President Biden, whose endorsement is the most worrisome danger signal around, as he is always mistaken. (Remember, he plagiarized from one of the most unsuccessful political leaders in modern British history, Neil Kinnock, the blood-curdling claim that he was "the first Biden in a thousand generations to go to a university.") George W.'s war is more or less working now, after lasting longer than America's participation in the two World Wars combined, and Obama's (Afghanistan) isn't. The factions and allies are running for cover because the president said we would be out next year. It is now a mess of eels associated with more or less amenable members of the Taliban, not a united anti-Taliban front. The president said, "Words must mean something," in Prague, on the subject of arms control, but his never do. (And arms control is about to degenerate into universal nuclear military capacity if Iran can deliver a nuclear warhead.)

What is needed is a colossal reorientation of the country away from consumption and toward investment, the cleaning out of the morass of the plea-bargain justice system and attendant vacuum cleaners of the legal and prison industries (and the gigantic fraud of the War on Drugs), drastic education reform, genuine health-care reform, a redefinition of U.S. national interests in the world to what is essential and defensible, and then restructured alliances to reflect shared interests. Until those issues are addressed, all talk of the American superpower is rubbish. Obama's is the fourth consecutive failed administration, and each succeeding one will make the festering problems more dangerous and difficult. As the problem is misdirection, not internal degeneracy or imperial overreach, it is a decline that will end in recovery, not a fall. It is like a non-terminal illness: America awaits a correct diagnosis, a curative plan, and a competent professional to supervise the recovery. The patient knows there is a problem and wants the cure. To paraphrase FDR, all that is missing is Dr. Comeback.

Contentions

[He Really Doesn't Want to Be Commander In Chief](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

It is not that we didn't know this before, but reading the [New York Times](#) — surely designed to be as favorable toward Obama as the reporter could possibly manage — one is left slack-jawed. Obama doesn't like being commander in chief, isn't good at it, and has relied on one tutor, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who is leaving next year. The report should be read in full. But a few low-lights:

A year and a half into his presidency, Mr. Obama appears to be a reluctant warrior. Even as he draws down troops in Iraq, he has been abundantly willing to use force to advance national interests, tripling forces in Afghanistan, authorizing secret operations in Yemen and Somalia, and escalating drone strikes in Pakistan. But advisers said he did not see himself as a war president in the way his predecessor did. His speech on Tuesday is notable because he talks in public about the wars only sporadically, determined not to let them define his presidency.

A former adviser to the president, who like others insisted on anonymity in order to discuss the situation candidly, said that Mr. Obama's relationship with the military was 'troubled' and that he 'doesn't have a handle on it.' ...

Reliant on Mr. Gates, Mr. Obama has made limited efforts to know his service chiefs or top commanders, and has visited the Pentagon only once, not counting a Sept. 11 commemoration. He ended Mr. Bush's practice of weekly videoconferences with commanders, preferring to work through the chain of command and wary, aides said, of being drawn into managing the wars. ...

Last December, the president gave the military 30,000 more troops, but also a ticking clock. ... "He didn't understand or grasp the military culture," said Lawrence J. Korb, a former Pentagon official at the liberal Center for American Progress. "He got over that particular quandary and put them back in the box by saying, 'O.K., I'm giving you 18 months.' "

As we all suspected, he compromised our Afghanistan war strategy for the sake of domestic politics:

One adviser at the time said Mr. Obama calculated that an open-ended commitment would undermine the rest of his agenda. "Our Afghan policy was focused as much as anything on domestic politics," the adviser said. "He would not risk losing the moderate to centrist Democrats in the middle of health insurance reform and he viewed that legislation as the make-or-break legislation for his administration."

He simply doesn't want to do the things that are expected of the commander in chief, and the military's ire is profound:

The schisms among his team, though, are born in part out of uncertainty about his true commitment. His reticence to talk much publicly about the wars may owe to the political costs of alienating his base as well as the demands of other issues. Senior Pentagon and military officials said they understood that he presided over a troubled economy, but noted that he was not losing 30 American soldiers a month on Wall Street. ...

"From an image point of view, he doesn't seem to embrace it, almost like you have to drag him into doing it," said Peter D. Feaver, a Bush adviser with military contacts. "There's deep uncertainty and perhaps doubt in the military about his commitment to see the wars through to a successful conclusion."

This was a man not only unprepared to be president but disposed to shirk the most important aspect of the job. It is a measure of his hubris and stubbornness that he has refused to, as Feaver succinctly puts it, "embrace" the role, that is, to commit in word and deed his full attention and effort to leading the country in war. He doesn't want to be a wartime president? Well, sorry — he is.

The only comfort one can draw from this appalling portrait is that perhaps, just perhaps, after November, when his dream of transforming America is crushed by an electoral blow-back, he will belatedly do his job.

Contentions

[RE: The F-35 and the Israel-Obama Relationship](#)

by J. E. Dyer

Evelyn Gordon's [post](#) from Thursday highlights a Team Obama method that increasingly comes across as precious, annoying, and insidious. I'm not sure there's a single word to describe it, but it involves a sort of inversion by which the *administration* of policy conveniently supersedes the *purpose* and *substance* of policy. In some cases, obstacles are allowed to dictate outcomes as if the U.S. administration has no discretion over them. In other cases, [bureaucratic arcana](#) serve as dodges. And in others, like Obama's approach to Iran, procedural checklists are wielded as surrogates for policy, generating a kind of lottery in which we all watch to see what fate the procedures will eventually confer on us.

The case of the F-35 and Israel appears to fall into the first category. The F-35, or Joint Strike Fighter, has been known for some time to be ill-suited to modifications in its avionics and weapons-control systems. Israel expressed [concern](#) about that almost two years ago – and Israel isn't the only F-35 customer to have reservations, as this Congressional Research Service [study](#) from April 2010 outlines. The tightly integrated nature of the F-35's avionics was intended to be a design [feature](#), not a bug. It is also, however, a 1990s-era design concept that will probably be updated eventually to accommodate more interchangeability of components in future production blocks of the F-35.

A constructive approach to this impasse would certainly be possible. A U.S. administration eager to tend alliances would review the sunk costs of the current design, balance that consideration with the importance of America's global partnerships, and probably make the commitment now to begin a design migration that would work better for allies. Israel might well find it acceptable to be met halfway and may agree without complaint to buy the first 20 fighters as-is.

But this situation is tailor-made for Team Obama's unique methods. In negotiations with one of our closest allies, the administration has simply left a known sticking point to fester. From the standpoint of professionalism, there is no good excuse for this: the issue has been recognized in the halls of government and industry for some time. But as Evelyn Gordon observes, it's something the public knows little about. Obama pays no real price for his administration's behavior.

An explanation for that behavior has to be deduced by process of elimination. Neither a well-intentioned ally nor a motivated seller behaves this way, so we are left with fecklessness or bad intentions. The Obama image is not enhanced by either possibility. When it comes to his administration's foreign-policy posture, I'm reminded often of P.J. O'Rourke's characterization of the French, in a 1986 *Rolling Stone* article ("Among the Euro-Weenies"), as "masters of the 'dog ate my homework' school of diplomatic relations." It doesn't quite reach the level of a "Twinkie defense" school of diplomatic relations, but it's still unbecoming in the leader of the free world.

Washington Post

[For black children, daunting divides in achievement and family life](#)

by George F. Will

Various figures denote vexing social problems. They include 10,000 (the number of new baby boomers eligible for Social Security and Medicare every day), 10.2 percent (what the unemployment rate would be if 1.2 million discouraged workers had not recently stopped looking for jobs), \$9.9

trillion (the Government Accountability Office calculation of the gap between the expected revenue and outlays for state and local governments during the next 50 years), \$76.4 trillion (the GAO's similar estimate of the federal government's 75-year fiscal shortfall).

Remedies for these problems can at least be imagined. But America's tragic number -- tragic because it is difficult to conceive remedial policies -- is 70 percent. This is the portion of African American children born to unmarried women. It may explain what puzzles Nathan Glazer.

Writing in the *American Interest*, Glazer, a sociology professor emeritus at Harvard, considers it a "paradox" that the election of Barack Obama "coincided with the almost complete disappearance from American public life of discussion of the black condition and what public policy might do to improve it." This, says Glazer, is the black condition:

Employment prospects for young black men worsened even when the economy was robust. By the early 2000s, more than a third of all young black non-college men were under the supervision of the corrections system. More than 60 percent of black high school dropouts born since the mid-1960s go to prison. Mass incarceration blights the prospects of black women seeking husbands. So does another trend noted by sociologist William Julius Wilson: "In 2003-2004, for every 100 bachelor's degrees conferred on black men, 200 were conferred on black women."

Because changes in laws and mores have lowered barriers, the black middle class has been able to leave inner cities, which have become, Glazer says, "concentrations of the poor, the poorly educated, the unemployed and unemployable." High out-of-wedlock birthrates mean a constantly renewed cohort of adolescent males without male parenting, which means disorderly neighborhoods and schools. Glazer thinks it is possible that for some young black men, "acting white" -- trying to excel in school -- is considered "a betrayal of their group culture." This severely limits opportunities in an increasingly service-based economy where working with people matters more than working with things in manufacturing.

Now, from the Educational Testing Service, comes a report about ["The Black-White Achievement Gap: When Progress Stopped,"](#) written by Paul E. Barton and Richard J. Coley. It examines the "startling" fact that most of the progress in closing the gap in reading and mathematics occurred in the 1970s and '80s. This means "progress generally halted for those born around the mid-1960s, a time when landmark legislative victories heralded an end to racial discrimination."

Only 35 percent of black children live with two parents, which partly explains why, while only 24 percent of white eighth-graders watch four or more hours of television on an average day, 59 percent of their black peers do. (Privileged children waste their time on new social media and other very mixed blessings of computers and fancy phones.) Black children also are disproportionately handicapped by this class-based disparity: By age 4, the average child in a professional family hears about 20 million more words than the average child in a working-class family and about 35 million more than the average child in a welfare family -- a child often alone with a mother who is a high school dropout.

After surveying much research concerning many possible explanations of why progress stopped, particularly in neighborhoods characterized by a "concentration of deprivation," the ETS report says: "It is very hard to imagine progress resuming in reducing the education attainment and achievement gap without turning these family trends around -- i.e., increasing marriage rates, and getting fathers back into the business of nurturing children." And: "It is similarly difficult to envision direct policy levers" to effect that.

So, two final numbers: Two decades, five factors. Two decades have passed since Barton wrote "America's Smallest School: The Family." He has estimated that about 90 percent of the difference in schools' proficiencies can be explained by five factors: the number of days students are absent from school, the number of hours students spend watching television, the number of pages read for homework, the quantity and quality of reading material in the students' homes -- and, much the most important, the presence of two parents in the home. Public policies can have little purchase on these five, and least of all on the fifth.

WSJ

Morality Check: When Fad Science Is Bad Science

by Eric Felten

Harvard University announced last Friday that its Standing Committee on Professional Conduct had found Marc Hauser, one of the school's most prominent scholars, guilty of multiple counts of "scientific misconduct." The revelation came after a three-year inquiry into allegations that the professor had fudged data in his research on monkey cognition. Since the studies were funded, in part, by government grants, the university has sent the evidence to the Feds.

The professor has not admitted wrongdoing, but he did issue a statement apologizing for making "significant mistakes." And beyond his own immediate career difficulties, Mr. Hauser's difficulties spell trouble for one of the trendiest fields in academia—evolutionary psychology.

Mr. Hauser has been at the forefront of a movement to show that our morals are survival instincts evolved over the millennia. When Mr. Hauser's 2006 book "Moral Minds: How Nature Designed Our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong" was published, evolutionary psychologist and linguist Steven Pinker proclaimed that his Harvard colleague was engaged in "one of the hottest new topics in intellectual life: The psychology and biology of morals."



The cotton-top tamarin.

Not so long ago, the initial bloom already was off evolutionary psychology. The field earned a bad name by appearing to justify all sorts of nasty, rapacious behaviors, including rape, as successful strategies for Darwinian competition. But the second wave of the discipline solved that PR problem by discovering that evolution favored those with a more progressive outlook. Mr. Hauser has been among those positing that our ancestors survived not by being ruthlessly selfish, but by cooperating, a legacy ingrained in our moral intuitions.

This progressive sort of evolutionary psychology is often in the news. NPR offered an example this week with a story titled "Teary-Eyed Evolution: Crying Serves a Purpose." According to NPR,

"Scientists who study evolution say crying probably conferred some benefit and did something to advance our species."

What that "something" "probably" is no one seems to know, but that doesn't dent the enthusiasm for trendy speculation. Crying signals empathy, one academic suggested, And as NPR explained, "our early ancestors who were most empathic probably thrived because it helped them build strong communities, which in turn gave them protection and support." Note the word "probably," which means the claim is nothing but a guess.

Christopher Ryan is co-author of the recent book "Sex at Dawn," itself an exercise in plumbing our prehistoric survival strategies for explanations of the modern human condition. But he is well aware of the limits of evolutionary psychology. "Many of the most prominent voices in the field are less scientists than political philosophers," he cautioned last summer at the website of the magazine Psychology Today.

Evolutionary psychologists tell elaborate stories explaining modern life based on the conditions and circumstances of our prehistoric ancestors—even though we know very little about those factors. "Often, the fact that their story seems to make sense is the only evidence they offer," Mr. Ryan wrote. "For them, it may be enough, but it isn't enough if you're aspiring to be taken seriously as a science."

That's where Mr. Hauser's work comes in. We may not be able to access the minds or proto-societies of *Homo habilis*, but we can look at how the minds of modern apes and monkeys work, and extrapolate. Unlike the speculative tales that had become the hallmark of evolutionary psychology, primate research has promised to deliver hard science, the testing of hypotheses through experiments.

Mr. Hauser's particular specialty has been in studying the cognitive abilities of New World monkeys such as the cotton-top tamarins of South America. He has cranked out a prodigious body of work, and bragged that his field enjoyed "exciting new discoveries uncovered every month, and rich prospects on the horizon," He and his colleagues, Mr. Hauser proclaimed, were developing a new "science of morality." Now his science is suspect.

As rumors swirled that Harvard was about to ding Mr. Hauser for scientific misconduct, prominent researchers in the field worried they would be tarnished by association. The science magazine *Nature* asked Frans de Waal—a primatologist at Emory University and author, most recently, of the widely read book "The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society"—about what Mr. Hauser's predicament meant for his discipline. He was blunt: "It is disastrous."

Mr. Hauser had boldly declared that through his application of science, not only could morality be stripped of any religious hocus-pocus, but philosophy would have to step aside as well: "Inquiry into our moral nature will no longer be the proprietary province of the humanities and social sciences," he wrote. Would it be such a bad thing if Hausergate resulted in some intellectual humility among the new scientists of morality?

It's important to note that the Hauser affair also represents the best in science. When lowly graduate students suspected their famous boss was cooking his data, they risked their careers and reputations to blow the whistle on him. They are the scientists to celebrate.

Though there is no doubt plenty to learn from the evolutionary psychologists, when an intellectual fashion becomes a full-blown fad, it's time to give it the gimlet eye.

Economist

Monkey business?

Allegations of scientific misconduct at Harvard have academics up in arms



RARELY does it get much more ironic. Marc Hauser, a professor of psychology at Harvard who made his name probing the evolutionary origins of morality, is suspected of having committed the closest thing academia has to a deadly sin: cheating. It is not the first time the scientific world has been rocked by scandal. But the present furore, involving as it does a prestigious university and one of its star professors, will echo through common rooms and quadrangles far and wide.

The story broke on August 10th when the *Boston Globe* revealed that Dr Hauser had been under investigation since 2007 for alleged misconduct at Harvard's Cognitive Evolution Laboratory, which he heads. This investigation has resulted in the retraction of an oft-cited study published in 2002 in *Cognition*, the publication last month of a correction to a paper from 2007 in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society*, and doubts about the validity of findings published in *Science*, also in 2007. All three studies purported to show that the cognitive abilities of some monkeys are closer to those of people than had previously been assumed. Dr Hauser was the only author common to all three papers.

An article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* on August 19th added further spice. It offered unsettling accounts by (anonymous) graduate students and research assistants depicting Dr Hauser as brusquely dismissive of their attempts to discuss possible improprieties in data collection and interpretation.

This prompted Michael Smith, the hitherto taciturn dean of Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences, to react. In an open letter to the faculty on August 20th, he confirmed that an internal investigation had found Dr Hauser "solely responsible" for eight instances of scientific misconduct, involving the three published papers and five other pieces of research. Since some of the dubious work had been funded by the federal government, the matter has been referred to the Office of Research Integrity, the agency responsible for overseeing research practice. On the same day, Dr Hauser, who is on leave and refusing to be interviewed, issued a single contrite statement apologising for having made some "significant mistakes".

Trials and errors

These would not be his first. In 1995 he claimed that cotton-top tamarins (with which he is pictured above) can recognise themselves in mirrors. At the time it was believed only humans and great apes could pass this test. Gordon Gallup, who invented the test in the 1960s and now teaches psychology at the State University of New York in Albany, found the results incredible and requested the filmed trials from which they had been drawn. After some pleading Dr Hauser sent him sample footage. What Dr Gallup saw apparently bore “no resemblance whatsoever” to the reported data, so he asked to examine the remaining videos, only to be told that these had been stolen. In 2001 Dr Hauser published another paper, admitting failure to replicate the earlier findings.

So far, none of this constitutes conclusive evidence of fraud. Slapdash lab work is not the same as fabricating data and Harvard has kept mum about the precise nature of the charges, citing concerns about privacy. Many researchers, however, fear that this silence itself makes things worse—and not just for Dr Hauser and Harvard. The uncertainty about which of his results (for he has been a prolific researcher) are up to snuff means others in the field are finding it hard to decide what to rely on in their own work. And despite Dr Hauser’s professed sole responsibility, a sizeable number of his present and former wards may unfairly be tainted by association.

At the least, then, Dr Hauser stands accused of setting the study of animal cognition back many years. Trying to discern an animal’s thought processes on the basis of its behaviour is notoriously tricky and subjective at the best of times. Now, his critics fear, no one will take it seriously. As Greg Laden, one of Dr Hauser’s former colleagues, laments in a blog, “the hubris and selfishness of one person can do more in the form of damage than an entire productive career can do in the way of building of our collective credibility.”

Others are less despondent, warning against conflating scientific misconduct with difficult science. One corner-cutting researcher does not impugn a whole field. Clive Wynne, editor of *Behavioural Processes*, which published an “obsessively” immaculate paper by Dr Hauser three days before the *Globe*’s revelations, says he is struck by how meticulous recent research in his discipline has been.

In general, scientists see themselves better placed than most to weed out cheats. The more startling a paper’s claims, the more likely it is that others will try to replicate it and, if the claims were specious, fail. Moreover, scientists want their work to be replicated; it is the only way it will stand the test of time, observes Robert Seyfarth, a primatologist and Dr Hauser’s former mentor.

Many researchers cite Harvard’s probe as further proof of science’s self-correcting mechanisms, and praise students for doughtily standing up to an authority figure of Dr Hauser’s distinction. Gerry Altmann, editor of *Cognition*, agrees, adding: “Although at the time it might appear that each transgression is major, its eventual impact on science is minor.”



www.IBDeitorials.com/cartoons



