

November 28, 2011

[Jeff Jacoby](#) remembers Thanksgiving assembly at the Hebrew Academy in Cleveland.

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On the other hand, immigrants weren't obliged to shed their ethnic pride, or to drop the foods and customs and festivals they brought with them from their native land. They were free to be "as ethnic as they pleased," writes Salins. The goal of assimilation was not to make all Americans alike; it was to get newcomers, however dissimilar their backgrounds and cultures, to believe that they were "irrevocably part of the same national family."

There was one other key ingredient, which we too easily overlook. Immigrants understood that the country they had come to was in some indispensable way better than the one they had left. They might retain a soft spot for the scenery or clothing or rhythms of life in the Old Country, they might always prefer their mother tongue to English, they might even pay tuition at a private or parochial school so that the religious or linguistic values they had grown up with would be passed on to their kids. But underlying everything would be the awareness that they had chosen to be Americans.

America was better than their native land — perhaps because its rulers were corrupt, or because it was riven by war, or because economic opportunities were limited. Perhaps, as in my father's case, because totalitarian tyrants — first Nazis, then Communists — had made life there a hell on earth. Perhaps because, like the Pilgrims, they sought a peaceable society where they could worship as they saw fit without being "[hunted and persecuted on every side](#)."

As my fellow forth-graders and I belted out the lyrics to another song — P-I-L-grim fathers landed here on Plymouth Bay — we assumed that Mrs. Feigenbaum was simply getting us ready for the Thanksgiving assembly. She knew, of course, that she was doing something far more important. She was getting us ready to be Americans.

All the assimilated Americans have actually, according to [Mark Steyn](#), come to this; ... In return for agreeing to raise the debt ceiling (and, by the way, that's the wrong way of looking at it: more accurately, we're lowering the debt abyss), John Boehner bragged that he'd got a deal for "a real, enforceable cut" of supposedly \$7 billion from fiscal year 2012. After running the numbers themselves, the Congressional Budget Office said it only cut \$1 billion from FY 2012.

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government's already borrowed back all those painstakingly negotiated savings. If it's \$7 billion in "real, enforceable cuts," in the time it takes you to defrost the bird, the cuts have all been borrowed back.

Bonus question: How "real" and "enforceable" are all those real, enforceable cuts? By the time the relevant bill passed the Senate earlier this month, the 2012 austerity budget with its brutal, savage cuts to government services actually increased spending by \$10 billion. More, more, more, how do you like it?

But don't worry. Aside from spending the summer negotiating a deal that increases runaway federal spending, those stingy, cheeseparing Republicans also forced the Democrats to agree to create that big ol' supercommittee that would save \$1.2 trillion -- over the course of 10 years.

Anywhere else on the planet that would be a significant chunk of change. But the government of the United States is planning to spend \$44 trillion in the next decade. So \$1.2 trillion is about 2.7 percent. Any businessman could cut 2.7 percent from his budget in his sleep. But not congressional supercommittees of supermen with superpowers thrashing it out across the table for three months. So there will be no 2.7 percent cut. ...

Charles Moore in the Telegraph, UK says there is some to dislike and some to like in the movie about Margaret Thatcher.

Friends of Lady Thatcher tend to deplore The Iron Lady, the new film about her starring Meryl Streep. They do so because they are upset at the portrayal of a still living person as suffering from dementia. Their feelings do them credit as friends. As someone who knows her himself, I find bits of the film, which I have just seen, distressing.

But friends are often the last people to understand how things look in a wider setting. When the general public (who, for some reason, will not be allowed to see the film until January) walk into the cinema and watch the Streep version of Thatcher, I am convinced that they will be moved by the human story. They will also absorb a most powerful piece of propaganda for conservatism (though not necessarily Conservatism). One reason it is so powerful is that it feels uncalculated: it just arises, inescapably, from the tale it tells. And its lessons apply, pointedly, to the current state of the Western world.

The message, embodied in the personality of the extraordinary woman depicted, is that conservatism is a sort of insurrection. We all know the romance of slave revolts. People wrote great poems about them. Wordsworth, for example, celebrated the oddly named Toussaint L'Ouverture, who turned his fellow slaves against their masters in Haiti. But there is romance, too, in the revolt of the bourgeoisie. The Iron Lady is a sort of poem about the triumph and tragedy of its leader, Margaret L'Epicière. ...

Christopher Caldwell on the rout of the Spanish socialists.

Just as incoming American presidents are given the atomic "briefcase" by their predecessors, along with the codes for launching a nuclear attack, perhaps Spanish prime ministers will henceforth receive a begging cup and a German phrasebook. It was al Qaeda that made José

Luis Rodríguez Zapatero of the Socialist Workers' party (PSOE) Spain's prime minister; Lehman Brothers and the euro crisis have unmade him, putting his country at the financial mercy of its European neighbors. Zapatero came to power when jihadists bombed several trains in the heart of Madrid on election weekend 2004. The bombs convinced Spaniards they would be safer voting for the candidate more congenial to al Qaeda's reading of the Iraq war.

This week prime minister-elect Mariano Rajoy, leader of the conservative Popular party, put an end to seven years of Zapaterismo. ...

Ilya Somin in Volokh Conspiracy posts on the perverse police incentives of the drug war.

Radley Balko has an interesting piece at Huffington Post on the ways in which the War on Drugs creates perverse incentives for police departments:

"Arresting people for assaults, beatings and robberies doesn't bring money back to police departments, but drug cases do in a couple of ways. First, police departments across the country compete for a pool of federal anti-drug grants. The more arrests and drug seizures a department can claim, the stronger its application for those grants.

"The availability of huge federal anti-drug grants incentivizes departments to pay for SWAT team armor and weapons, and leads our police officers to abandon real crime victims in our communities in favor of ratcheting up their drug arrest stats," said former Los Angeles Deputy Chief of Police Stephen Downing. Downing is now a member of Law Enforcement Against Prohibition, an advocacy group of cops and prosecutors who are calling for an end to the drug war.

"When our cops are focused on executing large-scale, constitutionally questionable raids at the slightest hint that a small-time pot dealer is at work, real police work preventing and investigating crimes like robberies and rapes falls by the wayside," Downing said.

And this problem is on the rise all over the country. Last year, police in New York City arrested around 50,000 people for marijuana possession. Pot has been decriminalized in New York since 1977, but displaying the drug in public is still a crime. So police officers stop people who look "suspicious," frisk them, ask them to empty their pockets, then arrest them if they pull out a joint or a small amount of marijuana. They're tricked into breaking the law. According to a report from Queens College sociologist Harry Levine, there were 33,775 such arrests from 1981 to 1995. Between 1996 and 2010 there were 536,322."

Boston Globe

Assimilation, American style

by Jeff Jacoby

WITH OUR music teacher, Mrs. Feigenbaum, at the piano playing the melody — the [Toreador's Song](#) from the opera “Carmen” — and the lyrics handed out to us on mimeographed pages, my fourth-grade classmates and I practiced one of the songs we were learning for our school's Thanksgiving assembly:

Thanksgiving Day comes once each year

Our president proclaims it far and near.

Thankful for the bounty of our land,

The harvest that makes this nation grand,

Bestowed us from above,

God bless this land,

This precious land we love.

I was a student at the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, a Jewish day school where half of the curriculum was devoted to religious studies and the school year conformed to the Jewish calendar. Most of the kids in my class came from Orthodox Jewish homes, and many of us were the children of Eastern European immigrants who spoke Yiddish more fluently than English.

Yet there we were, kids whose parents may have gotten off the boat only 10 or 15 years earlier and whose family life bore little resemblance to “[The Patty Duke Show](#),” singing songs about the Mayflower and turkey dinners without a hint of irony. The inculcation of Jewish values and learning was the Hebrew Academy's chief priority, but it was understood that raising kids to be good Jews went hand-in-hand with raising them to be good Americans.

I didn't know it at the time, but what my classmates and I were experiencing was [the classic model of American assimilation](#): the process by which immigrants and ethnic minorities, and the children of those immigrants and minorities, had for decades been successfully turned into Americans. In a world filled with ethnic antagonism and religious violence, the United States had found a paradigm for unifying the most ethnically, racially, and religiously varied population on the planet into a relatively tolerant and unified culture.

We rarely reflect on what an astonishing achievement this was. But how many other societies have managed to maintain national cultural unity in the midst of ethnic diversity? Cyprus? Rwanda? Sri Lanka? The former Yugoslavia?

The key to what Peter Salins, a scholar at the Manhattan Institute, calls “[assimilation, American style](#)” was a balancing act. On the one hand, newcomers to the United States found out quickly that they were expected to become honest-to-God Americans. That meant learning English,

getting a job, embracing America's democratic values and institutions, and eventually [taking the oath as new citizens](#).

On the other hand, immigrants weren't obliged to shed their ethnic pride, or to drop the foods and customs and festivals they brought with them from their native land. They were free to be "as ethnic as they pleased," writes Salins. The goal of assimilation was not to make all Americans alike; it was to get newcomers, however dissimilar their backgrounds and cultures, to believe that they were "irrevocably part of the same national family."

There was one other key ingredient, which we too easily overlook. Immigrants understood that the country they had come to was in some indispensable way better than the one they had left. They might retain a soft spot for the scenery or clothing or rhythms of life in the Old Country, they might always prefer their mother tongue to English, they might even pay tuition at a private or parochial school so that the religious or linguistic values they had grown up with would be passed on to their kids. But underlying everything would be the awareness that they had *chosen* to be Americans.

America was better than their native land — perhaps because its rulers were corrupt, or because it was riven by war, or because economic opportunities were limited. Perhaps, as in my father's case, because totalitarian tyrants — first Nazis, then Communists — had made life there a hell on earth. Perhaps because, like the Pilgrims, they sought a peaceable society where they could worship as they saw fit without being "[hunted and persecuted on every side](#)."

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Orange County Register **[SS Spendaholic sailing into debt abyss](#)**

by Mark Steyn

I see Andrea True died earlier this month. The late disco diva enjoyed a brief moment of global celebrity in 1976 with her ubiquitous glitterball favorite:

"More, More, More

How do you like it?

How do you like it?

More, More, More

How do you like it?

How do you like it?"

In honor of Andrea's passing, I have asked my congressman to propose the adoption of this song as the U.S. national anthem. True, Miss True wrote the number as an autobiographical reflection on her days as a porn movie actress but, consciously or not, it accurately distills the essence of American governmental philosophy in the early 21st century: Excess even unto oblivion.

When it comes to spending and the size of government, only the Democrats are officially panting orgasmically, "More, More, More; How do you like it?" while the Republicans are formally committed to "Less less less." This makes for many dramatic showdowns on the evening news. In the summer, it was the "looming" "deadline" to raise the debt ceiling. In the fall, it was the "looming" "deadline" for the alleged supercommittee to agree \$1.2 trillion of cuts. The supercommittee was set up as a last-minute deal for raising the debt ceiling. Now that the supercommittee's flopped out, "automatic" mandatory cuts to defense and discretionary spending are supposed to kick in – by 2013. But no doubt as that looming deadline looms the can of worms will be effortlessly kicked down the room another looming deadline or two.

In return for agreeing to raise the debt ceiling (and, by the way, that's the wrong way of looking at it: more accurately, we're lowering the debt abyss), John Boehner bragged that he'd got a deal for "a real, enforceable cut" of supposedly \$7 billion from fiscal year 2012. After running the numbers themselves, the Congressional Budget Office said it only cut \$1 billion from FY 2012.

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Bonus question: How "real" and "enforceable" are all those real, enforceable cuts? By the time the relevant bill passed the Senate earlier this month, the 2012 austerity budget with its brutal, savage cuts to government services actually *increased* spending by \$10 billion. More, more, more, how do you like it?

But don't worry. Aside from spending the summer negotiating a deal that increases runaway federal spending, those stingy, cheeseparating Republicans also forced the Democrats to agree to create that big ol' supercommittee that would save \$1.2 trillion -- over the course of 10 years.

Anywhere else on the planet that would be a significant chunk of change. But the government of the United States is planning to spend \$44 trillion in the next decade. So \$1.2 trillion is about 2.7 percent. Any businessman could cut 2.7 percent from his budget in his sleep. But not congressional supercommittees of supermen with superpowers thrashing it out across the table for three months. So there will be no 2.7 percent cut.

That means the "sequestration" from defense and discretionary spending will now be enforced, starting in 2013. That would be so brutal and slashing that by 2021 it would reduce U.S. public debt by \$153 billion! Which sounds kinda big if you say it in a Dr. Evil voice and give a menacing mwa-ha-ha laugh, but in fact boils down to about what we borrow currently every month.

But don't worry. Slashing a month's worth of spending over a decade is way too extreme. So that's not going to happen, either. Instead, CNN and "Meet The Press" will just interview big-shot senators and congressmen about it day in, day out, and then normal service will resume: More, more, more, how do you like it?

In the course of a typical day I usually receive at least a couple of emails from readers lamenting that America is now the Titanic. This is grossly unfair to the Titanic, a state-of-the-art ship whose problem was that it only had lifeboat space for about half its passengers. By contrast, the SS Spendaholic is a rusting hulk encrusted with barnacles, there are no lifeboats, and the ship's officers are locked in a debate about whether to use a thimble or an eggcup.

A second downgrade is now inevitable. Aw, so what? We had the first back in the summer, and the ceiling didn't fall in, did it? And everyone knows those ratings agencies are a racket, right? And say what you like about our rotten finances, but Greece's are worse. And Italy's. And, er, Zimbabwe's. Probably.

The advantage the United States enjoys is that, unlike Greece, it can print the currency in which its debt is denominated. But, even so, it still needs someone to buy it. The failure of Germany's bond auction on Wednesday suggests that the world is running out of buyers for western sovereign debt at historically low interest rates. And, were interest rates to return to their 1990-2010 average (5.7 percent), debt service alone would consume about 40 percent of federal revenues by mid-decade. That's not paying down the debt, but just staying current on the interest payments.

And yet, when it comes to spending and stimulus and entitlements and agencies and regulations and bureaucrats, "more, more, more/how do you like it?" remains the way to bet. Will a Republican president make a difference to this grim trajectory? I would doubt it. Unless the public conversation shifts significantly, neither President Romney nor President Insert-Name-Of-This-Week's-UnRomney-Here will have a mandate for the measures necessary to save the republic.

As for Andrea True, back in 1976 she made a commercial in Jamaica. To protest the then Prime Minister's flirtation with Castro, Uncle Sam had imposed economic sanctions against Her Majesty's government in Kingston. Miss True was unable to bring her earnings home. So, for want of anything better to do with them, she went into a Jamaican recording studio and made a demo of a song: "More, More, More." Sure, 35 years later Fidel's still around, but at least the world got a disco hit out of it, which is more than you can say for the Iranian sanctions.

We're approaching a state in which the government spends \$4 trillion but only raises \$2 trillion. Which is an existential threat to the nation, but at least has the advantage of being one whose arithmetic is simple enough even for politicians: Try to imagine every aspect of government having to make do with half of what it currently has.

That's the scale of reform necessary to save America from a future as a bankrupt, violent, Third World ruin. More, more, more, how do you like it? More poverty, more crime, more corruption, more decay: how do you like *that*?

Flirting with Castroite policies? Maybe Washington could impose economic sanctions against itself.

Telegraph, UK

[Margaret Thatcher knew that capitalism must deliver for the masses](#)

Propping up failure – in the euro and elsewhere – is hardly the recipe for renewed prosperity.

by Charles Moore



Margaret Thatcher in 1981: a particular sort of character, formed by particular beliefs

Friends of Lady Thatcher tend to deplore *The Iron Lady*, the new film about her starring Meryl Streep. They do so because they are upset at the portrayal of a still living person as suffering from dementia. Their feelings do them credit as friends. As someone who knows her himself, I find bits of the film, which I have just seen, distressing.

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The message, embodied in the personality of the extraordinary woman depicted, is that conservatism is a sort of insurrection. We all know the romance of slave revolts. People wrote great poems about them. Wordsworth, for example, celebrated the oddly named Toussaint L'Ouverture, who turned his fellow slaves against their masters in Haiti. But there is romance, too, in the revolt of the bourgeoisie. *The Iron Lady* is a sort of poem about the triumph and tragedy of its leader, Margaret L'Epicière.

The idea behind the drama is the belief, her belief, that the people without much power – the “workers not the shirkers”, small-businessmen, housewives (to use a word deployed at that time

without embarrassment) – can do great things if only you let them. They can do greater things than the people who keep them down.

In 1987, Mrs Thatcher flew to Moscow to meet the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. In their famous conversations (not shown in the film), Gorbachev rounded on her. As she recalled it, “His view was that the British Conservative Party was the party of the 'haves' in Britain and that our system of 'bourgeois democracy' was designed to fool people about who really controlled the levers of power.” But she hit back: “I explained that what I was trying to do was to create a society of 'haves', not a class of them.”

A society of “haves”: that was what trade union reform and privatisation, the attack on inflation and on government borrowing, and the selling of council houses and tax cuts were about. That aspiration to possess both liberty and property was what lay behind the struggles of the Cold War. And it was because the peoples of Eastern Europe wanted to be part of such a society, and rejected the system which Gorbachev was trying belatedly to reform, that they demolished the Berlin Wall and he did not dare stop them.

No one sane wants to go back to that divided world. Few believe that the Communism so peacefully overthrown holds the answers to anything. But, since 2007 or so, Gorbachev’s jibe has recovered some of its force. The credit crunch has made many feel that bourgeois democracy is indeed “designed to fool people about who really controlled the levers of power”.

The long boom created an apparently virtuous circle. You borrowed all the money needed for the price of a house. This made you, in your mind, though not in full fact, an owner. Because the value of the house was rising, it also made you, again in your mind, richer. The bank, which actually owned the house, found clever ways of mixing and selling on the loans it had granted so that it, too, felt richer. Governments, happy at rising revenues, thought it was their business to make sure that when the symptoms of high risk began to present themselves, they were suppressed.

Then the worm of doubt entered the system and so the virtuous circle turned vicious. The roof fell in – in the case of some houses bought with sub-prime mortgages, literally so. When that happened, the victims found themselves forced to nurse not only their own wounds, but those of the banks.

In the case of the eurozone, something even more painful has happened. The zone’s general population, impoverished by the errors of their policymakers, are then told, by those policymakers, that they must pay to keep entire countries afloat. If they protest, as they did in Greece and Italy, they find new governments imposed upon them, run by people whom they have not elected. And who are those people? The same policymakers!

As I argued in a couple of columns three months ago, it is not surprising if, when people now hear words like globalisation or capitalism or technocrat or “ever-closer union”, they feel slightly sick. The society of haves is shrinking fast.

In the old Prayer Book marriage service, the wedding vows include the words “to have and to hold”. Having is only meaningful if it includes holding, otherwise it’s just smash and grab. Next week, hundreds of thousands of public sector workers are expected to stage a one-day strike because of cuts to their pension entitlements. Actually, they are part of the luckiest group of

workers in the country, because even though reduced, their future pensions are guaranteed by law. No such luck for the once-enthusiastic members of the society of haves, whose private pension pots hold less and less. Even less luck for the young generation, who are not even getting the chance to join the society of haves in the first place.

Told you so, says the Left. Perhaps it did, though socialist parties here and on the Continent have been in the forefront of promoting the single currency which now traps the workers of the whole of southern Europe in a pattern of falling wages and rising unemployment.

But there is surely a better, conservative analysis to be brought to the financial catastrophe which makes George Osborne's Autumn Statement next week so awkward to frame, and to the moral one which makes deans and bishops wring their hands.

It will take a lot of work. But it should surely go back to the question, "Who is this all for?" Free-market conservatism is absolutely opposed to the concept of "too big to fail". This is partly because bigness threatens individual dignity and freedom. It is also because it is only through failure being admitted that success comes. If we keep on propping up failure – whether it be nationalised industries in the Eighties, or the current eurozone in the 2010s – we reinforce it.

Yet those ruling the Western world are propping up for all they – or rather, we – are worth. Their fears are understandable because the dangers are indeed intense. But those in charge of systems tend to overrate the value of those systems, precisely because they are in charge of them. The one thing all the Sarkozys and Merkels and Draghis and Barrosos cannot contemplate is the one thing most conspicuously bleeding obvious to those outside the euro. It does not work, and the more you try to make it work the worse it gets.

Even David Cameron, though suffering no illusions about the basic construction flaw, seems mesmerised by fear of collapse. It's as if he believed that the Maginot line could not prevent invasion, but sent troops off to reinforce it all the same.

The story in *The Iron Lady* is not the story of a set of policies, but of a particular sort of character, formed by particular beliefs. That character understood that only by facing failure can one face it down.

Weekly Standard

[Hasta Luego, Zapatero](#)

The rout of the Spanish socialists.

by Christopher Caldwell

Just as incoming American presidents are given the atomic "briefcase" by their predecessors, along with the codes for launching a nuclear attack, perhaps Spanish prime ministers will henceforth receive a begging cup and a German phrasebook. It was al Qaeda that made José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero of the Socialist Workers' party (PSOE) Spain's prime minister; Lehman Brothers and the euro crisis have unmade him, putting his country at the financial mercy of its European neighbors. Zapatero came to power when jihadists bombed several trains in the heart of Madrid on election weekend 2004. The bombs convinced Spaniards they would be safer voting for the candidate more congenial to al Qaeda's reading of the Iraq war.

This week prime minister-elect Mariano Rajoy, leader of the conservative Popular party, put an end to seven years of Zapaterismo. He will take power on Christmas Eve. Zapatero's successor as PSOE standard-bearer, Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, got the lowest vote total the Socialists have ever received. It was Rajoy whom Zapatero beat in 2004, to the surprise of everyone, including Zapatero himself. Once he had pulled Spain out of the Iraq war coalition, he struggled to find things to do. That meant indulging the whims of whatever interest group was complaining most loudly. The achievements of the Zapatero years are numerous and nugatory. Gay marriage. A record number of women in the cabinet. Divorce reform.

Another bizarre priority of Zapatero was to erase every trace of dictator Francisco Franco, who ruled Spain for four decades, from its bloody civil war until his death in 1975. One need not approve of Franco, and until Zapatero came to power one did not need to disapprove of him either. But one must take Spain for what it is—a country of deep and permanent ideological divisions. There were statues of Franco all over Spain, and Zapatero set out to have them all toppled. He dragged Spain into a self-deception. Just as official France obliterated all memory of its collaboration in the immediate aftermath of World War II, so did Zapatero—long after the fact, and unnecessarily—try to convince Spaniards that their “real” country had nothing to do with forces that had ruled it for much of the past century.

What resulted was a strange climate of opinion. Zapatero mixed the ideological hothouse atmosphere of the European 1930s with a futuristic utopia of infinitely negotiable gender roles. The only thing that was missing was the present. When Spain's economy began to lose altitude, and then went into a death spiral following the collapse of Lehman, it didn't have enough to do with fascism or gender roles to hold Zapatero's attention. Zapatero remained confident that men who could no longer put food on the family table would consider gay marriage and liberal abortion rights a reasonable substitute. They didn't, of course, and by September 2010 workers had called a general strike. It fizzled, but to a progressive Manichean of Zapatero's ilk, it was traumatic to see the forces of the working class arrayed against him.

Spain's predicament in the economic crisis was the opposite of most countries'. Many, like Ireland, had a mostly healthy real economy that was undone by the excesses of the financial sector. Spain's financial sector was quite responsible—although the country had a real estate bubble, it emerged from it better than the United States in many respects. It did not have a lot of securitization or derivatives. It had stringent capital requirements for home mortgages. It had a central bank that was competent and alert. But starting in the Franco era, Spain's labor market had been strictly regulated to provide security at the expense of income. With the coming of democracy in the late 1970s, the benefits offered to workers grew ever more generous. The result is a two-tier labor market. Workers in old, inefficient industries have preposterously generous pay packages and benefits. But companies cannot afford to hire young Spaniards.

It is in Spain, more than in any other country, that one can see the weak position of European youth in the face of the present crisis. The unemployment rate for 18- to 24-year-olds in the job market is 46 percent. And they are weak politically. Although many have been occupying various plazas in Spain, starting with Madrid's Puerta del Sol, since May, they have so far been unable to get either Zapatero or Rajoy to take them seriously. This weakness may have a demographic cause. The collapse of Spanish birthrates means that young adults have less than half the weight in Spain's population that they had at midcentury.

Rajoy has not yet mapped a strategy for taking Spain out of the Zapatero years. One of the complaints about Rajoy—you can read it in the conservative/free-market *El Mundo* as often as

in the socialistic *El País*—is that he has come to power in an emergency without making clear what his economic policies are. It may be that, as the leader of one of the eurozone’s mendicant countries, he must play his cards close to his chest. On the other hand, it may be that Spaniards, like the rest of us, are just being introduced to a new political style. Leaders who now have the job of seizing back gifts recklessly bestowed are bound to be less voluble than those who handed them out in the first place.

Volokh Conspiracy

[How the War on Drugs Creates Perverse Incentives for Police](#)

by Ilya Somin

Radley Balko has [an interesting piece](#) at Huffington Post on the ways in which the War on Drugs creates perverse incentives for police departments:

Arresting people for assaults, beatings and robberies doesn’t bring money back to police departments, but drug cases do in a couple of ways. First, police departments across the country compete for a pool of federal anti-drug grants. The more arrests and drug seizures a department can claim, the stronger its application for those grants.

“The availability of huge federal anti-drug grants incentivizes departments to pay for SWAT team armor and weapons, and leads our police officers to abandon real crime victims in our communities in favor of ratcheting up their drug arrest stats,” said former Los Angeles Deputy Chief of Police Stephen Downing. Downing is now a member of Law Enforcement Against Prohibition, an advocacy group of cops and prosecutors who are calling for an end to the drug war.

“When our cops are focused on executing large-scale, constitutionally questionable raids at the slightest hint that a small-time pot dealer is at work, real police work preventing and investigating crimes like robberies and rapes falls by the wayside,” Downing said.

And this problem is on the rise all over the country. Last year, police in New York City arrested around 50,000 people for marijuana possession. Pot has been decriminalized in New York since 1977, but displaying the drug in public is still a crime. So police officers stop people who look “suspicious,” frisk them, ask them to empty their pockets, then arrest them if they pull out a joint or a small amount of marijuana. They’re tricked into breaking the law. According to a report from Queens College sociologist Harry Levine, there were 33,775 such arrests from 1981 to 1995. Between 1996 and 2010 there were 536,322.

Several NYPD officers have alleged that in some precincts, police officers are asked to meet quotas for drug arrests. Former NYPD narcotics detective Stephen Anderson recently testified in court that it’s common for cops in the department to plant drugs on innocent people to meet those quotas — a practice for which Anderson himself was then on trial.

At the same time, there’s increasing evidence that the NYPD is paying less attention to violent crime. In an explosive Village Voice series last year, current and former NYPD officers told the

publication that supervising officers encouraged them to either downgrade or not even bother to file reports for assault, robbery and even sexual assault.

Even when police officials don't consciously prioritize drug crimes ahead of violent crimes, the [vast expenditure of law enforcement resources on the former](#) probably reduces the amount of police effort that can be devoted to the latter.

Later in the article, Balko notes that the War on Drugs also incentivizes police departments to shift resources away from violent crime because drug busts allow them to earn extra money through asset forfeiture, while solving violent crime usually does not:

The most perverse policy may be asset forfeiture. Under civil asset forfeiture, police can seize property from people merely suspected of drug crimes. So long as police can show even the slightest link of drug activity to a car, some cash, or even a home, they can seize it. In the majority of cases, most or all of the seized cash goes back to the police department. In some cases, the department has taken possession of cars as well, but generally non-cash property is auctioned off, with the proceeds then going back to the department. An innocent person who has property seized must go to court and prove his property was earned legitimately, even if he was never charged with a crime. The process of going to court can often be more expensive than the value of the property itself.

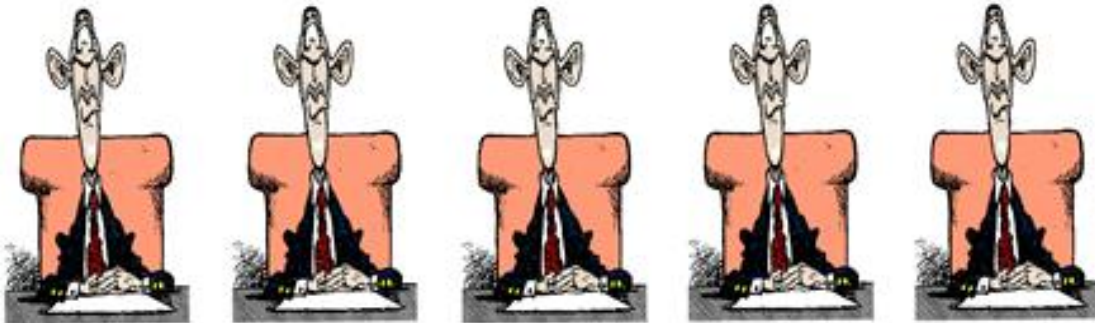
Asset forfeiture not only encourages police agencies to use resources and manpower on drug crimes at the expense of violent crimes, it also provides an incentive for police agencies to actually wait until drugs are on the streets before making a bust.

I wrote about the ways in asset forfeiture threaten constitutional property rights [here](#).

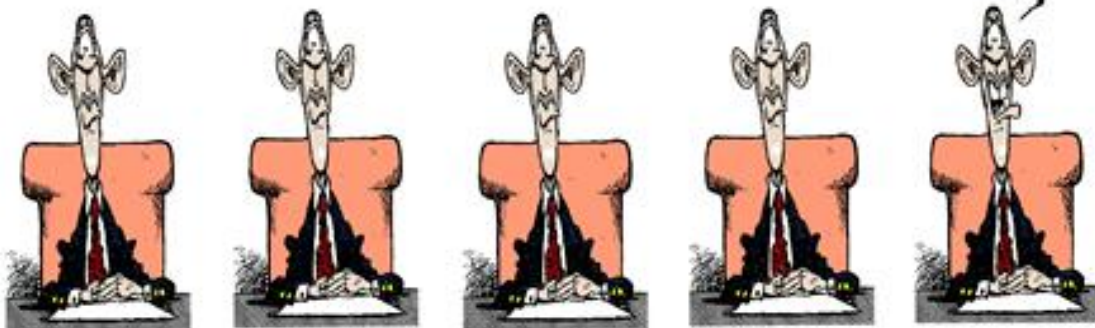
I WAS GETTING NOWHERE WITH MY MATH HOMEWORK... SO I APPOINTED A SUPERCOMMITTEE.



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