

December 7, 2011

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Obama, after all, is such a towering economic mind that in Osawatomie, he once again **blamed ATMs** (and the Internets) for job losses. This is a man we can trust. "Less productivity! More jobs!"

That's not to say capital isn't useful occasionally, of course. Not long ago, Obama hosted a \$38,000-a-plate **fundraiser** for wealthy Manhattanites. The president — with the Democratic National Committee — has hauled in more cash from rent-seeking financial-sector companies than all Republican candidates combined. This president has supported every big-business bailout with taxpayers' money, even though he claims they shouldn't be on the "hook for Wall Street's mistakes."

But it is refreshing to hear Obama come out and give us a clear picture of this country in all its ugly class-conscious, unjust, menacing glory rather than veil his arguments with any of that soothing rhetoric that got him elected last time. It's time, my friends, for a new square deal.

Tony Blankley says to the administration, "Nice job in Egypt."

One of the nice things about human history is that no matter how much people or their leaders misjudge events and make a hash of things, within a few centuries, the debris is cleared away and we can have another go at getting things right.

Yes, I am thinking about the Middle East and the latest mix-up by the experts - their assessment just a few months ago of the nature of the Arab Spring and its democracy movement. Back in the spring, leading experts - from the Obama administration to the neoconservatives on the right to the major liberal media to most of the academic area specialists - were overwhelmingly predicting that all those great secular, liberal, college-educated kids with their iPhones in Tahrir Square represented the new Egypt and would bring all their wonderful values to the revolution. It was primarily us cranky right-wingers who have been writing about radical Islamic politics (and, of course, the Israelis, who can't afford to get it wrong on Muslim political habits) who warned that this was all going to end in the rise in still-ancient Egypt of radical Islamist, anti-Israeli, anti-Semitic, anti-Christian, anti American, anti-Western governance.

So our government - as I said, cheered on by neoconservatives as well as liberals - undercut Hosni Mubarak's regime and told us not to worry about the Islamists. The Muslim Brotherhood was a group of really old, tired men who were no longer really radical and had been propped up just to provide the regime with an opposition punching bag. Armed with their social-media

devices, the kids would run rings around the sorry excuse for Islamists and deliver real democracy.

Hadn't any of those experts been to Egypt? There are not a lot of secular liberals hanging out - even at the universities - let alone in the thousands of villages and urban slums. Who the heck did the experts think those angry, bearded men were who were roaming around glaring at Westerners and Muslim women who dared to walk on the street? I saw them back in the 1960s and '70s, and they were scary even then. ...

Caroline Glick says the U. S., under Obama, is no longer an Israeli ally.

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Rather than warn Egypt that it will face severe consequences if it completes its Islamist transformation, the Obama administration has turned its guns on the first country that will pay a price for Egypt's Islamic revolution: Israel.

Speaking at the annual policy conclave in Washington sponsored by the leftist Brookings Institute's Saban Center for Middle East Policy, US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton hammered Israel, the only real ally the US has left in the Middle East after Mubarak's fall. Clinton felt it necessary — in the name of democracy — to embrace the positions of Israel's radical Left against the majority of Israelis. ...

[The Economist](#) writes on the man who envisioned the internet.

"FROM its very beginnings, the software industry has suffered from having too many engineers," says David Gelernter, a professor of computer science at Yale University. "There are too many people who love computers and too few who are impatient with them." He blames his fellow technologists for making computers too difficult for non-specialists to use effectively. "The industry doesn't grasp the fundamental lack of sympathy between, conservatively, at least half the population and the software they're using." But what about the late Steve Jobs of Apple, who was obsessed with building elegant and easy to use products? He and Dr Gelernter ought to have been natural allies. One of the many oddities of Dr Gelernter's unusual career, however, is that they ended up as adversaries instead.

More than two decades ago, Dr Gelernter foresaw how computers would be woven into the fabric of everyday life. In his book "Mirror Worlds", published in 1991, he accurately described websites, blogging, virtual reality, streaming video, tablet computers, e-books, search engines and internet telephony. More importantly, he anticipated the consequences all this would have on the nature of social interaction, describing distributed online communities that work just as Facebook and Twitter do today.

"Mirror Worlds aren't mere information services. They are places you can 'stroll around', meeting and electronically conversing with friends or random passers-by. If you find something you don't like, post a note; you'll soon discover whether anyone agrees with you," he wrote. "I can't be personal friends with all the people who run my local world any longer, but via Mirror Worlds we can be impersonal friends. There will be freer, easier, more improvisational communications, more like neighbourhood chatting and less like typical mail and phone calls. Where someone is or when he is available won't matter. Mirror Worlds will rub your nose in the big picture and society may be subtly but deeply different as a result." ...

More on David Gelernter from [Holman Jenkins](#) at WSJ.

Is it David Gelernter's time to be rich?

Mr. Gelernter, a professor at Yale, is already destined to be remembered as the man nearly murdered by the Unabomber. After a painful recovery, he blossomed as a conservative social critic and continued to pursue his personal vocation of painting. He's also written books on subjects as diverse as the future of technology, the meaning of Judaism, and the 1939 World's Fair. Today, the still-revolutionary opportunities of computing are again taking a central place among his varied interests.

To him, Facebook and Twitter are partial fulfillment of something he's been writing about and thinking about since the early 1990s, an evolution of the Internet into a form far less chaotic and more useful than today's. His preferred term is "lifestream." Whatever you call it, the cybersphere as it now exists is due for an overhaul.

Prophecy comes naturally to Mr. Gelernter. He is credited in some circles for having coined the term "the cloud." But what preoccupies him is the inadequacy of our conventions and practices for organizing the wildly expanding array of digital objects that populate the cybersphere.

On the desktop, he says, "The file system was already broken in the early '90s, the hierarchical system. Namespaces were saturated. I was sick of making up names like nsfproposal319. The file system got too crowded and people started crowding their desktops with icons." ...

The Blaze

Obama versus Capitalism

by David Harsanyi

In Teddy Roosevelt's era, President Barack Obama explained to the nation this week, "some people thought massive inequality and exploitation was just the price of progress. ... But Roosevelt also knew that the free market has never been a free license to take whatever you want from whoever you can."

And he's right. Even today there are people who believe they should have free license to take whatever they want from whomever they can. They're called Democrats.

Yet the president, uniter of a fractured nation, the mighty slayer of infinite straw men, claims that some Americans "rightly" suppose that the economy is rigged against their best interests in a nation awash in breathtaking greed, massive inequality and exploitation. Or I should say, he's trying to convince us that it's the case.

The middle-class struggle to find a decent life is the "defining issue of our time," the president went on. And nothing says middle-class triumph like more regulation, unionism, cronyism and endless spending. Hey, Dwight Eisenhower (a Republican!) built the interstate highway system, for goodness' sake. Ergo, we must support a bailout package for public-sector unions — you know, for the middle class.

In what other ways will Obama secure the dream in this "defining" moment? Is the middle class going to be salvaged by raising the top marginal tax rates a few points on 1-percenters and adding \$1 trillion to the federal budget in 10 years (equal to one year of federal deficit spending)? Or is the middle class going to rise again on the strength of a temporary tax holiday from programs it actually uses?

Surely, that won't do. If not, what are you talking about exactly, Mr. President? Give us the big plan. What program have you devised that offers middle-class Americans more opportunity, not just more dependency? How have you expanded the fortunes of the bitter, occasionally clingy bourgeois in the past three years — by adding \$4 trillion to their offspring's tab?

Smart people can grouse all they want about the supposed zealotry of the tea party or the conservative presidential field (and sometimes, they might be right), but Obama's mimicking Teddy Roosevelt's end-of-career hard left turn tells us a lot about the president's worldview. In his speech in Osawatomie, Kan., Obama dropped almost all pretenses and made the progressive case against an American free market system, which he called "a simple theory ...

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Washington Times

[Short-lived shibboleth of a moderate Egypt](#)

Islamists' election victory leaves Western predictions in shambles

by Tony Blankley

One of the nice things about human history is that no matter how much people or their leaders misjudge events and make a hash of things, within a few centuries, the debris is cleared away and we can have another go at getting things right.

Yes, I am thinking about the Middle East and the latest mix-up by the experts - their assessment just a few months ago of the nature of the Arab Spring and its democracy movement. Back in the spring, leading experts - from the [Obama administration](#) to the neoconservatives on the right to the major liberal media to most of the academic area specialists - were overwhelmingly predicting that all those great secular, liberal, college-educated kids with their iPhones in [Tahrir Square](#) represented the new [Egypt](#) and would bring all their wonderful values to the revolution. It was primarily us cranky right-wingers who have been writing about radical Islamic politics (and, of course, the Israelis, who can't afford to get it wrong on Muslim political habits) who warned that this was all going to end in the rise in still-ancient [Egypt](#) of radical Islamist, anti-Israeli, anti-Semitic, anti-Christian, anti-American, anti-Western governance.

So our government - as I said, cheered on by neoconservatives as well as liberals - undercut Hosni [Mubarak](#)'s regime and told us not to worry about the Islamists. The [Muslim Brotherhood](#) was a group of really old, tired men who were no longer really radical and had been propped up just to provide the regime with an opposition punching bag. Armed with their social-media devices, the kids would run rings around the sorry excuse for Islamists and deliver real democracy.

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By the way, as I recall, [Tahrir Square](#) was pretty much a circle. But who's counting when you are having deranged, liberal fantasies? Even if these experts on Sunday political round-table chatters had not been to [Egypt](#), perhaps it was a clue that a Pew poll in the spring said 65 percent of the public would vote Islamist.

The early returns are in. (There are still two more rounds of voting in 18 of the country's 27 provinces over the next month.) The Islamists look likely to get 65 percent 70 percent of the eventual vote. According to the High Election Commission, the Islamic fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party got about 36 percent, while the Salafist Nour Party got a stunning 25 percent. The Salafists are the hysterical wing of the fundamentally reactionary general Muslim population, while the [Brotherhood](#) is merely the fanatical wing.

The grand total for all the parties that, by the ancient cultural standards of Pharaonic Egypt, are considered the liberal-secular bloc - the makers of the glorious Arab Spring democracy was, wait for it - 13 percent. I predict that if any of them try to practice any of that liberal-secular stuff in public, either the military eventually will lock them up or the Salafists eventually will beat them up or kill them on the street. Adios, liberal-secular [Egypt](#), we hardly new ya. Hello, kill the Coptic Christians and the Jews.

Of course, the various ever-bewildered wire services and newspapers are reporting the "unpredicted," "unexpected" size of the Islamist vote while taking to calling the [Brotherhood](#), in its 2.0 form, "moderate."

But anyway, not to worry. As our brother in journalism Jackson Diehl wrote in this weekend's Washington Post, he has talked with various former terrorists and [Muslim Brotherhood](#) leaders in [Egypt](#), and he assures us that "the ascendancy of parties such as the [Muslim Brotherhood](#) should not be as alarming as many in the West suppose. ... The biggest reason for this is that the [Muslim Brotherhood](#), as well as the more fundamentalist parties to its right, has renounced violence."

Well, that's a relief. I suppose the [Brotherhood](#) also has no more territorial demands. Oh, wait a moment. Mr. Diehl notes that the [Brotherhood](#)'s platform does say that [Egypt](#) should "aid and support the Palestinian people and Palestinian resistance against the Zionist usurpers of their homeland." So, I guess, after they kill all the Jews, they will stop practicing violence. Of course, even then there will be the little matter of the [Brotherhood](#)'s credo: "God is our objective; the Koran is our constitution; the prophet is our leader; jihad is our way; and death for the sake of God is the highest of our aspirations." But it's OK. That is the moderate wing of the upcoming Egyptian parliament.

Jewish World Review

An ally no more

by Caroline B. Glick

With vote tallies in for Egypt's first round of parliamentary elections in it is abundantly clear that Egypt is on the fast track to becoming a totalitarian Islamic state. The first round of voting took place in Egypt's most liberal, cosmopolitan cities. And still the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists received more than 60 percent of the vote. Run-off elections for 52 seats will by all estimates increase their representation.

And then in the months to come, Egyptian voters in the far more Islamist Nile Delta and Sinai will undoubtedly provide the forces of jihadist Islam with an even greater margin of victory.

Until the US-supported overthrow of Hosni Mubarak, Egypt served as the anchor of the US alliance system in the Arab world. The Egyptian military is US-armed, US-trained and US-financed.

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Speaking at the annual policy conclave in Washington sponsored by the leftist Brookings Institute's Saban Center for Middle East Policy, US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton hammered Israel, the only real ally the US has left in the Middle East after Mubarak's fall. Clinton felt it necessary — in the name of democracy — to embrace the positions of Israel's radical Left against the majority of Israelis.

The same Secretary of State that has heralded negotiations with the violent, fanatical misogynists of the Taliban; who has extolled Saudi Arabia where women are given ten lashes for driving, and whose State Department trained female-hating Muslim Brotherhood operatives in the lead-up to the current elections in Egypt accused Israel of repressing women's rights. The only state in the region where women are given full rights and legal protections became the focus of Clinton's righteous feminist wrath.

In the IDF, as in the rest of the country, religious coercion is forbidden. Jewish law prohibits men from listening to women's voices in song. And recently, when a group of religious soldiers were presented with an IDF band that featured female vocalists, keeping faith with their Orthodox

observance, they walked out of the auditorium. The vocalists were not barred from singing. They were not mistreated. They were simply not listened to.

And as far as Clinton is concerned, this is proof that women in Israel are under attack. Barred by law from forcing their soldiers from spurning their religious obligations, IDF commanders were guilty of crimes against democracy for allowing the troops to exit the hall.

But Clinton didn't end her diatribe with the IDF's supposed war against women. She continued her onslaught by proclaiming that Israel is taking a knife to democracy by permitting its legislators to legislate laws that she doesn't like. The legislative initiatives that provoked the ire of the US Secretary of State are the bills now under discussion which seek to curtail the ability to foreign governments to subvert Israel's elected government by funding non-representative, anti-Israel political NGOs like B'Tselem and Peace Now.

In attacking Israel in the way she did, Clinton showed that she holds Israel to a unique standard of behavior. Whereas fellow Western democracies are within their rights when they undertake initiatives like banning Islamic headdresses from the public square, Israel is a criminal state for affording Jewish soldiers freedom of religion. Whereas the Taliban, who enslave women and girls in the most unspeakable fashion are worthy interlocutors, and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, which supports universal female genital mutilation is moderate, Israel is an enemy of democracy for seeking to preserve the government's ability to adopt policies that advance the country's interests.

The unique standard to which Clinton holds the Jewish state is the standard of human perfection.

And as far as she is concerned, if Israel is not perfect, then it is unworthy of support. And since Israel, as a nation of mere mortals can never be perfect, it is necessarily always guilty.

CLINTON'S ASSAULT on Israeli democracy and society came a day after Panetta attacked Israel's handling of its strategic challenges. Whereas Clinton attacked Israel's moral fiber, Panetta judged Israel responsible for every negative development in the regional landscape.

Panetta excoriated Israel for not being involved in negotiations with the Palestinians. Israel, he said must make new concessions to the Palestinians in order to convince them of its good faith. If Israel makes such gestures, and the Palestinians and the larger Islamic world spurn them, then Panetta and his friends will side with Israel, he said.

Panetta failed to notice that Israel has already made repeated, unprecedented concessions to the Palestinians and that the Palestinians have pocketed those concessions and refused to negotiate. And he failed to notice that in response to the repeated spurning of its concessions by the Palestinians and the Arab world writ large, rather than stand with Israel, the US and Europe expanded their demands for further Israeli concessions.

Panetta demanded that Israel make renewed gestures as well to appease the Egyptians, Turks and Jordanians. He failed to notice that it was Turkey's Islamist government, not Israel, that took a knife to the Turkish-Israeli strategic alliance.

As for Egypt, rather than recognize the strategic implications for the US and Israel alike of Egypt's transformation into an Islamic state, the US Defense Secretary demanded that Israel ingratiate itself with Egypt's military junta. Thanks in large part to the Obama administration, that junta is now completely beholden to the Muslim Brotherhood.

As for Jordan, again thanks to the US's support for the Muslim Brotherhood and its aligned groups in Libya and Tunisia, the Hashemite regime is seeking to cut a deal with the Jordanian branch of the movement in a bid to save itself from Mubarak's fate. Under these circumstances, there is no gesture that Israel can make to its neighbor to the east that would empower King Abdullah to extol the virtues of peace with the Jewish state.

Then there is Iran, and its nuclear weapons program.

Panetta argued that an Israeli military strike against Iran would lead to regional war. But he failed to mention that a nuclear armed Iran will lead to nuclear proliferation in the Arab world and exponentially increase the prospect of a global nuclear war.

Rather than face the dangers head on, Panetta's message was that the Obama administration would rather accept a nuclear-armed Iran than support an Israeli military strike on Iran to prevent the mullocracy from becoming a nuclear-armed state.

Clinton's and Panetta's virulently anti-Israeli messages resonated in an address about European anti-Semitism given last week by the US Ambassador to Belgium Howard Gutman. Speaking to a Jewish audience, Gutman effectively denied the existence of anti-Semitism in Europe. While attacks against European Jews and Jewish institutions have become a daily occurrence continent-wide, Gutman claimed that non-Muslim anti-Semites are essentially just all-purpose bigots who hate everyone, not just Jews.

As for the Muslims who carry out the vast majority of anti-Jewish attacks in Europe, Gutman claimed they don't have a problem with good Jews like him. They are simply angry because Israel isn't handing over land to the Palestinians quickly enough. If the Jewish state would simply get with Obama's program, according to the US ambassador, Muslim attacks on Jews in Europe would simply disappear.

Gutman of course is not a policymaker. His job is simply to implement Obama's policies and voice the president's beliefs.

But when taken together with Clinton's and Panetta's speeches, Gutman's remarks expose a distressing intellectual and moral trend that clearly dominates the Obama administration's foreign policy discourse. All three speeches share a common rejection of objective reality in favor of a fantasy.

In the administration's fantasy universe, Israel is the only actor on the world stage. Its detractors, whether in the Islamic world or Europe, are mere objects. They are bereft of judgment or responsibility for their actions.

There are two possible explanations for this state of affairs — and they are not mutually exclusive. It is possible that the Obama administration is an ideological echo chamber in which only certain positions are permitted. This prospect is likely given the White House's repeated

directives prohibiting government officials from using terms like "jihad," "Islamic terrorism," "Islamist," and "jihadist," to describe jihad, Islamic terrorism, Islamists and jihadists.

Restrained by ideological thought police that outlaw critical thought about the dominant forces in the Islamic world today, US officials have little choice but to place all the blame for everything that goes wrong on the one society they are free to criticize — Israel.

The second possible explanation for the administration's treatment of Israel is that it is permeated by anti-Semitism. The outsized responsibility and culpability placed on Israel by the likes of Obama, Clinton, Panetta and Gutman is certainly of a piece with classical anti-Semitic behavior.

There is little qualitative difference between accusing Israeli society of destroying democracy for seeking to defend itself against foreign political subversion, and accusing Jews of destroying morality for failing to embrace foreign religious faiths.

So too, there is little qualitative difference between blaming Israel for its isolation in the face of the Islamist takeover of the Arab world, and blaming the Jews for the rise of anti-Semites to power in places like Russia, Germany and Norway.

In truth, from Israel's perspective, it really doesn't make a difference whether these statements and the intellectual climate they represent stem from ideological myopia or from hatred of Jews.

The end result is the same in either case: Under President Obama, the US government has become hostile to Israel's national rights and strategic imperatives. Under Obama, the US is no longer Israel's ally.

Economist

Seer of the mirror world

David Gelernter, a pioneering computer scientist, foresaw the modern internet but thinks computers are still too hard to use

"FROM its very beginnings, the software industry has suffered from having too many engineers," says David Gelernter, a professor of computer science at Yale University. "There are too many people who love computers and too few who are impatient with them." He blames his fellow technologists for making computers too difficult for non-specialists to use effectively. "The industry doesn't grasp the fundamental lack of sympathy between, conservatively, at least half the population and the software they're using." But what about the late Steve Jobs of Apple, who was obsessed with building elegant and easy to use products? He and Dr Gelernter ought to have been natural allies. One of the many oddities of Dr Gelernter's unusual career, however, is that they ended up as adversaries instead.

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If his vision was correct, Dr Gelernter realised, then new systems would be needed—and whoever built them would have an opportunity to make them more elegant and accessible than existing software. He had already made a big contribution to the field of network computing with his work on the development of Linda, a parallel-programming language that allows programs running on different machines to co-ordinate their actions. Multiple interconnected computers can then operate as a single, more powerful machine. In 1991 Dr Gelernter and his colleagues at Yale demonstrated the value of this approach by linking 14 small “workstation” computers to create a cluster that was as powerful as a supercomputer, but cost a fraction of the price. This was a forerunner of the modern “cloud computing” approach in which firms such as Google and Amazon combine thousands or millions of machines to deliver computing services.

Clouds on the horizon

Linking up machines in this way, Dr Gelernter observed at the time, made far more efficient use of computing resources and created a foundation for new applications such as those outlined in “Mirror Worlds”. In 1992 the *New York Times* wrote of his vision of “a world wired together into one giant computer”, though it noted that this scenario was considered “a potential nightmare by people who worry about computer privacy”.

The publicity around Dr Gelernter’s work may explain why Ted Kaczynski, an anti-technology terrorist known as the Unabomber, decided to target him with a letter bomb in 1993. Mr Kaczynski hoped to foment a worldwide revolution against the “industrial-technological system” and sent a series of letter bombs, causing three deaths and many injuries before being arrested in 1996. The letter bomb sent to Dr Gelernter put him in hospital for weeks, required him to undergo extensive surgery and left him with permanent injuries to his right eye and right hand, which he covers with a glove. “Whenever I get to feeling a bit morose and missing my old right hand, I wind up thinking instead how privileged I am to be an academic in computer science,” he

wrote to his friends by e-mail after leaving hospital. "In the final analysis one decent typing hand and an intact head is all you really need."

"I want the state of each hospital patient to be watched by a million software agents."

The attack prompted Dr Gelernter to branch out into new areas beyond computing. While convalescing he wrote an acclaimed book about the 1939 New York World's Fair, and he has gone on to establish himself as a political commentator, art critic and painter. (He was originally attracted to computer science because he thought it would be a solid career that would allow him to pursue his love of painting.) At the same time Dr Gelernter pressed on with his work as a computer scientist. In 1997 he and his colleague Eric Freeman formed a company, also called Mirror Worlds, to develop an approach called "lifestreams"—a graphical user interface intended to replace the windows and files of conventional computer desktops with an elegant chronological stream of digital objects.

Looking like an endless Rolodex, a lifestream would extend from the moment of your birth to the day of your death, containing every document, photo, message or web page you have ever interacted with—all in a single, searchable stream, and held safely online. Individual items could be shared with other people. "When I want to make something public, I flip a switch, and everyone in the world who's interested sees it," says Dr Gelernter. "I could also blend millions of other streams into mine, with a simple way to control the flow of information so I'm not overwhelmed. It would be my personal life, my public life and my confidential electronic diary."

If that sounds an awful lot like Facebook, the similarities become almost eerie when Dr Gelernter explains how he hoped to release lifestreams into the world. "I wanted the company to build software for college students, who are eager early adopters. It would be designed not only to eliminate file systems but also to be a real-time messaging medium. Social networking was the most important aspect of it. Starting with Yale, we would give it away for free to get undergraduates excited about recommending it to their friends," he says. But Mirror Worlds' investors decided that it would be better to focus on corporate clients, and the result was an organisational tool called Scopeware. It sold modestly to a few large American state agencies, but never took off. Mirror Worlds ceased trading in 2004, the same year that Mark Zuckerberg launched Facebook.

The story of Mirror Worlds was not over yet, however. In 2008 the company, now owned by a hedge fund, revived itself and filed suit against Apple for patent infringement. Between 1996 and 2003, Dr Gelernter and Dr Freeman had generated a number of patents relating to the idea of lifestreams. These patents, the firm argued, were being infringed by several Apple products, including its Spotlight search feature, its Cover Flow interface for displaying album covers in iTunes and its Time Machine backup software. A countersuit from Apple accused Dr Gelernter of hiding prior art relating to his patents and misrepresenting his inventorship.

Dr Gelernter thus found himself at war with Jobs, one of the few figures in the computer industry who shared his views on the importance of technology being subservient to users, rather than the other way around. "Apple has always been interested in the cultural and aesthetic value of its products over the engineering. Steve always saw himself as an artist," says Dr Gelernter. According to an internal Apple e-mail presented at the trial, Jobs saw an article about Scopeware in 2001, was impressed by the idea and suggested that Apple might want to license it. The two firms met but no deal was done.

Inversion of fortune

In 2010 a district court in Texas found Apple guilty on all counts and awarded Mirror Worlds a stunning \$625.5m in damages—the fourth-biggest patent award in history. “It was good to be vindicated, although by that time, I had only a small financial interest in the verdict,” says Dr Gelernter. “In research, the capital that you have is not money in the bank but your reputation. I simply wanted a footnote saying that these were Gelernter’s ideas.” But in April 2011 a federal judge overturned the verdict, even while upholding the Mirror Worlds patents, ruling that Apple had not infringed them and should pay nothing. “It was like a punch in the face,” says Dr Gelernter. Mirror Worlds is now appealing against this ruling and a final judgment is expected in early 2012.

Given his track record for predicting the future, what is Dr Gelernter working on next? One prediction in “Mirror Worlds” remains conspicuously unfulfilled: his vision of cyberspace seething with billions of intelligent software agents working on behalf of their human masters. They might monitor news feeds, track local-government decisions or keep an eye on people’s health via digital sensors. “I want the state of each hospital patient to be watched by a million agents,” says Dr Gelernter. “We can create a software agent for a particular rare combination of circumstances that happens only once every 1,000 years but happens to you.” The technology exists, he says, “but our Mirror World is uninhabited. It’s like a forest with nothing living in it.”

He plans to form a new company to focus on this agent-based approach, something today’s internet firms show little interest in pursuing. “Google is commercially successful and dazzlingly imaginative but I don’t see what I would like to see from them, or Facebook or Twitter,” says Dr Gelernter. “They’re not turning on their imaginations.” His new company will also deliver a new incarnation of lifestreams, capable of subsuming social networking, news and multimedia. “I’ve added software layers and apps that make it easy to take any kind of document, object or image and put it in the stream,” he says. “I want this to be a publication medium, the launch pad for everything and a copy of everything.”

As ever, Dr Gelernter’s excitement about the potential of new technology is tempered by frustration that too little attention is paid to aesthetic and social factors. “A lot of convenience and power could be gained, and a lot of unhappiness, irritation and missed opportunities avoided, if the industry thought about design, instead of always making it the last thing on the list,” he says. “We need more people who are at home in the worlds of art and the humanities and who are less diffident in the presence of technology. There are not enough articulate Luddite, anti-technology voices.”

It is not the sort of thing you expect to hear from a professor of computer science, let alone the victim of an anti-technology extremist. But as well as having foreseen the future of computing, over his career Dr Gelernter has developed a clear understanding of humans’ conflicted relationship with the technology on which they increasingly rely.

WSJ

Rethinking the Digital Future

In 1991 a Yale professor David Gelernter envisioned a lot of what we now do on the Internet. Future computing, he thinks, may be organized around a concept called 'lifestreams.'

by Holman W. Jenkins, Jr.

Is it David Gelernter's time to be rich?

Mr. Gelernter, a professor at Yale, is already destined to be remembered as the man nearly murdered by the Unabomber. After a painful recovery, he blossomed as a conservative social critic and continued to pursue his personal vocation of painting. He's also written books on subjects as diverse as the future of technology, the meaning of Judaism, and the 1939 World's Fair. Today, the still-revolutionary opportunities of computing are again taking a central place among his varied interests.

To him, Facebook and Twitter are partial fulfillment of something he's been writing about and thinking about since the early 1990s, an evolution of the Internet into a form far less chaotic and more useful than today's. His preferred term is "lifestream." Whatever you call it, the cybersphere as it now exists is due for an overhaul.

Prophecy comes naturally to Mr. Gelernter. He is credited in some circles for having coined the term "the cloud." But what preoccupies him is the inadequacy of our conventions and practices for organizing the wildly expanding array of digital objects that populate the cybersphere.

On the desktop, he says, "The file system was already broken in the early '90s, the hierarchical system. Namespaces were saturated. I was sick of making up names like nsfproposal319. The file system got too crowded and people started crowding their desktops with icons."

On top of this complexity soon arrived the complexity of the Web, the mass of digital objects we know today, connected by hyperlinks but organized in a way satisfying to no one, except possibly Google. "The current shape of the Web is the same shape as the Internet hardware," says Mr. Gelernter. "The Internet hardware is lots of computers wired together into a nothing-shaped cobweb. The Web itself is a lot of websites hyperlinked together into a nothing-shaped cobweb."

The failure of the Internet to organize itself into a more useful metaphor is precisely what needs fixing. "It is impossible to picture the Web. It's a big fuzzy nothing. I sort of tiptoe around tiny areas of it shining a flashlight."

We sit in his family's modest, woodsy home a few miles north of New Haven. Because the Unabomber experience has so colored the press's interest in him, Mr. Gelernter, in profiles, tends to come across as grim. He's anything but grim. He's a bit of a comedian, in a deadpan sort of way. He cites the "most talked about" part of one of his books, but quickly adds, "not that any part was greatly talked about."

In that book, 1991's "Mirror Worlds," Mr. Gelernter described a future in which all our activities would be mirrored on the Web. Almost as soon as it was published he began thinking about a

radical new way to organize our digital mirror world. He started a company to pursue his vision, but it was not well conceived and went out of business after a few years. Today its patents, now owned by an investor group, are at the center of a major lawsuit with Apple.

The idea, though, of lifestreams has been catching on. A lifestream is a way of organizing digital objects—photos, emails, documents, Web links, music—in a time-ordered series. A timeline, in essence, that extends into the past but also the future (with appointments, to-do lists, etc.). Facebook, with its "wall" constantly updated with postings by you and your friends, is a lifestream. Twitter's feed is a lifestream. "Chatter," developed by Salesforce.com for internal use by client companies, is a lifestream.

Mr. Gelernter believes streams are a more intuitive, useful way to organize our digital lives, not least because, as the past and future run off either side of our screen, at the center is *now*—and *now* is what the Internet really is about.

Eventually business models based on streaming will dominate the Internet, he predicts. All the world's data will be presented as a "worldstream," some of it public, most of it proprietary, available only to authorized users. Web browsers will become stream browsers. Users will become comfortably accustomed to tracking and manipulating their digital objects as streams rather than as files in a file system. The stream will become a mirror of the unfolding story of their lives.

"I can visualize the worldstream," says Mr. Gelernter, explaining its advantages. "I know what it looks like. I know what my chunk of it looks like. When I focus on my stuff, I get a stream that is a subset of the worldstream. So when I focus the stream, by doing a search on Sam Schwartz"—a hypothetical student—"I do stream subtraction. Everything that isn't related to Schwartz that I'm allowed to see vanishes. And then the stream moves much more slowly. Because Sam Schwartz documents are being added at a much slower rate than all the documents in the world. So now I have a manageable trickle of stuff."

A stream is any stream you care to describe. "These very simple operations, which correspond to physical intuitions, are going to give people a much more transparent feeling about the Net. People will understand it better, and the Net itself will support what is clearly emerging as its most important function, which is to present relevant information in time."

His son Daniel, a recent Yale graduate, sits in on our interview. His apparent dual mission is to tout the inevitable triumph of a new company the two are working on while making sure Mr. Gelernter doesn't say anything to queer his former company's pending lawsuit against Apple.

Mr. Gelernter himself grew up in the suburbs of New York, visiting Brooklyn regularly where both sets of grandparents lived. He believes America, and especially its educational system, has gone downhill in some ways since then. He recalls a time, in the 1960s, when poets like Robert Frost and painters like Jackson Pollock were as closely followed by the "educated middle class" as TV celebrities are today.

Mr. Gelernter's father studied physics and became a pioneering researcher in artificial intelligence at IBM, so growing up Mr. Gelernter was "familiar with software and found it a comfortable topic." His ambition, from a very early age, was to be an important painter, but at Yale he pursued computing "as a path to supporting a family, which is a very important

obligation in Judaism. Computing in the 70s and early 80s," he adds, "was not a path to absurd wealth. It was a path to well-paying jobs, compared to people in the English department."

There followed happy days and nights in the computing lab, which might have come straight from the memoirs of Bill Gates or other computing superstars. His early work on parallel computing—in which many computers cooperate on tasks—made him a superstar too.

His targeting by Theodore Kaczynski, living in a shack in Montana and waging his deranged war against modernity, has been told often enough. Mr. Gelernter was lucky to survive a mail bomb that tore open his chest and abdomen, mangled his right hand and eye. His blood pressure is said to have been undetectable by the time he stumbled from his office to a Yale clinic nearby. Today the glove on his right hand, mentioned in every media account, I learn is not a concession to those around him, but a prosthesis. "It allows me to get some use out of the hand. It's all ripped up and stuff, patched together."

He takes medicine for pain and visits a pain specialist regularly, but he has come to see himself as lucky compared to other chronic pain sufferers—able to "operate in the world, and do the things you want to do. It could have been a lot worse," he says.

The question posed at the top was meant whimsically. Mr. Gelernter, by any measure, is living a rich life. He has been making paintings since childhood. Lately he has allowed his work to be sold and next year will bring what he calls "an important event for me," his first museum show at Yeshiva University Art Gallery. He sees his work building on the "discoveries" of the New York abstract expressionists as well as the flat panels of Medieval devotional art. Interestingly, he also sees a similar new-old artistic potential in the high-definition video display: "Since the richness of stained glass emerged in the late 12th century, for the first time there is a new luminous art medium—a medium for creating glowing art."

Mr. Gelernter sold his first company, Mirror Worlds Technologies, and its intellectual property to an investor group years ago. The buyer insisted on giving him a small stake in the outcome of its patent lawsuits, and last year a jury handed down an eye-popping \$625 million verdict against Apple for infringing lifestream-related patents in its Macintosh and iPhone operating systems. In April, the judge in the case overruled the jury and tossed out the award. The matter is now under appeal.

Mr. Gelernter says the former company has no relation to a new venture he and Daniel are working on—though Daniel is quick to note that they will be obtaining a license for the Mirror Worlds technology, as Apple supposedly should have done.

The new venture, for which Mr. Gelernter is just beginning to seek funding, will focus on developing a lifestream product for the Apple iPad. "We like the pad," he says. "A particular goal is to create a lifestream which aggregates the most popular social network streams, and includes email and stuff like that. It will generate revenues the way Twitter and Facebook do—by getting huge numbers of users, beginning at the place we know, Yale University undergraduates, who love glitzy new software. They tell their parents, who are big shots because their kids are students at Yale." The new product will spread virally, forming a vast audience that can be sold to advertisers.

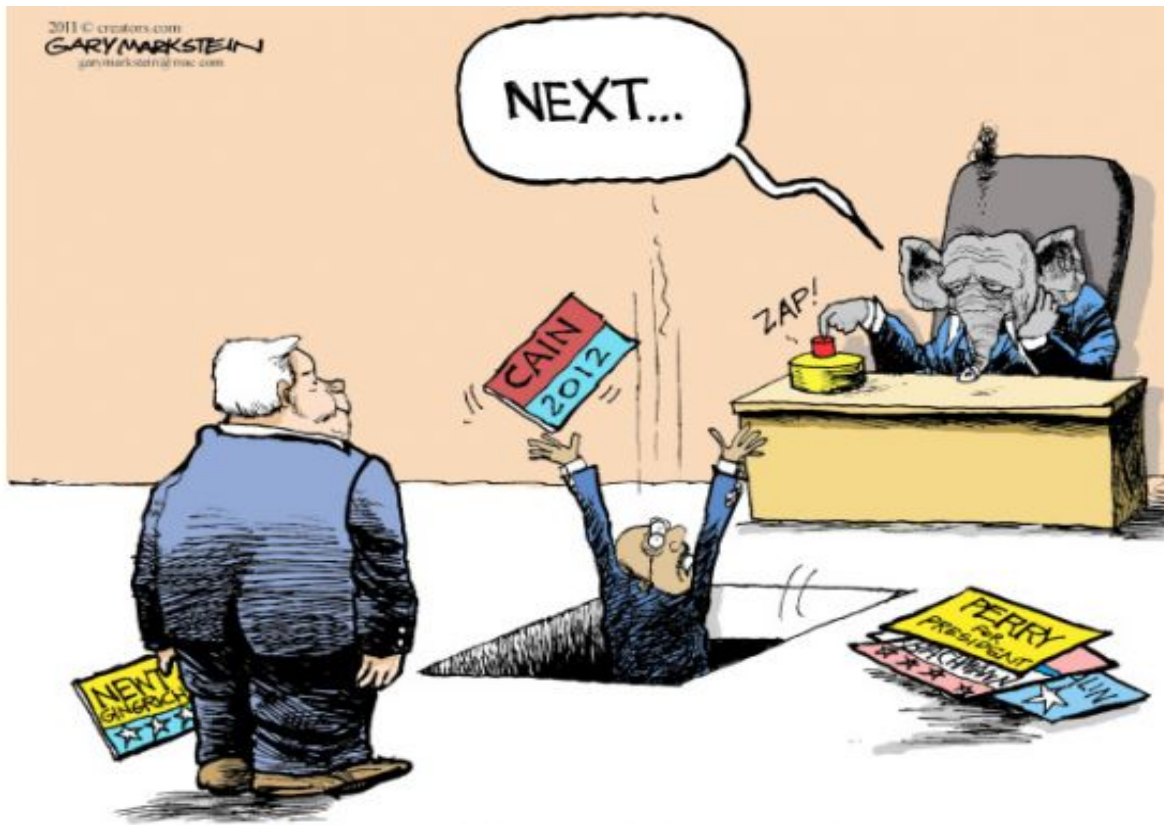
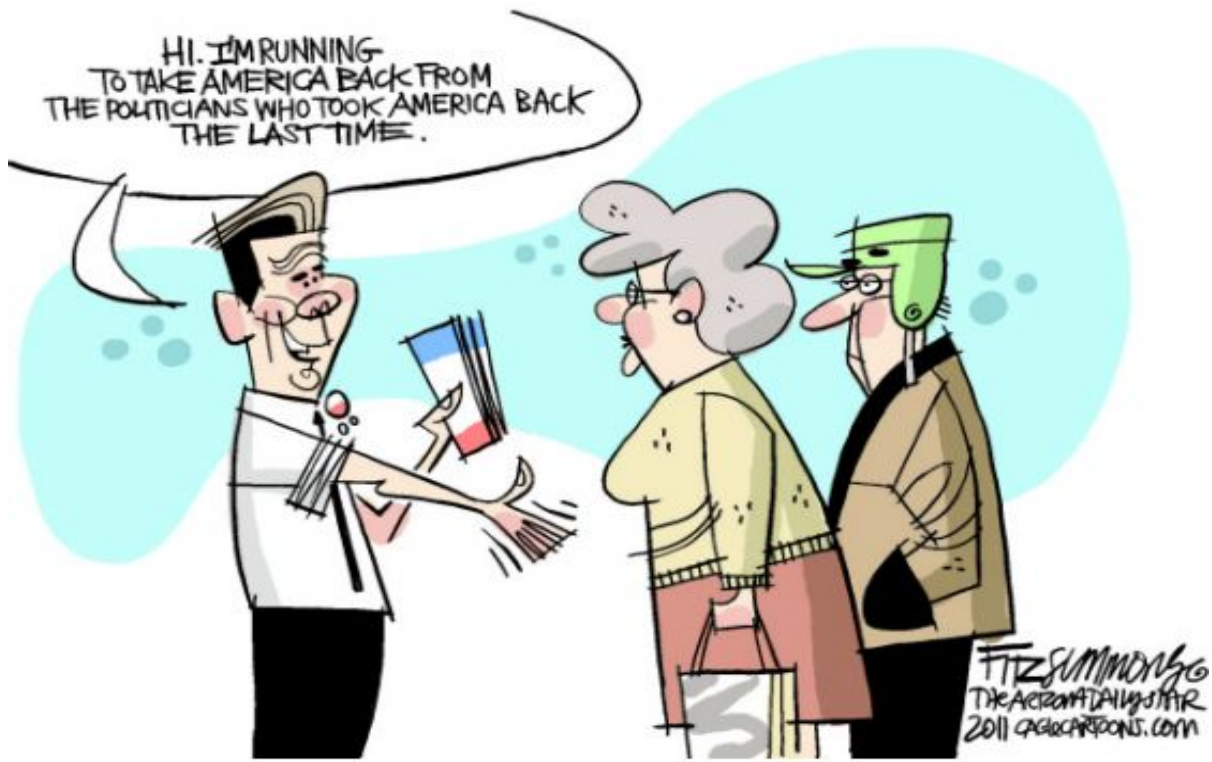
If this sounds familiar, it should. Facebook started at Harvard and branched out to other universities before conquering the world. Facebook, which has evolved into a stream by which users tell their own stories and read each other's stories, is "plugging a very important gap in the cybersphere, but I don't think it's plugging it in an elegant way," says Mr. Gelernter. "I don't think Facebook will be around forever."

About Google he also has mixed feelings. He values Google's efforts to make the world's undigitized documents, such as out-of-print books, available to the worldstream. But he also mistrusts Google. "Google impresses me as wanting power more than beauty. Although Steve Jobs was no friend of mine, I admired the fact he was in pursuit of beauty. I don't pick up any of that at Google. The important engineers are the ones who are dominated by aesthetics, not just engineering."

Perhaps surprisingly, then, he's a fan of Bill Gates and thinks Microsoft (in which Mr. Gates no longer plays a leading role) has the potential to be an important player in the worldstream future. "They need somebody with a vision of where the Net is going, where devices are going. They're one of the few organizations with the resources to make a big move into the future, to make things easier and more elegant and therefore useful. If they were to decide to do it, they can do it."

As for his own return to entrepreneurship, he admits, "It's boring to watch from the sidelines, boring and a little bit depressing." The second time around should also be a lot easier, he adds, because lifestreams no longer are a "radical, weird idea."





THE MACHINE
HE NEEDS:



THE MACHINE
DEMOCRATS
WOULD GIVE HIM:

