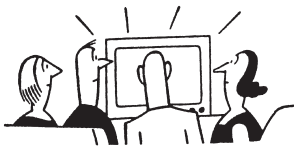




THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT HOMELANDS



Slaves—men of West African origin branded with Christian monikers like Tom, Peter, Ben, Harry, and Daniel—helped build the White House. Three were on loan from its chief architect, James Hoban. Construction began in 1792, and slaves worked as sawyers, quarrymen, carpenters, stonemasons, brickmakers. Such was the fabric of the new republic: twelve American Presidents owned slaves, eight of them while in office.

After emancipation and the Civil War, a handful of black men won seats in Congress, but, as the spirit of Jim Crow overwhelmed the promise of Reconstruction, white supremacy regained its hold. On January 29, 1901, the last of those black congressmen, George H. White, of North Carolina, stood in the well of the House and prophesied the miracle of reconciliation and justice:

This, Mr. Chairman, is perhaps the Negroes' temporary farewell to the American Congress but let me say Phoenix-like he will rise up some day and come again. These parting words are on behalf of an outraged, heart-broken, bruised and bleeding, but God-fearing people. . . . The only apology I have for the earnestness with which I have spoken is that I am pleading for the life, the

liberty, the future happiness, and manhood suffrage for one-eighth of the entire population of the United States.

On January 20th, an African-American family will take occupancy of the White House. The incoming President's father was Kenyan, his mother a Kansan. The future First Lady's great-great-grandfather Jim Robinson worked as a slave on the Friendfield Plantation, in Georgetown, South Carolina, and is thought to be buried there in an unmarked grave. The election of Barack Hussein Obama represents the culmination of the processes predicted by Representative White, forces that accelerated with the rise, in 1955, of the Second Reconstruction—the civil-rights movement—and the election and the appointment thereafter of hun-

dreds of African-Americans to public office. It is cause not for self-congratulation but for celebration nonetheless. There are many things that the Inauguration of Barack Obama will not mean—the complete eradication of racial prejudice; the disappearance of injustices of history still made manifest in the everyday statistics of employment, education, and incarceration—but it can only instill in the American people a sense of possibility and progress.

Barack Obama was not elected the forty-fourth President based on the depth of his legislative achievements or on the length of his public service. John McCain and Hillary Clinton were the “experience” candidates. Rather, Obama projected an inspiring message, a “narrative,” of change at a moment when so much in American life—the economy, the environment, national security, health care—is in such parlous condition that, for many voters, political familiarity seemed less a source of solace than a form of despair. During the campaign, Obama embodied novelty and a broader American coalition, and everything we heard about his temperament—as a community organizer in Chicago, as a president of the *Harvard Law Review*, as a legislator, as a campaigner—spoke of someone who, in contrast to the outgoing, faith-based President, possessed a gift for rational judgment and principled compromise.

Now there remains only the occasion of Obama's Inaugural Address before he will put to the test his capacity to recon-

cile forces and historical actors far beyond his experiences in Cambridge, Hyde Park, Capitol Hill, and Oahu. As if the hydra-headed economic disaster and the heightened tension between nuclear Pakistan and nuclear India were not enough to quicken the pulse, the Bush era is ending, and the Obama era is opening, with yet another conflagration in the most intractable, faith-dazed, and history-inflamed spot on earth. With the end of an uneasy six-month truce, the agents of Hamas immediately began firing rockets, dozens of them a day, into the population centers of southern Israel. As the Palestinian journalist Daoud Kuttab writes in the *Washington Post*, the Hamas leadership had lost much of its support in Gaza and knew that the only way to regain it was to reestablish itself as “the heroic resister.” In return, the Israeli government—now in the run-up to a national election—unleashed its F-16s and helicopter gunships. As in so many instances in the past half century—the Lebanon War of 1982, the “Iron Fist” response to the 1988 intifada, the Lebanon War of 2006—the Israelis have reacted to intolerable acts of terror with a determination to inflict terrible pain, to teach the enemy a lesson. The civilian suffering and deaths are inevitable; the lessons less so.

On June 4th, the day after Obama clinched enough delegates to win the Democratic Party’s nomination for President, he spoke at a session of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, with the intention of assuring American Jews of his allegiances. Once more, he invoked his own story and told of how, when he was eleven, he first learned about Jewish traditions, history, and the “dreams of a homeland, in the face of impossible odds”:

The story made a powerful impression on me. I had grown up without a sense of roots. My father was black; he was from Kenya, he

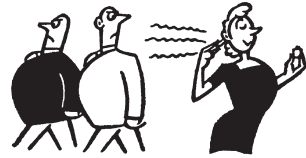
had left when I was two. My mother was white and she was from Kansas, and I’d moved with her to Indonesia and then back to Hawaii. In many ways, I didn’t know where I came from. So I was drawn to the belief that you could sustain a spiritual, emotional, and cultural identity. And I understood the Zionist idea—that there is always a homeland at the center of our story.

As President, Obama will have to address another dream of homeland—the unrealized dream of the Palestinians. In the West Bank, he will be dealing with a leadership that, while imperfect, supports the overdue justice of a two-state resolution. The same is true in Israel, at least with those politicians to the left of Benjamin Netanyahu. But in Gaza Obama will be dealing, directly or not, with political actors who, with Iranian support, seek ceaseless battle with Israel, and may even hope to destabilize Egypt.

Soon after George W. Bush came to office, eight years ago, he told a confidant that “there’s no Nobel Peace Prize to be had” in Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy. He turned his attention instead to places farther east in the Middle East, with mostly horrific results. But, as Obama told his listeners at AIPAC last June, there remains the Talmudic imperative of *tikkun olam*, “the obligation to repair the world.” In four years, or eight, he may well have won no Nobel medal, made no final repair. But the obligation of constant engagement is deep; the cost of negligence is paid in blood. And, what is more, history has proved that the seemingly impossible can be achieved: the Irish and the English have all but resolved a conflict that began in the days of Oliver Cromwell, and on January 20th an African-American President will cross the color line and move into the White House—a house that slaves helped build.

—David Remnick

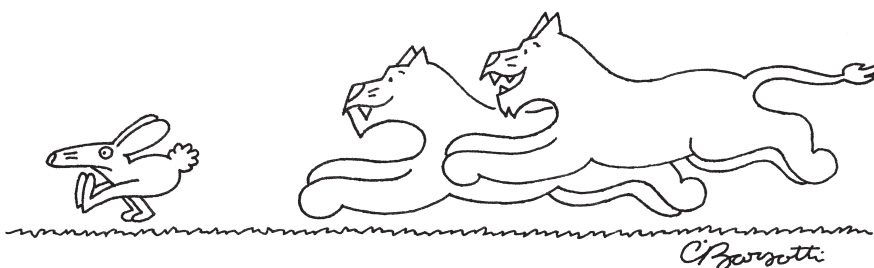
ELIZA DOOLITTLE DEPT. CORRECTING CAROLINE



In 2001, shortly after being sworn into the Senate, Hillary Clinton gave a press conference to address questions related to her husband’s Presidential pardons. The *Times* observed that she used the word “disappointed” ten times, in reference to her brother, Hugh Rodham, who had accepted four hundred thousand dollars to lobby on behalf of a couple of criminals. (One was pardoned, and the other got out of jail early.) Robin Lakoff, a professor of linguistics at Berkeley, read a partial transcript of Clinton’s remarks and was struck by the recurrence of something else: the phrase “you know,” which in her line of work is recognized as a “discourse marker” or a “pragmatic particle.” She recalled her old graduate student Jan-Ola Östman’s 1980 master’s thesis, “You Know: A Discourse-Functional Study,” and was moved to write an essay, “Now You Know About Hillary Rodham Clinton,” in which she speculated that even “very sophisticated and articulate public persons” might repeat the phrase excessively when feeling vulnerable. Lakoff wrote, “Senator Clinton keeps using *you know*, whether hopefully or desperately, as a plea: ‘Please see it my way—because we share the same world-view.’”

Clinton’s “you know” count came to nineteen. Her possible senatorial replacement, Caroline Kennedy, would seem, by this standard, to be overqualified. She met with a couple of *Times* reporters recently and said “you know” a hundred and thirty-eight times. Speaking to the *News*, and on NY1, she broke two hundred. The effect, however, was not to suggest a shared world view but to recall what some commentators refer to as the “Roger Mudd moment”—a reference to the CBS correspondent who flummoxed Caroline’s uncle, Ted Kennedy, in 1979, with questions about his desire to run for President:

Ted: “Well, it’s—on what—on, you know, you have to come to grips with the different issues that we’re facing. I mean, we can—we’d have to deal with each of



“The system’s not perfect, but, by God, it’s transparent.”

the various questions that we're talking about." Caroline, on Ted: "I mean, he loves the Senate. It's been, you know, the most, you know, rewarding life for him, you know. I'm sure he would love it to feel like somebody that he cared about had that same kind of opportunity."

Mudd, last week, reflected, "All Ken-



Caroline Kennedy

neds have always been hard interviews," and added, "At least she didn't use the word 'like,' did she?" (She did, but not nearly so noticeably.)

The Mudd parallel highlighted the strange tension in Kennedy's nascent candidacy. On the one hand, her lack of polish, or media training, suggests an Everywoman appeal—the mother of three with no Washington experience, like a Sarah Palin for Democrats—while at the same time undermining the Kennedy mystique and serving as a reminder of the Bush lesson that dynasties can devolve (and not just into mangled English).

Perhaps Mary Mayotte could help? Mayotte runs the Speech Fitness Institute and has experience in curbing the tics of fashion-industry types. ("I've seen people say 'fabulous' twenty-five times in a three-minute interview," she said.) She watched Caroline host the Kennedy Center Honors, and identified what she called "eye contact issues: when she looked up from her script, she didn't focus on the audience." One helpful technique, Mayotte suggests, "involves making a conscious effort to CONNECT on opening—in any form of Comm-YOU-nication."

Or maybe Kennedy could call Michael Levine, a publicist who specializes in celebrity overexposure. Levine met Kennedy at a book-signing, and remembers that she had "a warmth that would make a Frigidaire proud." He said his advice to Kennedy is much like his advice to Paris Hilton and Lindsay Lohan: "Here's what you do—exactly the opposite of what you normally do." For celebs, that means not playing to the paparazzi, and going "bling-less"; for Kennedy, he recommends not public speaking but a "listening tour," to capitalize on the strengths of her underexposure.

There is also the cosmetic approach to achieving public polish. Amy Strozzi, who was hired to serve as one of Sarah Palin's stylists, just began writing a blog, the Beauty Manifesto. Her first post included this "Tip from the Trail": "For a full day of wear, cover your (entire) lip with L'Oreal Automatic Lip Pencil in Nudes, soften with a brush or smudge it with your finger, and add a thin coat of Carmex. Top with a swipe of Chanel Glossimer in Giggle, and you are good to go."

—Ben McGrath

SELL-OFF FAMILY JEWELS



Last week, with family vacations to St. Bart's and Aspen cancelled, the Upper East Side was swarming with kids. The McDonald's at Eighty-fifth and Third was packed—and, to most of the younger patrons, if not the sunken-eyed parents, an afternoon there was probably just as good as skiing. (The Web site destroydebt.com had posted a list of "20 Inexpensive Ways to Entertain Your Kids in the Winter." No. 15: "Count and roll the change.")

At The Breakers, in Palm Beach, the ten-thousand-dollar-a-week cabanas were all booked, but a guest there said the atmosphere was grim. "It's like everybody's in mourning," he said, referring both to Bernie Madoff's victims and to the people whose stock portfolios had merely taken a dive. "It's like a member of the family has died, and its name is

Money." A new poolside pastime had emerged, in place of canasta: calling a friend over and showing him a stack of account statements from Bernard L. Madoff Investment Securities—the now worthless things touting those steady ten- to fifteen-per-cent returns—and asking, "What did I miss?" The guest, having seen a few, thought he'd detected a clue (besides the impossible math): "When you get a statement from J. P. Morgan and Merrill Lynch, it's done on a laser printer. Madoff's statements were all done on nineteen-nineties printers—impact printers, typewriter-ribbon printers. If I was running a con, I would have kept my technology up to date is what I'm saying."

Back in midtown, business was brisk at the Madison Avenue headquarters of CIRCA, a jewelry-buying firm, where Madoff-related jewels had been incoming all month, like expensive shrapnel. "When Madoff hit, then we started to get the calls," the firm's C.E.O., Chris Del Gatto, said the other day in his office, which is decorated with polo paraphernalia. An older woman in Beverly Hills had mailed in a nine-carat diamond to sell, so that she could pay her expenses; the company had sent armored cars to retrieve two batches of family jewels from Chicago and Arizona. "If it's high enough value, one of the services we provide is we'll send Brinks," Del Gatto said.

He got on his speakerphone and called Tracy Sherman, the company's Palm Beach director, who talked about the daily rounds she'd been making to the homes of Madoff victims. "Just visualize a dining-room table with everything laid out in rows," Sherman said. "They've taken the jewelry out of the safety-deposit box and laid it out—all the earrings, and then come the bracelets and the suites of things that go together." Often, the house is for sale, too. "Everybody down here has David Webb jewelry," Sherman said, referring to a company known for its gem-encrusted animals. "And there's all the inherited jewelry: things from the twenties that are from the great-grandmother. And then the grandmother's things are from the forties and fifties, and now Mom is selling her things that are from the seventies." Sherman helps them prioritize: "I always say, 'Well, now, have you worn any of it? Or is there anything you're still emotionally tied to?'" She does a bit of therapy: "Most of them never thought about

having to come up with money to pay regular expenses. I look upon it positively and say, 'Be glad you had these things, and be glad you had great taste, so now you can sell it in order to continue.'

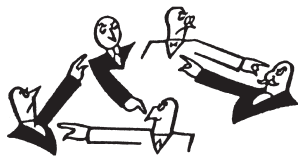
"We become the priest and the rabbi, the psychiatrist," Del Gatto added.

Del Gatto went into a back room and retrieved a manila envelope, which he emptied out onto a table: the day's harvest from Palm Beach, more than a quarter of a million dollars' worth of jewels. There was a worn leather case containing a teardrop-shaped platinum-and-diamond pin made by Cartier in the twenties (\$50,000); a diamond tennis bracelet from the seventies (\$5,000); a yellow-gold Franck Mueller watch, worth thirty thousand dollars; and a sixties- or seventies-era gold bangle with two green enamel bullfrogs on the ends and matching frog earrings. The frogs had ruby eyes and diamond warts. "This is kind of interesting," Del Gatto said. "This is a David Webb animal suite." The set was worth fifteen thousand dollars.

Del Gatto gestured toward the haul and said, "This will be sold to collectors all around the world," and it was possible to imagine the frog family, together with the rest of the jewels dislodged by Madoff, going on a great migration—from Palm Beach to Russia, or Dubai, or wherever the outlook is still rosy, if such a place exists. He scooped the jewels back into the envelope and walked down the hall to the safe room—a very un-Ali-Baba-like closet full of wiring and plastic boxes. "We're not pirates," he said.

—Lizzie Widdicombe

BUREAUCRACY DEPT. TWEED WARS



As anyone who has lived through the past eight years can attest, disputes about the foreign relations of the United States frequently deteriorate into shouting matches. Not so with disputes about the "Foreign Relations of the United States"—the official documentary history of America's dealings with the rest of the world. The series, not so widely known as FRUS, makes public the viscera of officialdom—

diplomatic cables, intelligence reports. If you want to read a transcript of President Nixon and Chairman Mao joking about Henry Kissinger, FRUS is the place to look. (Nixon: "Anyone who uses pretty girls as a cover must be the greatest diplomat of all time." Mao: "So your girls are very often made use of?" Nixon: "His girls, not mine.")

But recently FRUS became not just a chronicle of conflict but a source of it. Last month, the State Department's Foggy Bottom headquarters was the site of a contentious meeting, during which two members resigned from an advisory committee of nine historians that oversees the series. The resignations were the culmination of nearly two years of acrimony between the committee and the State Department's Office of the Historian, which is currently headed by Marc Susser. Last fall, the committee learned that one of its members, Tom Schwartz, a historian at Vanderbilt, would not be reappointed by the State Department to another three-year term. Schwartz had been the lead drafter of the committee's 2007 annual report to the Secretary of State and Congress, which noted that the office was having trouble retaining staff historians. A number of staffers had begun to complain about Susser's management style. Some of the gripes sound like generic faculty-room politics: the Historian, the historians groused, played favorites, doling out perks to those who were deferential. As one staff member put it, "It's like junior high. I was going to say high school, but it's more juvenile than that." In a memo to committee members, Craig Daigle, a historian who worked in the office, claimed Susser warned him that if he "committed any mistake, had any problems with security issues, or created any dissension within the office, he would 'cut my fucking heart out.'"

The allegations shocked the chairman of the advisory committee, Wm. Roger Louis, of the University of Texas at Austin. "Even by Texas standards, it was a level of vulgarity and crudeness that we found hard to believe," Louis said. Most troubling to Louis was Susser's apparent intolerance of any dissent. "We began to discover that it is the equivalent of a petty dictatorship in the Historian's Office," he said. The committee, Louis added, felt that "Tom Schwartz was being purged because of the criticism in the report." (A

State Department official said that the move was intended to increase the committee's diversity.) So Louis decided to resign at the next scheduled meeting, on December 10th, as did another member, Edward Rhodes.

The fifty or so people in attendance at the meeting weren't sure what to expect. "Usually these meetings are fairly mundane," Tom Zeiler, a committee member, said. "People fall asleep sometimes." This time, the mood was tense. One factor was the unusual presence of Assistant Secretary of State Sean McCormack, the State Department spokesman who heads the Bureau of Public Affairs and to whom Susser ultimately reports.

All eyes were on Louis as he called the meeting to order. Before announcing his resignation, Louis read into the record a letter that he had sent to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. (The day before, Louis's assistant says, someone in Susser's office had called and said that if Louis made the letter public "his career would be over.")

"The prospective fate of the series has now become so grave that it would be a failure of responsibility on my part were I not to call it to your attention," Louis read. He said that he had included with his letter to Rice a compilation of anonymous testimony regarding Susser's management. At this point, McCormack interrupted. "I will not sit here and listen to you traffic in rumors and innuendo!" he shouted. "I hardly think that the kind of ad-hominem attacks you have engaged in are the kind of behavior we expect from respected academics."

Ignoring the outburst, Louis finished reading his letter. Then two committee members read statements from the exiled Tom Schwartz, who suggested that the department look for new members in North Korea, where they might find "the type of subservience and devotion to the Dear Leader that the management of the Historian's Office seems to prefer." (Susser and McCormack declined to comment.)

Two weeks later, Secretary Rice met with the committee and seemed intensely concerned; she has appointed a review panel to look into the matter. But some members view the fracas as a sign of the times. "You're seeing a reflection of the Bush-Cheney Administration," Tom Zeiler said. "You know: you're with us or you're not with us."

—Justin Vogt