

## Impromptus

By Jay Nordlinger, *NR* Senior Editor  
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### The Wall and the One, &c.

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There has been some conservative commentary about President Obama's non-attendance in Berlin — his decision not to participate in events marking the 20th anniversary of the Fall of the Wall. I will add just a little to that commentary. Remember that some of us conservatives were unhappy that President Bush — 41, I mean — didn't show more pleasure, when Communism fell? Bush and his people replied that they were restraining themselves for reasons of state: It would be bad to rub it in, etc. And there was an argument. But wouldn't it be okay to show a little joy and appreciation now, 20 years after the fact? Is it acceptable to say that the disintegration of the Soviet bloc was a great happening?

As you know, Obama is better at "apology tours" than he is at such things as celebrating the fall of the Berlin Wall. Earlier this year, in Europe, he did everything but slap a maple leaf on his backpack. (Remember when American students did that? Do they still?) And I will repeat — you all know it — one of the most breathtaking statements of his presidency. He made it when speaking to the U.N., and therefore to "the world." He said, "For those who question the character and cause of my nation" — hang on, it's coming — "I ask you to look at the concrete actions we have taken in just nine months."

Yup. America's efforts in the Cold War took place before January 20, 2009 — and what good could America have done, before that date? The One we had been waiting for had not yet arrived.

I could go on . . .

- On our group blog the Corner, I have been talking about Anita Dunn, the White House communications director. (Go [here](#), for example, or [here](#).) Dunn is the Mao devotee who has been bashing Fox News. Anyway, did you see her statements about how the Obama campaign controlled the media last year — boastful, brazen, amazing statements? You can find them [here](#).

And let me make this point, because I know you have never heard it before: If Bush or his people had talked this way — and acted this way — the world would be all over them like ugly on ape. (You recall that Bush 41 used this phrase, right?)

Count on me for original, consciousness-shifting points . . .

- Monday, on the Corner, I talked about how "teabagging" and "teabagger" came into being: Anderson Cooper, an anchorman for CNN, used "teabagging" against the "tea party" protesters, when those protesters got going last spring. It happened this way:

He was interviewing David Gergen, who said that Republicans had yet to find their voice. They were searching for their voice. Cooper, the anchor, said, "It's hard to talk when you're teabagging." And he duly smirked while saying it. "Teabagging" is a rather exotic sexual practice. You can find the definition at Urban Dictionary, [here](#).

The epithet "teabagger," with "teabagging," etc., was immediately picked up by Democratic pundits and politicians. For example, Janeane Garofalo said of tea-party protests, "This is racism straight up, nothing but a bunch of teabagging rednecks." And the words quickly went "mainstream." Talk-show hosts such as George Stephanopoulos use "teabagging" and so on without blinking, blushing, or apologizing. They say "teabaggers" like they would "Republicans."

On the Corner two days ago, I gave that definition — the one found at Urban Dictionary. And that is why I am writing about this subject again now: I got some mail from a couple of people expressing outrage that I saw fit to give the definition. Isn't *National Review Online* a family site? Other readers wrote to say, "I'm glad you spelled it out — we should not let them smirk in the shadows, so to speak."

Well, that is my view: Sometimes you have to look at something straight-on. And you have to speak plainly. (Remember that book about Harry Truman? *Plain Speaking*.) When a CNN anchorman says something foul, and a little snarky, on the air, we should examine it. When a nasty epithet enters mainstream journalism — and mainstream politics — we should question whether this should be so, hard.

I trust you know what I mean.

I thought of a piece I wrote several years ago — this was on pornography, and it was a companion piece to a bigger piece on the subject that Bill Buckley did. I talked to several anti-porn researchers and activists. And I admire these people just about as much as I admire anybody — especially those who work against child pornography. It is a largely thankless task — and they face three main obstacles, as I recall: 1) They have to marinate in evil, basically, all day long. 2) People, their critics, sometimes say, "Well, why are *you* so interested? Kind of enjoy this stuff, don't you?" And 3) Child pornography in particular is so awful, people (quite naturally) turn away from it, don't want to hear about it. And this benefits pornographers enormously — it is a subject we naturally want to ignore, or sweep under the rug.

Now, I make no analogy whatsoever between Anderson Cooper et al. and pornographers — zero. Please don't mistake me. Those who employ "teabagger" against anti-Obama protesters, and those who purvey pornography, are many, many leagues apart. But, when I got the couple of e-mails chastising me for frank talk about "teabagging," I thought of that piece I wrote, years ago. Hope you think that's all right.

- In my writings about China over the years, I have remarked frequently the following aspect of that state's repression, or persecution: the physical violence against the elderly — the elderly who dissent. Just about every week, from the human-rights groups, you read about the PRC's rounding on some old man or woman, and subjecting him to all the abuses that are the lot of younger dissidents.

I thought of this when seeing an item concerning Syria: "Assad Regime Detains 78-year-old Prominent Dissident." That man is Haytham al-Maleh. He has been on the frontlines against tyranny since the early 1950s, and was imprisoned by the Assad dictatorship in the 1980s. He has not quit, has not given up — has not piped down. Can you imagine such stamina, can you imagine caring about your countrymen so much that you risk your neck, year after year, decade after decade? These people, to me, are barely fathomable, and language is too poor to praise them.

For the full item on Maleh, go [here](#).

- I think you'll get a kick out of [this article](#) from the Associated Press — containing candid remarks by British diplomats in decades past. In 1967, Britain's outgoing ambassador to Nicaragua wrote in a memo, "There is, I fear, no question that the average Nicaraguan is one of the most dishonest, unreliable, violent and alcoholic of the Latin Americans." And how about this from the high commissioner in Nigeria? He wrote that Nigerian leaders had "a maddening habit of always choosing the course of action which will do the maximum damage to their own interests." And "Africans as a whole are not only not averse to cutting off their nose to spite their face; they regard such an operation as a triumph of cosmetic surgery."

I have met many Africans — particularly at international conferences — who describe exactly this tendency, and despair of it.

Finally, get a load from the high commissioner in Canada: "Anyone who is even moderately good at what they do — in literature, the theater, skiing or whatever — tends to become a national figure. And anyone who stands out at all from the crowd tends to be praised to the skies and given the Order of Canada at once."

Ain't no one can slam like a Brit — particularly a British diplomat when he can let his hair down, free of diplomacy.

- Friends, I am writing you from Midland, Texas. Earlier, I was in Austin. My friend Ted Cruz lives there — and in Houston — and he is "going great guns," as my grandmother would say. Ted, you recall, is the Reaganite whiz running for attorney general. I wrote about him in Impromptus, [here](#). I so look forward to his becoming AG — and then governor, and then . . .

- Three words for you — three words that Austin-area people know very well: Amy's Ice Cream. This shop reminds me of shops in my hometown of Ann Arbor (Mich.). Of course, Austin at large has touches of Ann Arbor — though Austin's barbecue is infinitely superior. The workers in Amy's could have come straight from State Street in Ann Arbor: same hair, same piercings, same tattoos, same tudes. I was all but homesick. But I don't think we ever had ice cream in Ann Arbor as good as Amy's . . .

- The opening of the last item reminded me of something: Years ago, I visited some friends, a family of five. Both parents professional musicians, at least one son highly, highly musical. Was seven at this point, I think. Was doing a lot of composing. We wanted to hear a new piece of his. Would he play it for us? The little darling said, "I got two words for you: N-O."

- Back to ice cream: Blue Bell is the local brand in Texas, or probably I should say regional brand. And its slogan is maybe my favorite in all of America: "We eat all we can and sell the rest."

That "resonates" with me, to use a word that seems everywhere now . . .

- Was driving from Austin to Houston and saw a billboard for a dental practice: "We cater to cowards." That resonates, too.

- Had a funny experience several years ago: I was going to visit Houston for the first time, and I mentioned this to a friend — a distinguished music critic. He said, "They have really wonderful songbirds there." I thought that was a curious comment; I quickly forgot about it. I arrived in Houston, and, my first night, I heard some really sweet warbling — not from any person. And I thought, "Holy-moly — it's true!"

- Midland is the home of high-school football, the *Friday Night Lights* town. (Well, Midland and Odessa together, I guess — not entirely sure.) It is also the home of some serious oil drilling. And the hometown of George W. Bush. And Laura Bush. And Susan Graham, the mezzo-soprano. (She sang at the second GWB inauguration.) And the hometown of plenty of others. Governor Bush, when he was running in 2000, liked to cite the Midland motto: "The sky's the limit."

Big sky here in Midland, too — and flat, very flat. (The earth, I mean.)

- If you fly from Houston (say) to Midland, they tell you you're flying to Midland-Odessa. But, as was pointed out to me by an old-timer in Midland, the airport sign says Midland, only: the Midland International Airport. Used to be Midland-Odessa. What happened?

"Odessa didn't pay their way."

Also, the airport used to be billed as "Regional" — but now they fly to Mexico . . .

- This same old-timer worked for an oil company for some 30 years. And he detests the immaturity that so many Americans show toward the oil business. Enviro's and others portray the business as a great

despoiler of the earth. These days, says my contact, “They can drill in your backyard, and, with a little healing, you’d never know the difference.”

He wishes he could talk to Americans, or, better, show them around here, show ’em how it’s done.

- Outside the Midland courthouse stands a darling little replica of the Statue of Liberty — a little taste of New York City, here in West Texas. This Liberty is sweet, pretty, feminine. The one back East is more . . . could we say “strong”? We must certainly not say “butch.” In any case . . .

- The [Texas Public Policy Foundation](#) is a wonderful organization, turning conservative principles into action. (That is a shorthand description, but good enough for the time being.) They are Austin-based, but we had an event here in Midland. The president of the group is Brooke Rollins, a native Texan, and — guess what? The grand-niece of James Burnham, the brilliant political theorist who was a founding editor of *National Review*. It was so great to hear WFB talk of him, as he not infrequently did. He sometimes referred to Burnham as his “best friend”; I heard him describe Harry Elmlark, his erstwhile agent, that way, too.

Bill would sometimes tell about evenings he and Burnham spent chez Horowitz — that is, at the home of Vladimir Horowitz, and his legendary wife Wanda (daughter of you-know-who) (Toscanini). (Whenever Wanda behaved especially imperiously or caustically or appallingly, Horowitz would turn to people nearby, shrug, and say, “Toscanini, you know.”) One time, Bill and Burnham baited Horowitz into playing some Clementi — by claiming that Clementi was not quite worthy. (Horowitz adored Clementi, and championed him — rightly, too.)

Anyway, Burnham had the distinction of being lieutenant to a) Trotsky and b) Buckley. It is better — infinitely better — to end well than to begin well.

- It was a pleasure to meet Clayton Williams, I can tell you. I remember following his gubernatorial campaign in 1990, hoping like hell he would win. What would he do with criminals? “Introduce ’em to the joys of bustin’ rocks.” I wish I could vote for him right today.

And by the way: No one — no one — has ever said “oil bidness” (or however you want to render it) more naturally, more authentically, more perfectly than Claytie Williams. It was positively musical.

- Speaking at our event was Arlene Wohlgemuth, a former Texas state legislator who is now a senior fellow at TPPF, and a health-care expert — very expert. She spoke on the subject with complete persuasiveness, saying that the ObamaCare debate is not really, fundamentally, about health care: It is about the nature of society. The goals of increased access and decreased costs can be met — but Obama’s vision of a new kind of society, with a new relationship between the citizen and the state, is something else. She says that, if ObamaCare becomes law — becomes the new American Way — that will represent a serious, serious loss of freedom. And she explains why, with a chilling clarity.

These are momentous times, I’m afraid — or, if not momentous, all too consequential.

- A sharp lady sitting next to me told me about a local school: the [Midland Classical Academy](#). This is a Great Books school and a Christian school, both: a blend. It is some combination of St. John’s and Wheaton (speaking loosely, maybe too loosely). The school runs from K to 12. And my friend told me something that amused me, greatly.

She said, “The rap against this school is that the kids don’t do enough socially. They have to be off reading, by themselves, and so on. And yet they’re whuppin’ up on everyone in basketball.”

I loved that expression, “whuppin’ up on.”

I later visited the school with its founder, Tim Dunn. (A man who has used what he has earned in business to some wonderful ends.) In the gym, I saw many banners, including state-championship banners. The Knights, and Lady Knights, have been state champions in basketball, golf, cross-country.

Not the most important thing about the school, but mightily impressive. I asked the founder why the school had shown such prowess in golf, in particular. He said, “Well, the coach has an interesting philosophy: He says that his players should not worry so much about winning and go out and have fun.”

Golf can be fun? I never knew. Why didn’t someone tell me, years ago? (Just kidding.) (Kind of.)

See you!

P.S. There is an old story that says a great deal: about a Scotsman who, after his round, threw his clubs into the sea, in frustration — and drowned trying to retrieve them.

P.P.S. I once worked with a man, at a golf course, who came in one day after his round — hot, bedraggled, defeated. He said, “I’ve played this game for 30 years and hated every minute of it. What’s our tee time tomorrow?”

*That’s* what I’m talking about. See you!



[here](#).

Now available from *National Review* is *Here, There & Everywhere: Collected Writings of Jay Nordlinger*. It contains almost 100 pieces, on a great variety of topics. And it is just over 500 pages long. Mark Helprin, the novelist and analyst, says that reading these pieces is “like opening one present after another.” The book is \$24.95, but is being offered through *NRO* for \$21.95. If you’d like an inscription from the author, that’s free. To order the book, please go