
November 19, 2006

Letters

Where Plan A Left Ahmad Chalabi

Dexter Filkins's article about [Ahmad Chalabi](#) reveals the tangled web of complicity, duplicity and incompetence that has destroyed Iraq and mired the United States in an unnecessary war (Nov. 5). Filkins describes these contests: Chalabi versus Allawi; the Pentagon versus the State Department; the C.I.A versus D.I.A; and delusion versus realism. In view of this complex background, President Bush's black-and-white moral absolutism of good versus evil was a sham construct that duped a majority of the U.S public into supporting the war. If blame is to be meted out, who should be held accountable, an Iraqi polymath or a monotone President?

Scheherazade al-Abed
Greenwich, Conn.

The adjectives that Dexter Filkins uses to describe Chalabi — “enigmatic,” “brilliant,” “nimble,” “unreliable,” “charming,” “narcissistic,” “finally elusive” — apply to both the man and the country. In that part of the world, nothing is as it seems. Allegiances are made, then broken, while the ground shifts in an instant, as unstable as the sands.

Chalabi is playing both sides against the middle and holding up a mirror that may or may not reflect reality. Meanwhile, everyone else is doing the same thing. We think they are hopelessly corrupt, and they think we are hopelessly naïve.

Carol Haskill
San Francisco

An associate of Chalabi's complained that the reason their party lost the parliamentary election was that the winning Shiite alliance cheated. As proof, the associate explained: “We know they cheated. You know how we know? Because in one area we had 5,000 forged ballots, and when they were counted, we didn't even get that many.” An avowed cheater complaining about being cheated — now that takes real chutzpah.

Mark Wasserman
Boca Raton, Fla.

Your cover photograph of Ahmad Chalabi — consummate con artist, flim-flam man, duplicitous dissembler and co-conspirator in the duping of the American public on the invasion of Iraq — will fit perfectly in a rogue's gallery of photos of Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz and the rest of the neocon establishment that misled the United

States into this disastrous war.

William L. Valenti
Seattle

Cyber_neologoliferation

James Gleick's fascinating article on the ongoing revision of the third edition of the Oxford English Dictionary dramatizes yet another way in which the World Wide Web has changed and redefined everything (Nov. 5). The Internet has broken down geographic barriers, globalized dialect and jargonized discourse. Rules of lexico-statistics are quaint, and five-year timetables absurd. A word suddenly appears and "cyber-neologlobalgoliferation," bada-bing!

James N. Harris
Chesterland, Ohio

Like tabloids and TV, the Internet is providing fresh meat for lexicographers. With new words from blogs, zines and podcasts, and new citations from archives and databases, we'll soon have a yacht-size folkonomy of language.

Let's hope that the supersize O.E.D. 3 doesn't get the "Pig and Python" syndrome, choking with too much information. And let's hope too that its intrepid lexicographers don't receive the same snarky reviews that Webster's Third New International Dictionary did when it was dissed in the 1960s as a "Kinsey Report in linguistics."

Edwin Battistella
Ashland, Ore.

Borat Ready for Close-Up Now!

Perhaps Sacha Baron Cohen's comic anti-Semitism will serve a healing purpose, somewhat like Richard Pryor's use of the "N" word, but I doubt it (Style, Nov. 5). Such "humor" may become quite the fad — with racist attitudes rendered acceptable.

To say "Just kidding, folks" often masks real ill will.

Art Victor
Turners Falls, Mass.

The Intuitionist

Kiki Smith is a gifted and fascinating artist, as Michael Kimmelman points out in his article (Nov. 5). But for every Kiki Smith who gets her 15 minutes of fame, there are thousands of women artists equally as good whose work will never see the light of day. A quick look at any gallery roster will show approximately one woman to 12 men. The same is true for the art museums and art-history books. In addition to Smith's excellent art work, she has been the recipient of a tremendous amount of good luck.

Peggie Blizzard
Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.

The Price of Climate Change

In finding a correlation between the price of rye and property crime in the 1800s, current economists are rediscovering relationships well known at the time (Freakonomics, Stephen J. Dubner and Steven D. Levitt, Nov. 5). In his book, "Laboring Classes and Dangerous Classes," a social history of Paris in the same epoch, Louis Chevalier noted that "the price of bread was of utmost importance; its curve followed the curve of all ills that Paris was heir to," and the Paris prefect of police wrote in 1827 that "it is imperative that the price of bread does not go higher than 3 sous to the pound." Of course, he did this analysis without the benefit of a single regression equation.

Michael D. Maltz
Department of Sociology
[Ohio State University](#)
Columbus, Ohio

Obedience Training

In her Lives column, Kris Holloway, a naïve do-gooder, unintentionally violates important local customs (Nov. 5). Predictably, these violations upset the delicate balance of this particular society, and her irresponsible actions have consequences.

The same is true, in a general sense, of American foreign policy, which is often formulated by do-gooders, many former [Peace Corps](#) volunteers. These do-gooders think, How can we help country X? despite not really understanding it. The culturally insensitive solution they propose often has results not unlike Oussie's unfortunate but entirely predictable end.

Had Holloway not intervened and adopted the dog, it would likely be named Police, be alive today and disciplined according to the local customs. She should have known that, in Africa, it takes a village to keep a dog.

Michael G. Brautigam
Cincinnati

Islam, Terror and the Second Nuclear Age

Noah Feldman's article (Oct. 29) notes parallel debates in Islam on the morality of suicide bombing and the use of nuclear weapons. One hopes that the non-Muslim world will also grapple with the ethics of violence, particularly by challenging the rhetoric of the term "suicide bomber." Contrary to suggestions of self-sacrifice, most suicide bombers do not act alone but at the behest of homicidal handlers who never risk their own lives. In killing themselves, protest as a motive is dwarfed by their murderous intent to kill as many bystanders as possible.

Calling such killers suicide bombers is like cloaking a wolf in the guise of a sacrificial lamb. A more apt term would be "omnicide bombers," which captures their goal of indiscriminate murder.

Jonathan Gellman

Pleasantville, N.Y.

Feldman writes that Sheik Yusuf al-Qaradawi, [Al-Jazeera](#)'s resident cleric, has "repeated the common view that the killing of Israeli women is justified on the grounds that all Israelis must serve in the military, and so no Israeli is a true noncombatant." What Qaradawi may not understand is that he is acknowledging Israel's relative success in achieving gender equality.

Feldman goes on to say that since "embracing Palestinian suicide bombing has become a social norm, it would have been essentially unthinkable for an important Muslim scholar to condemn the practice without losing his standing among Muslims worldwide. ... What happened, in other words, is that without the scholars paying too much attention to the question, the killing of Israeli women and children has become a kind of exception to the ordinary laws of jihad." Anti-Zionism has become a more important part of Islamic law than Islamic law itself.

George Jochnowitz
New York

Pregnant With Possibilities

Diagnosing tick-borne illness is complicated and takes perseverance and knowledge of the many symptoms and testing options of the numerous parasitic illnesses prevalent not only on the East Coast but also in the Midwest and West Coast (Diagnosis, Lisa Sanders, M.D., Oct. 8).

What troubled me is the fact that the patient in your article had so much trouble diagnosing her illness, even though both she and her husband are physicians. Arguably, the diagnosis was finally made as a result of personal contacts in the medical world. What would be the medical outcome of those patients infected with tick-borne illness who don't have those connections, male or female, pregnant or not?

Karen Peterson
Greenwich, Conn.

My Rapist

Maureen Gibbon was injured but not broken by rape (Lives, Oct. 29). Though she bore symptoms of post-traumatic stress, her revenge fantasies show that her spirit refused to succumb.

As a psychoanalyst who treats survivors of trauma and as a survivor of violent trauma during my own childhood, I was proud of Gibbon for openly opposing the popular notion that "forgiveness enables a person to move on." Her essay is a far superior way of standing up for herself because her story will be affirming for many survivors, while serving as a warning to perpetrators that they easily may be exposed for their wrongdoing.

Farrell Silverberg
Philadelphia

Pigeon Wars

It was not so long ago that Bryant Park and other public spaces had dedicated pigeon-feeding areas (Jon

Mooallem, Oct. 15). Middle-aged Chicago residents may recall when downtown parks had vending machines selling seed for visitors to feed the birds. Until London's current mayor ousted the vendor from Trafalgar Square and criminalized feeding, that square was frequented by tourists and locals alike who came for the unique experience of having the pigeons land on them and eat from their hands; anyone who has visited Venice's Piazza San Marco has almost undoubtedly partaken in this much-beloved and photographed ritual.

It was one of New York's own, former Parks Commissioner Thomas Hoving, who memorably called pigeons "rats with wings" in the 1960s; and it was another New Yorker, [Woody Allen](#), who popularized the term in his 1980 film "Stardust Memories." Now those who still choose to feed the birds, once a common pastime, are, as Mooallem's article points out, deemed "crazy" or "marginal" city inhabitants; and, as cities criminalize this activity, they may come to be viewed as legal deviants as well.

Colin Jerolmack
Brooklyn

[Copyright 2006 The New York Times Company](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)
