

WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE . . . I TALKED JUST THE WAY YOU ARE NOW TALKING, PERICLES SAID. IF ONLY I HAD KNOWN YOU, PERICLES, ALCIBIADES REPLIED, WHEN YOU WERE AT YOUR BEST. WE MUST INDEED ALL HANG TOGETHER, FRANKLIN REPORTEDLY SAID, OR MOST ASSUREDLY WE SHALL ALL HANG SEPARATELY. SIR YOU PRIDE YOURSELF ON AN ABILITY IN WHICH ANY BARBARIAN IS YOUR EQUAL AND ANY JACKASS IMMEASURABLY YOUR SUPERIOR. I COULD SWALLOW YOU WHOLE AND NEVER KNOW I HAD EATEN ANYTHING. AND IF YOU DID THAT, STUPID THINGS WOULD GO, YOU WOULD HAVE MORE BRAINS IN YOUR FEET THAN YOU HAVE IN YOUR HEAD. IF YOU EVER HAD SOLD IN OUR SIDE, LINCOLN SAID GRUMLY, IT IS MORE IMPORTANT TO KNOW THAT WE ARE ON GOD'S SIDE. NO, HE SAID. I LOOK AT THE SENATORS AND PRAY FOR THE COUNTRY. DO I UNDERSTAND THE SPEAKER THANKS GOD FOR HIS IGNORANCE? WELL, YES, IF YOU WANT TO PUT IT THAT WAY, THE MAN ANSWERED. THEN, FULLER SAID, YOU HAVE A GREAT DEAL TO BE THANKFUL FOR. LET ME ASK YOU, SIR, IF YOUR GRANDFATHER HAD BEEN A JACKASS AND YOUR FATHER HAD BEEN A JACKASS, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY? A REPUBLICAN! THE DRUNK SHOT BACK. I WANT TO SAY, I WILL NOT MAKE AGE AN ISSUE IN THIS CASE. REAGAN RESPONDED. I AM NOT GOING TO EXPLOIT FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES MY OPPONENT'S YOUTH AND INEXPERIENCE. POOR GEORGE...HE CAN'T TALK. HE WAS BORN WITH A SILVER FOOT IN HIS MOUTH. WE DON'T LISTEN TO HALF OF WHAT YOU SAY, ONE OF THE REPORTERS RESPONDED.

THE ART OF THE POLITICAL PUTDOWN

THE GREATEST
COMEBACKS,
RIPOSTES,
AND RETORTS
IN HISTORY

EDITED BY CHRIS LAMB AND WILL MOREDOCK

I LIKE TED CRUZ MORE THAN MOST OF MY COLLEAGUES LIKE TED CRUZ, FRANKEN SAID, AND I HATE TED CRUZ.

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CHRONICLE BOOKS

SAN FRANCISCO

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To our wives, Lesly and Maryam—and the sharp- and
dim-witted politicians who made this book possible.

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INTRODUCTION



Des Moines Register editor Carolyn Washburn, the moderator of a Democratic presidential debate in Iowa on December 13, 2007, mentioned Senator Barack Obama's promise for a new approach in the country's foreign policy. She then asked the first-term senator from Illinois how he could achieve this when so many of his advisers had worked for President Bill Clinton.

Before Obama could answer, he was interrupted by Senator Hillary Clinton, the former first lady and the front-runner to win the Democratic nomination. "I want to hear that," she said, provoking laughter.

Obama paused for a moment and replied, "Well, Hillary, I'm looking forward to you advising me, as well."

Laughter followed from the audience and the other candidates—except Clinton, whose self-satisfied smile disappeared.

Obama won the exchange. Several weeks later, Obama won the Iowa caucuses and eventually the Democratic nomination. He was elected president in November 2008.

Hillary Clinton advised him as his secretary of state.

The ability to deliver a comeback that deflects criticism and leaves an opponent speechless can be a potent political weapon. It can be both a bludgeon to injure an opponent and a shield to deflect an opponent's attacks. But, perhaps most importantly, it can establish one's superiority over a rival. In the dog-eat-dog world of politics, nobody wants to end up as the fire hydrant.

Comebacks, however, are rare—or at least medium rare—in politics because they require qualities underappreciated in political campaigning: a good ear, a nimble brain, a sharp wit, and a comic's timing.

In addition, the remark must be spontaneous, and few things in the carefully choreographed world of politics—including ad libs—are left to spontaneity. Winston Churchill, known for his quick and trenchant wit, explained the secret behind the spontaneous comeback: "All the best off-the-cuff remarks are prepared days beforehand."

Churchill provides many of the responses in this book, including the one for which he is perhaps best known.

Churchill had been drinking heavily at a party when he bumped into a political rival, Labour Party stalwart Bessie Braddock.

"Mr. Churchill, you are drunk," Braddock scolded him.

"And Bessie, you are ugly," Churchill said and after a pause, added, "You are very ugly. I'll be sober in the morning."

Churchill's wit could indeed cut deeply. This approach works better in England, where verbal sparring in Parliament

is a contact sport. John Wilkes, an eighteenth-century political reformer, was involved in a particularly angry exchange with John Montagu, the Fourth Earl of Sandwich, who yelled at Wilkes, “Sir, I do not know whether you will die on the gallows or of the pox!”

Whereupon Wilkes responded, “That, sir, depends on whether I embrace your principles or your mistress.”

There’s no record of Montagu’s response, or even if he had one. He probably put what was left of his manhood in a thimble and skulked away.

In his 2005 book, *Viva la Repartee*, Mardy Grothe writes that the word *retort*, which first appeared in 1557, comes from the Latin word *retortus*, which, he said, loosely means “to turn back.” This, Grothe said, “is exactly what a perfectly executed retort does: It turns back a personal attack, transforming a momentary threat into a personal triumph.”

What makes the retorts in this book worthy of inclusion is that most were delivered in quick response to a rival’s verbal attack. We admire those who can do this because most of us recoil when insulted or we think of something to say long after the moment has passed.

Grothe included the French expression *l’esprit de l’escalier*, literally “the wit of the staircase,” that refers to the clever comebacks that come to us as we’re walking down the stairs and departing. Journalist Heywood Broun, who is included in this book, said, “Repartee is what you wish you’d said.”

French and British politicians have exchanged insults far longer than America has had politicians to insult. The American tradition of expressing derision toward authority is as old as the Boston Tea Party and the Declaration of Independence. "There has always been something *sui generis* in the American comic spirit," Christopher Morley wrote, "though, I don't know if it has been recognizably defined. A touch of brutality, perhaps? Anger rather than humor? Various words rise to mind . . . sardonic, extravagant, macabre—we reject each one. Yet the mere fact that it suggests itself points to some essential hardness or sharpness of spirit."

In the United States, a sarcastic quip may regale party loyalists, but it runs the risk of turning away undecided voters in an election. If you live by the rapier wit, you may die by it. Republican senator Bob Dole twice ran for president and lost each time in part, observers said, because his sense of humor was widely viewed as mean-spirited.

Dole did everything he could to confirm that reputation when he ran as President Gerald Ford's running mate during the 1976 presidential election. Dole accused Democrats of being warmongers during a debate with Walter Mondale, the Democratic vice presidential candidate.

"I figured out the other day," Dole said, "that if we added up the killed and wounded in Democrat wars, it would be about a million Americans, enough to fill the city of Detroit."

"I think that Senator Dole has richly deserved his reputation as a hatchet man," Mondale responded. "Does he

really think there was a partisan difference over our involvement in the fight against Nazi Germany?"

After Jimmy Carter narrowly defeated Ford in the presidential election, Dole was asked to reflect on his debate performance. "I was supposed to go for the jugular," he said. "And I did—my own."

Sometimes, to paraphrase Sigmund Freud, a comeback is just a comeback; other times, it can result in unintended—and historic—consequences. In 1856, Preston Brooks, a South Carolina congressman, responded to a vicious speech by Charles Sumner, a Massachusetts senator, by nearly beating Sumner to death in the Senate chamber. Today we can clearly see that this incident was one of the provocations that led to the Civil War. And we might ask, Did Donald Trump run for president in 2016 in response to being humiliated by President Barack Obama during the 2011 White House Correspondents' Association dinner?

This book includes more than three hundred comebacks and eleven essays that attempt to capture the value of a quick punishing wit in politics, from an Athenian lawgiver in the sixth century BC to the present.

No counterpuncher in politics was as punishing as Winston Churchill. By contrast, Abraham Lincoln was often self-deprecating. During one of Lincoln's debates with Stephen Douglas in 1858, Douglas called Lincoln "two-faced." Lincoln responded, "I leave it to my audience. If I had another face, would I wear this one?"

Ronald Reagan, who worked as a film actor before becoming a politician, was, like Lincoln, a master storyteller who had a performer's timing. Reagan was elected president in 1980. But when he ran for reelection in 1984, he struggled in his first debate against Democratic candidate Walter Mondale. Reagan, who was then seventy-three, knew he would be asked about his age in the next debate. When the question came, Reagan responded, "I want you to know I will not make age an issue in this campaign. I am not going to exploit for political purposes my opponent's youth and inexperience."

He easily won reelection.

George H. W. Bush, having served two terms as Reagan's vice president, ran for president in 1988. Bush selected a relatively obscure forty-one-year-old senator Dan Quayle as his running mate. Quayle tried to deflect questions about his age and inexperience by comparing himself to John F. Kennedy, when he ran for president in 1960.

"I have as much experience as Jack Kennedy did when he sought the presidency," Quayle said during his nationally televised debate with the Democratic vice presidential candidate Lloyd Bentsen. Bentsen famously turned to Quayle and said, "Senator, I served with Jack Kennedy. Jack Kennedy was a friend of mine. Senator, you're no Jack Kennedy."

Bush and Quayle won the election. But Bentsen's putdown is forever etched in American politics. And it left Quayle forever marred.

No politician wants to end up on the Quayle end of a comeback. Political analysts and commentators call these “zingers.” But most zingers are just scripted wisecracks.

During the 2016 presidential campaign, the *Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel* called on Florida senator Marco Rubio to resign from the Senate because he had missed too many meetings while campaigning for president.

During a GOP debate that evening, former Florida governor Jeb Bush scolded Rubio. “Marco, when you signed up for this, this was a six-year term and you should be showing up to work,” Bush said. Rubio responded that Bush hadn’t criticized Senator John McCain for missing Senate business while he was running for president in 2008. “The only reason why you’re doing it now is because we’re running for the same position and attacking me is going to help you.”

Media commentators praised Rubio’s response, which received one of the loudest applauses of the evening. But Rubio is no Lloyd Bentsen. Rubio used McCain as a straw man to deflect legitimate criticism. The *Sun-Sentinel* had a point and Rubio, unable to deny it, attacked the messenger.

Wit, unlike wisecracks, has truth to it.

A sense of humor is shaped, in part, by how we observe things around us. Those with a sharp sense of humor often have a keener sense of observation and a more acute sense of the absurd. No contemporary national politician has a better sense of humor than Barack Obama. He, too, was a

counterpuncher, delivering his jabs with a slight smile instead of a snarl.

During his final State of the Union address on January 20, 2016, Obama said, “I have no more campaigns to run.”

Before he could continue, Republicans interrupted the president with snarky applause and adolescent laughter.

Obama waited for the applause to end before responding.

“I know, because I won both of them,” he said.

The GOP members fell silent and the Democrats howled in support.

Obama’s comeback went viral. Once again, he had the last word—and the last laugh.

When Hillary Clinton ran for president in 2016, she faced Republican billionaire developer Donald Trump. When a reporter asked Trump during one of their debates about his close relationship with Russian president Vladimir Putin, Trump said that Putin had “no respect” for Clinton.

“That’s because he’d rather have a puppet as president,” Clinton responded.

Trump countered: “No, puppet, no puppet, you’re the puppet.”

In other words, as the schoolyard poets would say, “I know you are but what am I?” or “I’m rubber, you’re glue, everything you say bounces off me and sticks to you.”

When Trump feels threatened, he responds with the finesse of a knee to the groin. His comebacks are more like

something you would hear on an elementary school playground.

Trump called his opponents for the GOP presidential nomination “Lyin’ Ted” Cruz, “Little Marco” Rubio, and “Low Energy Jeb” Bush. He called Hillary Clinton “Crooked Hillary” and Barack Obama “Cheatin’ Obama.” He also called Omarosa Manigault Newman, a former staffer, “a dog”; Stormy Daniels, an adult film actress he paid to keep silent about their affair, “horseface”; and actor-comedian Rosie O’Donnell “a fat pig.”

Trump frequently takes to Twitter to vent his anger at whomever or whatever happens to annoy him at that moment. In 2018, he directed a series of tweets against French president Emmanuel Macron, Macron’s approval rating, and his statement that European armies should be prepared to build up their own armies without US support. Macron responded by telling a French television journalist: “I do not do policy or diplomacy by tweets.”

The late-night comedy program *Saturday Night Live* satirized Trump as it has done with every sitting president since Gerald Ford. Unlike other presidents, the hypersensitive Trump frequently lashed out at the comedy program.

“Nothing funny about tired Saturday Night Live on Fake News NBC!” Trump tweeted. “Question is, how do the Networks get away with these total Republican hit jobs without retribution? Likewise for many other shows? Very unfair and should be looked into.”

Democratic congressman Ted Lieu of California responded with his own tweet. “One thing that makes America great is that the people can laugh at you without retribution.”

For the last several decades, politicians have had the courtesy of delivering their comebacks before large television audiences or large crowds or by Twitter, leaving no doubt what they said.

It’s possible, even probable, maybe likely, that some of the putdowns in this book were created after the fact, or perhaps created without fact. In our defense, we have taken the advice of many politicians: “Never let the facts get in the way of a good story.”

When Jimmy Walker was mayor of New York, a political opponent trapped him in a lie. Asked by a reporter for a response, Walker just smiled and said, “Another good story ruined by an eyewitness.”

If a story was clearly apocryphal, it was not included in this book. For instance, New York governor Thomas Dewey was the heavy favorite in the 1948 presidential election against Harry S. Truman.

On election night, the story goes, Dewey asked his wife, “How will it feel to sleep with the president of the United States?”

“A high honor,” Mrs. Dewey said, “and quite frankly, I’m looking forward to it.”

But Truman won the election; and the next day at breakfast, she said, “Tell me, Tom, am I going to Washington or is Harry coming here tonight?”

This book is limited to political comebacks, putdowns, and retorts. Therefore, any quip included here must be a response to something said or done.

This isn't a book of stories that politicians tell on the campaign trail to appear folksy. Unlike such anecdotes, putdowns come from the darker side of the brain and are often used as weapons.

During one exchange between political rivals Nancy Astor and Winston Churchill, Ms. Astor snapped: "Winston, if you were my husband, I'd put poison in your coffee."

"If you were my wife, Nancy," Churchill replied, "I'd drink it."

CHRIS LAMB



A young Alcibiades debated his uncle, the Greek orator Pericles. “When I was your age, Alcibiades, I talked just the way you are now talking,” Pericles said.

“If only I had known you, Pericles,” Alcibiades replied, “when you were at your best.”



In the sixth century BC, the legendary Athenian statesman Solon was in the process of overhauling the city’s draconian laws in favor of something more humane and just. He asked his friend and counselor Anacharsis what he thought of the new statutes. Anacharsis was not impressed. He answered that the best restraint on evil was personal character and social censure: “Written laws are no different from spiders’ webs, They’ll restrain anyone weak and insignificant who gets caught in them, but they’ll be torn to shreds by people with power and wealth.”



A talkative barber asked Archelaus, king of Macedon in the fifth century BC, how he would like his hair cut. “In silence,” the king said.



Greek statesman Demosthenes said to his rival Phocion, “The Athenians will kill you someday when they are in a rage.”

Phocion replied, “And you someday when they are in their senses.”



After a battle in which a soldier in his army named Alexander had fled from a skirmish, Alexander the Great rebuked him: “Either change your name or live up to it.”



The Roman statesman Metellus Nepos, whose mother had a reputation for lasciviousness, once teased Cicero about the famous orator’s low birth.

“Who, after all, was your father?” Metellus Nepos asked Cicero.

“It would be much harder for me to tell who yours was,” Cicero replied.



Julius Caesar could never escape insinuations that he had been a lover of King Nicomedes of Bithynia. Caesar once talked about Rome's obligations to Bithynia: "No more of that," Cicero said, "for it is well known what he gave you, and what you gave him in turn."



A friend once said to Cato the Elder. "It's a scandal that no statue has been erected to you in Rome. I am going to form a committee to see that this is done."

"No," Cato said, "I would rather have people ask, 'Why isn't there a statue to Cato?' " than 'Why is there one?'"



King Henry VIII requested that Sir Thomas More carry a strongly worded note to King Francis I of France.

More protested: "Your majesty, you know his temper. Why, he might even have me beheaded."

"Never fear," the monarch assured him. "If he does, I will have the head of every Frenchmen in London."

"This is most kind of your majesty," More replied. "But I don't think any of their heads will fit my shoulders."



Sir Francis Bacon was best known as a scientist, philosopher, statesman, and rhetorician. But he also served as Lord Chancellor of England from 1618 to 1621. In that capacity he sat in judgment of felons and miscreants, and one day an accused murderer named Hogg was brought before him.

"Have you anything to say for yourself"? Bacon inquired.

"Your honor should let me go," the defendant said. "We are kin. My name is Hogg and Hogg is kin to Bacon."

"Not until it's hung," Bacon said.



Actress Nell Gwyn, one of the mistresses of King Charles II of England, was riding in a coach that was attacked by a crowd reacting to the rumor of a Catholic conspiracy to kill the king. The crowd mistook Gwyn for another of Charles II's mistresses, Louise de Kerouaille, who was known as "the Catholic whore."

"Praise, good people, be civil," Gwyn pleaded. "I am the Protestant whore."



After the death of England's Protestant King Charles II in 1685, his Roman Catholic brother, James II, assumed the throne. Charles II's illegitimate son, James Scott, the Duke of Monmouth, led an unsuccessful rebellion.

The rebels were brought before Chief Justice George Jeffreys, known as "Hanging Judge Jeffreys." During one of the trials the notorious judge stuck his cane in the chest of one rebel, snarling, "There is a great rogue at the end of my cane!"

The defendant sneered, "At which end, my lord?"



In the middle of a backgammon game, King Louis XIV of France got into an argument with his opponent. The courtiers surrounding the table, uncertain as to what course to take, remained silent while the king and his rival bickered. In the heat of the dispute, one of the king's associates entered the room and Louis rushed to his side for his support.

"Now," the king insisted. "I want you to judge whether I am right or wrong in this."

With hesitation, the king's associate said, "You are wrong, your majesty."

"But," Louis retorted in astonishment, "I haven't yet told you what the disagreement is about!"

"That's true," the man responded. "But if you were right, sire, these gentlemen standing here would be loud in your support."



John Horne Tooke, an eighteenth-century British politician, lawyer, and clergyman, was asked why he not yet taken a wife. “With all my heart,” he replied. “Whose wife shall it be?”



John Wilkes, an eighteenth-century political reformer, was involved in a particularly angry exchange with John Montagu, the Fourth Earl of Sandwich, who yelled at Wilkes, “Sir, I do not know whether you will die on the gallows or of the pox!”

Whereupon Wilkes responded, “That, sir, depends on whether I embrace your principles or your mistress.”

FOUNDING FATHERS



In early July of 1776, the delegates to the Second Continental Congress voted to “dissolve the political bands which . . . connected” them to the British Empire. John Hancock, president of the Congress, admonished that they must remain united and “all hang together.”

Ben Franklin, the sage and elder statesman of the group, concurred. “We must indeed all hang together,” he reportedly said, “or most assuredly we shall all hang separately.”

Presumably, there were some chortles and guffaws at Franklin’s pungent remark, but there also was a hard truth because all the men in that stifling Philadelphia room knew they were committing treason against King George III and the most formidable empire and military force on the globe. The prospect of getting their necks stretched on an English gallows was real and sobering to those gathered around Franklin that day.

Yet there was no turning back. When Hancock wrote his famously large signature on the Declaration of Independence, he proclaimed, “There, I guess King George will be able to read that!”

The British government hired John Lind, an English politician and pamphleteer, to write the response. In it, Lind mocked

the colonists for writing that “all men are created equal” and claiming that “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” were inalienable rights while allowing slavery.

The men in the room who cast the greatest shadow over that Congress were Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson, who had three radically different personalities. “Franklin could laugh at himself, which was a rare trait,” Philip Goff, author of *The Soul of John Adams*, said. “Adams could laugh at others, and Jefferson couldn’t laugh.”

Yes, the Declaration of Independence, which was written by Jefferson, is one of the most significant documents in history, but it’s admittedly lacking in chortles and guffaws.

The Declaration—and perhaps history—would have turned out quite different if it had been written by Franklin, whose sense of humor leaned toward the scatological.

In 1780, Franklin, who suffered for much of his adult life with digestive issues, wrote “Dialogue Between Franklin and the Gout,” where his gout blames his illness on his poor diet, excessive drinking, and lack of exercise. When Franklin promises to live a better life, the Gout responds with skepticism. “I know you too well,” it says. “You promise fair; but, after a few months of good health, you will return to your old habits; your fine promises will be forgotten like the forms of last year’s clouds.”

A year later, Franklin wrote one of the finest essays of farting the world has ever known. Here is an excerpt:

“It is universally well known, That in digesting our common Food, there is created or produced in the Bowels of human Creatures, a great Quantity of Wind. . . .

“That all well-bred People therefore, to avoid giving such Offence, forcibly restrain the Efforts of Nature to discharge that Wind. . . .

“Were it not for the odiously offensive Smell accompanying such Escapes, polite People would probably be under no more Restraint in discharging such Wind in Company, than they are in spitting, or in blowing their Noses.”

Franklin was a printer, writer, scientist, inventor, and diplomat. But it was no doubt his musings on farting and gout that made him the life of every party he attended in America or in France, where he lived from 1776 to 1785.

When Jefferson was sent to become the American ambassador to France, he was asked if he would replace Franklin. “No one can replace him,” Jefferson said. “I am only his successor.”

Adams’s wit reflected his caustic personality. When he became the country’s first vice president, he dryly observed that he had been honored with a meaningless job. “My country,” he said, “has in its wisdom contrived for me the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived or his imagination conceived.”

When George Washington learned he had been elected the first president of the new American republic, he was similarly unimpressed with the honor. “My movements to the chair of Government,” he wrote a friend, “will be accompanied by feelings not unlike those of a culprit who is going to the place of his execution.”

Adams succeeded George Washington as president after the 1796 election. Slanders were widely published and widely

believed in the acrimonious political climate of the day. According to one story, President Adams sent General Charles Cotesworth Pinckney to England to secure four mistresses, two for each of them. When Adams heard the rumor, he confronted and vanquished it with this remark: "If this be true, General Pinckney has kept them all for himself and cheated me out of my two."

WILL MOREDOCK



Princess Marie-Louise Therese of Savoy-Carignan was a confidante of Queen Marie Antoinette. She was beaten to death by a mob during the French Revolution. As she lay dying, she farted.

“Good,” she said. “A woman who can fart is not dead.”

And then she died.



John and Abigail Adams had one of the great love stories in American politics. They were married for fifty-four years, decades that witnessed a war for independence against England, the birth of the republic, his becoming the first vice president, and then second president, and many long periods when he was away in service to the new country.

Early in their marriage, Abigail clearly understood that her husband was an ambitious man and that his fame rested in part on his role as one the instigators of the revolution, which meant the British government had a price on his head.

“After all,” she told him, “I am Mrs. John Adams and that’s quite enough for one lifetime.”

“Is it, Abby?” he replied.

“Think of it, John, to be married to the man who is always the first in line to be hanged!”



The delegates at the Second Continental Congress argued over declaring independence from the British. At one point, Benjamin Franklin objected to being called an “Englishman.”

“What’s so terrible about being called an Englishman?” his fellow Pennsylvania delegate asked. “The English don’t seem to mind.”

“Nor would I, were I given the full rights of an Englishman,” Franklin said. “But to call me one without those rights is like calling an ox a bull. He’s thankful for the honor, but he’d much rather have restored what’s rightfully his.”



Revolutionary War hero Ethan Allen visited England after the war, where he was subjected to constant ridicule. Someone posted a drawing of George Washington on an outhouse. When someone asked Allen whether he had seen the picture, he nodded and said he thought it was an appropriate place for an Englishman to keep a picture of Washington. “Why was that?” he was asked. “There is nothing that will make an Englishman shit so quick as the sight of General Washington.”



When the attack on the Bastille began on the night of July 14, 1789, King Louis XVI was in his isolated apartment in Versailles. When informed, the king told one of his associates, “Why, it’s only a revolt.”

“No,” the associate said, “it is not a revolt. It is a revolution.”



Playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan served for a number of years in the House of Commons. A Liberal, Sheridan was a frequent critic of the conservative Tories. Strolling through Piccadilly Square, Sheridan was approached by two Tory lords. Each took a position beside him.

As the three walked, one of the Tories hectored him: “I say, Sherry, we were just discussing whether you were a rogue or a fool.”

Sheridan answered, “Why, I do believe I am between both.”



Napoleon was once asked, “Who do you think was the greatest military leader in history?”

“Well,” Napoleon answered, “Julius Caesar was the second greatest.”



French leaders have long been known—rightly or wrongly—for a special suave cynicism, and no one did more to engender this mystique than Charles Maurice de Talleyrand. The foreign minister was in counsel with King Louis XVIII in 1815, discussing the royal budget, when Talleyrand observed that it included no salaries for the top deputies of the crown. He asked how such an omission could occur, and the young king told him naïvely, “It is an honorary position. Deputies should perform their duties without payment,”

“Without payment?” the incredulous Talleyrand replied. “Your Majesty, that would cost us too much.”



Founding father James Madison's health was failing fast. He was on his deathbed in 1836 at his ancestral plantation home, Montpelier. It might have been a grim encounter when a friend came to visit and say good-bye. After all, the former president was famous for dressing in black and maintaining a rather stern and stodgy manner.

Whatever the motivation, his mind was still sharp when his friend urged him not to speak while he was lying down. He should muster his strength and remain quiet, he was told.

But Madison responded, "I always talk more easily when I lie."



King George IV of Great Britain was believed to have illegally married his mistress, Maria Fitzherbert. To make matters worse, he frequently directed malicious remarks at his legal spouse, Caroline of Brunswick.

The king eventually brought her before the House of Lords on a charge of adultery.

When asked to answer the charge, Caroline replied, "The only time I ever committed adultery was with the husband of Mrs. Fitzherbert."



Friends told former president John Quincy Adams, then approaching eighty, that a young congressman was ridiculing him for his age.

“Tell that young man that an ass is older at thirty than a man is at eighty,” the venerable politician responded.

MULES AND MEN IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC



“There is no more useful or willing animal than the Mule. And perhaps there is no other animal so much abused, or so little cared for. Popular opinion of his nature has not been favorable; and he has had to plod and work through life against the prejudices of the ignorant.”

—Mule driver Harvey Riley, 1867

Before there were steam engines and trains, there were mules, plowing the fields and grinding corn and sugar cane. Mules pulled wagons and barges, carrying prospectors and their supplies into the Sierra Nevadas. They hauled millions of tons of borax out of Death Valley and moved men and supplies in America's wars. Probably half a million mules served in the Civil War.

The poor mule. Strong of limb, stout of heart, and utterly sterile, the mule is the man-made hybrid of the donkey and the horse, combining the best of both, according to many who knew them best.

In 1935, at the peak of their numbers, there were six million mules in America, most of them pulling plows in the South. That stock of Southern mules began with none other than George

Washington, who started breeding hearty European donkeys with American horses, in the 1780s.

It's not clear when or why Americans started thinking of the mule as a lowly beast of jest and ridicule. It had been the ride of choice for many nobles and military leaders in the ancient world. But in the young American republic, teeming with great energy, seething with great rivalries, there was need for a token of ridicule to wield against minions and adversaries. "The jackass and his illegitimate child, the mule," as Mark Twain called them, became the perfect symbol of contempt in the agrarian vernacular.

It's also unclear when or why many Americans chose to use the words *mule* and *donkey* interchangeably, but whichever word the antagonist chose, the audience understood his meaning.

Thus, when General Ulysses S. Grant criticized one of his officers, another officer came to his defense, claiming the fellow had been in ten campaigns.

"So has that mule, yonder," Grant snapped, "but he's still a jackass."

If that was meant to be witty, it was a mean wit, a wit that skated close to the edge of contempt.

In politics, you rarely win by just improving your image among voters; you must expose your opponent as someone who is not worthy of his or her office. One way of doing this is to reduce your opponent in the minds of voters by calling him a jackass or some other animal.

Politics became as dirty as the language used in campaigning and as dirty as the streets and bars and hotels in Washington, DC, the capital of this frontier nation.

Many of the men who gathered there to make the laws and run the government reflected the rural culture, arriving in the capital with manure on their boots, guns in their belts, and plugs of tobacco in their cheeks. Visitors at the Capitol were dismayed to see tobacco stains on the floors and carpets, despite dozens of spittoons around the Senate and House chambers.

Today, the early nineteenth century is thought of as the golden age of Congress, the age of statesmanship and oratory. But it was also an age of brawls and fisticuffs, stabbings and duels. There were some seventy incidents of violence among members of Congress—and most of them in the halls of Congress—during the three decades leading up to the Civil War.

When members of Congress were not punching and stabbing one another they were calling one another jackasses. Thus Daniel Webster of Massachusetts, could goad Henry Clay of Kentucky, insinuating that his constituents were mules; and Clay could snap back, implying that mules were public school teachers in Massachusetts. Champ Clark of Kentucky could call an Ohio congressman a jackass. John Randolph of Virginia could do the same to one of his congressional tormentors.

During the 1828 presidential election, critics called the Democratic candidate Andrew Jackson a “jackass.” Jackson, the blunt-spoken war hero, politician, and slave-owning plantation owner from the rural South, had been called far worse in his life.

Where other politicians saw being called a “jackass” as fighting words, Jackson laughed. He saw an opportunity. He began using an image of a jackass in his campaign posters.

In doing so, Jackson rode the much-disparaged animal to the presidency, defeating John Quincy Adams in the election and becoming America’s first Democratic president. “For the rest of his career and even into his retirement,” Matt Soniak wrote on the website Mental Floss. “Newspapers and cartoonists continued to represent Jackson either as a stubborn ass or struggling to control one.” In the 1870s, more than a generation after Jackson’s death, political cartoonist Thomas Nast popularized the donkey as the symbol of the Democratic Party.

WILL MOREDOCK



It was well known in the early 1800s that Congressman John Randolph was sexually impotent. Few dared use that against him.

Once, in the heat of a congressional debate, a rival made jest of his condition.

Randolph responded, "Sir, you pride yourself on an ability in which any barbarian is your equal and any jackass immeasurably your superior."



In its early years, Washington, DC, was a city of wooden houses and muddy streets. Congressional rivals John Randolph of Virginia and Henry Clay of Kentucky met on a narrow plank. One would have to step aside.

Randolph stood his ground and challenged Clay: "I will not give way for a scoundrel," he said.

Clay bowed, smiled slightly, and stepped into the mud. "I will," he said.



After John Randolph attacked Secretary of State Henry Clay in a vicious speech in the House of Representatives, Clay challenged him to a duel. Randolph said he would meet Clay, as the Kentucky politician insisted, but would not violate Virginia law, which prohibited duels. “I have determined to receive without returning Clay’s fire,” Randolph said. “Nothing shall induce me to harm a hair on his head. I will not make his wife a widow or his children orphans.”

Clay fired first, piercing Randolph’s coat near the hip. Randolph then raised his pistol and—true to his word—fired into the air. “I do not fire at you,” he said.

The two men then shook hands.

“You owe me a coat, Mr. Clay,” Randolph said with a smile.

“I am glad the debt is not greater,” Clay responded.



When John Randolph was speaking on the floor of the House of Representatives, he was repeatedly interrupted by Philemon Beecher of Ohio, who would jump to his feet and call for “previous question,” a parliamentary maneuver to cut off debate on the pending question.

After ignoring Beecher’s first few interruptions, Randolph had heard enough.

“Mr. Speaker,” he said, “in the Netherlands, a man of small capacity, with bits of wood and leather, will, in a few moments, construct a toy that, with the pressure of the finger and thumb, will cry, ‘Cuckoo, Cuckoo.’ With less ingenuity, and with inferior materials, the people of Ohio have made a toy that will, without much pressure, cry ““Previous question, Mr. Speaker!”



Henry Clay was sitting outside a Washington hotel with Massachusetts senator Daniel Webster, when a man walked by with a pack of mules. “Clay, there goes a number of your Kentucky constituents,” Webster said.

“Yes,” Clay replied, “they must be going up to Massachusetts to teach school.”



During a dull and lengthy address in Congress, General Alexander Smyth turned to Henry Clay and remarked: “You, sir, speak for the present generation, but I speak for posterity.”

Clay interrupted Smyth: “Yes, and you seem resolved to speak until the arrival of your audience.”



Senator James Buchanan of Pennsylvania told Henry Clay that he had participated in the defense of Baltimore during the War of 1812. When Clay pressed Buchanan for details, the senator said, “True, was not in any engagement, as the British had retreated before I got there.”

“You marched to Baltimore, though?” Clay said.

“Yes, sir,” Buchanan said.

“Armed and equipped?” Clay said.

“Yes, armed and equipped,” Buchanan replied.

“But the British had retreated before you arrived?” Clay asked.

Buchanan nodded in agreement.

“Will the senator from Pennsylvania be good enough to inform us whether the British retreated in consequence of his valiantly marching to the relief of Baltimore,” Clay said, “or whether he marched to the relief of Baltimore in consequence of the British army having already retreated?”



President Andrew Jackson was asked on his deathbed if he had any regrets. “Yes,” he said, “that I didn’t shoot Henry Clay and hang John C. Calhoun.”



Henry Clay, who ran three times for president but never won, declared in an 1838 debate, “I’d rather be right than president.” Decades later, when Thomas Bracket Reed was speaker of the House of Representatives, he heard someone use Clay’s words. “The gentleman need not trouble himself,” Reed said. “He’ll never be either.”



Asked if the Republicans would nominate him for president, Thomas Brackett Reed said, “They could look much farther and do much worse. And I think they will.”



In 1840, the Whig Party ran General William Henry Harrison, the hero of the Battle of Tippecanoe, for president, with John Tyler as his running mate. The campaign slogan was “Tippecanoe and Tyler Too.” Philip Hone, a wealthy New York Whig, while acknowledging the pithiness of the slogan, expressed confusion about why the party added Tyler, a states’ rights advocate, to a ticket with Harrison, a nationalist.

“There was rhyme but no reason in it,” Hone said.



When President James K. Polk appointed James Buchanan secretary of state, former president Andrew Jackson protested the selection.

“But, General,” Polk said, “you yourself appointed him minister to Russia in your first term.”

“Yes, I did,” Jackson snapped. “It was as far as I could send him out of my sight and where he would do the least harm.”



Soon after John Tyler succeeded William Henry Harrison as president, Tyler sent his son Robert to order a special train. The railroad superintendent told the younger Tyler that he didn't run special trains for presidents.

"What!" Tyler exclaimed, "Didn't you furnish a special train for the funeral of General Harrison?"

"Yes," said the superintendent. "And if you will bring your father here in that shape, you shall have the best train on the road."



When one of General Zachary Taylor's drinking buddies suggested he run for president in 1848, Taylor reportedly said, "Stop your nonsense and drink your whiskey!"



Before Alexander H. Stephens became vice president of the Confederacy, he was elected from Georgia to the House of Representatives. When fellow Whig Benjamin Hill accused Stephens of being a Judas to his party for his support of slavery, Stephens challenged Hill to a duel.

Hill declined, saying, "It might be some satisfaction to you to shoot me, though I should entertain no great fear of being hit. . . . But I might possibly kill you, and though you may consider your life valuable, to take it would be a great annoyance to me afterward."

Stephens didn't drop the challenge and said that Hill was "not only an impudent braggart but a despicable poltroon besides."

Hill still refused, saying, "I have a soul to save and a family to support and you have neither."



When A. H. Stephens was serving in the House of Representatives, an angry opponent shouted at the diminutive Georgian: “You little know-nothing, I could swallow you whole and never know I had eaten anything.”

“And if you did that,” Stephens fired back, “you would have more brains in your belly than you have in your head.”



In the course of a House debate, A. H. Stephens said, “My opponent is not fit to carry swill. . . .”

Other congressmen cried out, “Order, order!” and Stephens was told to apologize.

“Mr. Speaker, I do apologize,” Stephens said. “The congressman is absolutely fit for the duty to which I referred.”

FIGHTING WORDS



From the earliest days of the republic, the Senate stressed—and often practiced—civil behavior toward fellow senators. Thomas Jefferson, the country's second vice president, included the following in his *Manual of Parliamentary Practice*: “No one is to disturb another in his speech by hissing, coughing, spitting, speaking or whispering to one another; nor to stand up or interrupt him; nor to pass between the Speaker and the speaking member; nor to go across the [Senate chamber], or to walk up and down it, or to take books or papers from the [clerk's] table, or write there.”

There is little evidence that Jefferson's words were ever obeyed.

On May 20, 1856, Senator Charles Sumner, a Massachusetts abolitionist, condemned the Kansas-Nebraska Act on the Senate floor in a one-hundred-page speech that was every bit as vitriolic as it was long. Over part of two days, Sumner denounced the legislation that allowed residents of the new state of Kansas to decide whether their state would be slave or free. Proslavery and anti-slavery hotheads rushed into Kansas to help settle the question, leading inevitably to the violence known as “Bleeding Kansas.”

In the speech, which he called “The Crime Against Kansas,” Sumner referred to the “murderous robbers” who had come from neighboring states to perpetuate slavery, calling them “hirelings, picked from the drunken spew and vomit of an uneasy civilization.”

Sumner saved his most venomous words for Senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois and Senator Andrew Butler of South Carolina, authors of the legislation. He called Douglas a “brutal, vulgar man without delicacy or scholarship [who] looks as if he needs clean linen and should be put under a shower bath,” and described him as a “noise-some, squat, and nameless animal . . . not a proper model for an American senator.”

Sumner then assailed Butler, claiming the Southern partisan was a delusional fool who considered himself a chivalrous knight. “Of course he has chosen a mistress to whom he has made his vows, and who, though ugly to others, is always lovely to him,” Sumner said, “though polluted in the sight of the world, is chaste in his sight—I mean the harlot, Slavery.”

Sumner then made a mocking reference to Butler’s speech impediment, which was the result of a recent stroke. “The Senator touches nothing which he does not disfigure with error, sometimes of principle, sometimes of fact,” Sumner said. “He shows an incapacity of accuracy, whether in stating the Constitution, or in stating the law, whether in the details of statistics or the diversions of scholarship. He cannot open his mouth, but out there flies a blunder.”

Stephen Douglas, listening to the speech, observed, “this damn fool is going to get himself shot by some other damn fool.”

South Carolina congressman Preston Brooks was particularly incensed by Sumner’s attack on both his home state and on Butler, a distant relative. He considered challenging Sumner to a duel, but was advised that duels were to be fought between men of equal classes, and this wasn’t the case here. Brooks belonged to the plantation class and the Massachusetts senator was no more than a drunkard because of the language he used in his speech.

Two days after the speech, Brooks entered the Senate chamber and approached Sumner, who was sitting at this desk. “Mr. Sumner,” Brooks said, “I have read your speech with great care, and with as much impartiality as I am capable of, and I feel it my duty to say to you that you have published a libel on my State, and uttered a slander upon a relative, who is aged and absent, and I am come to punish you.”

Brooks proceeded to thrash Sumner about the head with his heavy cane, trapping him under his desk, which was bolted to the floor. Sumner, blinded by his own blood, finally extricated himself, staggered to his feet, then collapsed—even as Brooks continued to beat him. Brooks only stopped when the cane broke into pieces.

Sumner was so badly injured he did not return to the Senate for two years. He became a martyr to the abolitionist cause. Brooks resigned from Congress and returned to South Carolina, where he received a hero’s welcome. He received replacement

canes from throughout the South and was easily reelected to Congress.

The incident came to represent the polarizing power of slavery in the country. Historians credit the caning of Sumner with the rise of the nascent Republican Party and Brooks's caning of Sumner for exacerbating sectional tensions that precipitated the Civil War.

The election of Republican Party candidate Abraham Lincoln to the presidency in November 1860 motivated the state of South Carolina to become the first Southern state to secede from the union. The announcement was met with cheers throughout much of the state and region. But other South Carolinians saw it as an act of madness. James Petigru, a Charleston unionist and jurist, responded, "South Carolina is too small to be a republic and too large to be an insane asylum."

South Carolina did little to contradict this comparison.

On February 22, 1902, John McLaurin, the state's junior senator, ran into the Senate Chamber and proclaimed that Ben Tillman, the state's senior senator, was guilty of "a willful, malicious, and deliberate lie." Tillman, who was standing nearby, punched McLaurin in the jaw.

The two Democrats had once been friends, but McLaurin broke with the Democrats and supported Republicans on a controversial treaty vote. In response, Tillman charged that McLaurin had changed his vote because of "improper influences." When McLaurin heard this, he retaliated by calling Tillman a liar.

The Senate chambers descended into pandemonium as senators began exchanging punches with one another.

The Senate censured both men and added Rule XIX: “No senator in debate shall, directly or indirectly, by any form of words impute to another Senator or to other Senators any conduct or motive unworthy or unbecoming a Senator.”

CHRIS LAMB



When the Reverend Edward Everett Hale was chaplain of the Senate, he was asked if he prayed for the senators.

“No,” he said. “I look at the senators and pray for the country.”



Benjamin Disraeli and William Gladstone were intense rivals who each served as prime minister of Great Britain. During a debate in Parliament, Disraeli used the word “calamity” but quickly replaced it with “misfortune.”

When asked if there was really such a difference between the two, Disraeli said he would explain by example. “If my honorable friend Gladstone were accidentally to fall into the Thames River, it would be a misfortune,” Disraeli said. “But if anyone were to pull him out, that would be a calamity.”



Observing that Benjamin Disraeli had the reputation for being able to make a joke about any subject, William Gladstone asked if that were indeed true.

Disraeli said it was entirely possible.

“Then I challenge you,” Gladstone said. “Make a joke about Queen Victoria.”

“Sir,” Disraeli replied. “Her majesty is not a subject.”



A newly elected member of Parliament went to Benjamin Disraeli for advice.

“For the first six months,” Disraeli told him, “you should listen and not become involved in debate.”

“But my colleagues will wonder why I do not speak,” the new MP protested.

“Better they should wonder why you do not,” Disraeli said, “than why you do.”



Brooklyn preacher Henry Ward Beecher was an outspoken abolitionist and defender of the Union. In 1862, as the Civil War raged at home, he visited England, seeking support for the cause. While speaking in Manchester, a hostile crowd of Southern sympathizers challenged him.

“Why didn’t you whip the Confederates in sixty days, as you said you would?” one heckler yelled.

Knowing the Revolutionary War was still a sensitive topic for many of his listeners, he responded, “Because we had Americans to fight this time, not Englishmen.”



When a British voter insulted Benjamin Disraeli by telling him his wife had picked him out of the gutter, Disraeli answered, “My good fellow, if you were in the gutter no one would pick you out.”



During one of his speeches, Benjamin Disraeli was interrupted by a heckler who yelled, “Speak quick! Speak quick!”

Disraeli responded: “It is very easy for you to speak quickly; you only utter stupid monosyllables, but when I speak I must measure my words. I have to open your great thick head. What I say is to enlighten you. If I bawled like you, you would leave this place as great a fool as you entered it.”



A fellow member of Parliament complained to Disraeli that his attacks on John Bright, a liberal member of the House of Commons, were too harsh.

“After all,” the MP said, “John Bright is a self-made man.”

“I know he is,” Disraeli replied, “and he adores his maker.”



In 1875, President Ulysses S. Grant officially opened the State Department building, which was hideous in its architecture.

A guide, who proudly gave Grant a full tour of the building, said, “One thing more, Mr. President. The building is fireproof.”

“What a pity,” Grant replied.



Former secretary of state William Seward and New York political boss Thurlow Weed were riding up Broadway one day and passed the bronze statue of Abraham Lincoln in Union Square.

Seward, who had lost the Republican nomination to Lincoln in 1860, told Weed, “If you had stayed loyal to me, I would have a bronze statue there instead of Lincoln.”

Weed was unapologetic, responding, “Seward, is it not better to be alive with me in a carriage than dead in bronze?”



In the course of a conversation, a congressman boasted to newspaper editor Horace Greeley that he was a self-made man.

“That, sir,” Greeley replied, “relieves the Almighty of a great responsibility.”



Shortly after the Civil War, John Allen was running for Congress in Mississippi. The former private found himself facing a former major, a couple former colonels, and two or three former generals.

Each of his opponents pulled rank on Allen, reminding their audiences of their contributions to the South’s losing effort.

When it was Allen’s turn, he said: “Now the officers are boasting of their accomplishments and making their appeal to you veterans. I simply ask that all of you who were generals vote for the generals; all of you who were colonels, vote for colonels; all of you majors vote for the major; but all of you ditch-digging enlisted men, you vote for Private John Allen.”

He was overwhelmingly elected and was thereafter known as “Private John Allen.”



Congressman John Allen once was pleading his case before hostile voters. Someone in the audience threw a large rock that missed his head just as he had happened to stoop down.

“You see,” he said to friends who tended to him, “if I had been an upright politician, I would have been killed.”



After President James Garfield was wounded by an assassin's bullet, he lingered on his deathbed for several weeks, restricted to a diet of oatmeal and lime water.

Told that the great Indian Sitting Bull was starving himself in captivity, Garfield snapped, “Let him starve.”

A moment passed and the president added, “Better yet, send him my oatmeal.”



When influential New York politician Roscoe Conkling was asked to endorse Republican presidential candidate James G. Blaine in 1884, he refused, saying, “I don’t engage in criminal practice.”



Suffragist Julia Ward Howe tried to enlist Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner in the case of a person who needed help.

“Julia, I’ve become so busy I can no longer concern myself with individuals,” Sumner said.

Howe replied, “Even God hasn’t reached that stage yet.”



Supreme Court chief justice Melville W. Fuller was presiding at a church conference when an audience member rose and began a tirade against universities and education, saying that he gave thanks to God that he had never been corrupted by any contact with a college.

“Do I understand the speaker thanks God for his ignorance?” Fuller interrupted.

“Well, yes, if you want to put it that way,” the man answered.

“Then,” Fuller said, “you have a great deal to be thankful for.”



An angry senator once directed his fury at fellow Senator George Vest of Missouri.

When the attack ended, Vest rose slowly and said, “After listening to the remarks of my learned colleague, I feel somewhat like the little corporal in the Philistine army, who, after Samson had passed through, picked himself off the ground and, holding his battered head, cried out, ‘Now I know how it feels to be smitten by the jawbone of an ass.’”



During the 1900 presidential election between Democrat William Jennings Bryan and Republican William McKinley, a Democratic speaker announced confidently that Mrs. Bryan would be sleeping in the White House after Inauguration Day.

The Bryan supporter was interrupted by a GOP supporter, who yelled, “If she is, she’ll be sleeping with McKinley.”



William Jennings Bryan of Nebraska, who ran unsuccessfully three times for president as a Democrat, had a reputation for oratorical skills that traced back to his youth, earning him the nickname, “The Boy Orator of the Platte.” When Senator Joseph Foraker, an Ohio Republican, heard Bryan referred to by his nickname, he reminded his listeners that the Platte River was “six inches deep and six miles wide at the mouth.”

ABRAHAM LINCOLN



Abraham Lincoln won the Republican nomination in 1858 to oppose incumbent Democrat Stephen Douglas in the Senate election in Illinois. Lincoln condemned slavery in his acceptance speech by saying, “A house divided against itself cannot stand” and “This government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free.” Douglas attacked Lincoln as a radical whose antislavery views threatened the country’s stability.

Lincoln challenged Douglas to a series of debates. The two men traversed the state debating the issue of slavery in each of the seven congressional districts. Lincoln established himself in the national press as one of the country’s leading critics of slavery and gave no ground in the debates to the more experienced Douglas, one of the dominant figures in the Senate.

Lincoln won over his rural audiences with his humor. He dismissed one of Douglas’s arguments by saying it was “as thin as the homeopathic soup that was made by boiling the shadow of a pigeon that had starved to death.”

During one of the debates, Douglas tried to embarrass Lincoln in front of an evangelical audience by saying he had once seen Lincoln selling whiskey. "And an excellent bartender he was too," Douglas said.

The crowd laughed.

Lincoln then admitted he had run a general store, where he sold cotton, candles, and cigars, and sometimes whiskey.

"I particularly remember that Mr. Douglas was one of my best customers. Many a time I stood on one side of the counter and sold whiskey to Mr. Douglas on the other side," Lincoln said. "But now there's a difference between us: I have left my side of the counter, but he sticks to his as tenaciously as ever!"

The crowd erupted in laughter.

The debates demonstrated Lincoln's quick mind, his comic instincts, the agility of his wit, and the self-deprecating quality of that wit.

Lincoln, in contrast to Churchill and other politicians who used their wit as a blackjack to injure anyone who dared criticize them, made himself the punch line, leaving the recipient of the response with a smile and not a bruise, and winning the affection of his audience.

Douglas questioned Lincoln's sincerity during one of the debates by calling him "two-faced."

"I leave it to my audience," Lincoln responded. "If I had another face, would I wear this one?"

Lincoln won the popular vote by more than thirty thousand votes in the November election. But he lost the election because, according to the law at that time, state legislators—and not voters—decided the outcome.

Two years later, however, Lincoln defeated Douglas in the 1860 presidential election.

Lincoln remains the most tragic figure to serve as president and the one with the best sense of humor. He often made jokes about his homely countenance.

He often told the story about the day he was riding his horse when he was confronted by a hideous old woman who aimed a shotgun at his face. "I always said if I ever met a man uglier than myself, I would shoot him on the spot," she said.

Lincoln responded: "Ma'am, if I'm uglier than you, fire away."

Lincoln's humor reveals a sadness that followed Lincoln throughout his life. Author Joshua Wolf Shenk wrote that Lincoln suffered from depression. "No element of Mr. Lincoln's character," Lincoln's friend Henry Whitney said, "was so marked, obvious and ingrained as his mysterious and profound melancholy." Lincoln's law partner William Herndon said, "His melancholy dripped from him as he walked."

As a young man, Lincoln talked about suicide and as he got older continued to see the world as a grim and miserable place—and not without reason. His only brother died in infancy, his mother died when he was nine, and his only sister died in childbirth. Ann Rutledge, who some consider the love of Lincoln's life, died of typhoid fever. Lincoln's marriage to Mary Todd was an unhappy one. Two of their four sons died before they were thirteen and a third died when he was eighteen.

And then there was the carnage of the Civil War, which began shortly after Lincoln became president. Lincoln was assassinated as the war ended.

Lincoln referred to laughter as “the joyful, beautiful, universal evergreen of life.” It served as a salve against his suffering. When he told a joke, a friend said, “his face loses its melancholy mask, his eyes sparkle and his whole countenance lights up.”

When he delivered the punch line, his laughter exploded, punctuating the moment and his audience laughed even louder.

Lincoln told the story of a young woman who demonstrated interest in a hospitalized soldier. “Where were you wounded?” the woman asked. The soldier, who had been shot through the testicles, deflected her question by saying only, “at Antietam,” which provided the name of the battle but not to the place of the wound. The woman saw Lincoln, who was visiting the wounded,

and asked for his help. Lincoln spoke with the soldier and then held the young woman's hands and whispered, "My dear girl, the ball that hit him, would have missed you."

Edwin Stanton, Lincoln's secretary of war, often grew impatient when Abraham Lincoln told one of his humorous stories during cabinet meetings during the grim years of the Civil War. "Mr. President, why are you always joking?" an exasperated Stanton said.

"Stanton," Lincoln replied. "don't you understand? If I can't laugh, I would die."

CHRIS LAMB



An Abraham Lincoln speech was interrupted by a heckler who yelled, “Do I have to pay a dollar to see one of the ugliest men in the country?”

“I’m afraid, sir, that you were charged a dollar for that privilege,” Lincoln answered, “but I have it for nothing.”



As a young lawyer, Abraham Lincoln once had to plead two cases in the same day before the same judge. Both involved the same principle of law, but in one Lincoln appeared for the defendant; in the other, he appeared for the plaintiff.

In the morning he made an eloquent plea and won his case. In the afternoon Lincoln took the opposite side but argued it with the same earnestness.

The amused judge asked Lincoln what had made him change his argument.

“Your honor,” Lincoln said. “I may have been wrong this morning, but I am right this afternoon.”



In 1846, Abraham Lincoln ran for Congress against evangelist Peter Cartwright, who tried to turn one debate into a revival, addressing the crowd and saying, “All who desire to give their hearts to God and go to heaven will stand.”

Many stood.

“All who do not wish to go to hell will stand,” Cartwright continued.

And everybody but Lincoln stood.

“I observe that everybody but Mr. Lincoln indicated he did not want to go to hell,” Cartwright said. “May I inquire of you, Mr. Lincoln, where are you going?”

Still seated, Lincoln said, “I am going to Congress.”



Asked what it was like to be president, Lincoln said, “I’m like the man who was tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail. When they asked him how he felt about it, he said that if it weren’t for the honor of the thing, he would rather have walked.”



As Abraham Lincoln met with his cabinet during the dark days of the Civil War, one of his advisers said, “God is on our side.”

“We trust, sir, that God is on our side,” Lincoln said glumly. “It is more important to know that we are on God’s side.”



Abraham Lincoln was once asked what he thought of a political opponent.

“He can compress the most words into the smallest idea of any man I ever met,” he said.



A guest at a White House reception told Abraham Lincoln that the welfare of the country depended on God and the president.

“You are half right,” Lincoln said.



Pennsylvania congressman Thaddeus Stevens reportedly said that Simon Cameron, secretary of war in the Lincoln administration, “would steal anything but a red hot stove.”

Cameron protested to Lincoln, who suggested that Stevens might care to say he had been misquoted.

Stevens agreed and announced he had, indeed, been misquoted. What he actually said was that Cameron “would steal anything, *including* a red hot stove.”



President Lincoln was constantly frustrated by the indecisiveness of his top general, George McClellan.

Once when Lincoln visited McClellan's headquarters with an aide, the general was nowhere to be found. Lincoln heard hammering in the woods nearby. He found some soldiers building something, and asked what it was.

"It's a new privy for the general," one of the soldiers said.

"Is it a one-holer or a two-holer?" Lincoln asked.

"A one-holer, sir," the soldier answered.

Once out of earshot of the soldiers, the president told his aide, "Thank God it's a one-holer, for if it were a two-holer, before McClellan could make up his mind which to use, he would beshit himself."



When General Joseph Hooker succeeded George McClellan as commander of the Union army, he sent President Lincoln a telegram informing him, “Headquarters in the saddle.”

“The trouble with Hooker,” Lincoln said, “is that he’s got his headquarters where his hindquarters ought to be.”



When one of President Lincoln’s advisers recommended a particular man for a post in the cabinet, Lincoln shook his head, explaining, “I don’t like the man’s face.”

“But,” the adviser protested, “the poor man isn’t responsible for his face.”

Lincoln corrected him: “Every man over forty is responsible for his face.”



A foreign diplomat walked into Lincoln's office while the president was polishing his shoes.

"Mr. President!" the startled diplomat said with disdain, "you black your own boots?"

"Yes," said Lincoln. "Whose boots do you black?"



A temperance committee visited President Lincoln in late 1863 and asked him to fire his top general, Ulysses S. Grant.

"For what reason?" a surprised Lincoln asked.

"He drinks too much whiskey," the group's spokesman declared.

"Well, I wish one of you would tell me what kind of whiskey Grant drinks," the president countered. "I would like to send a barrel of it to every one of my generals."

THE 1903 PENNSYLVANIA ANTI-CARTOON BILL



In 1899, Thomas Wanamaker, the progressive son of Philadelphia department store magnate John Wanamaker, bought one of the city's newspapers, the *North American*, in hopes of using it to expose political corruption in the City of Brotherly Love. Wanamaker used the newspaper to harass the state's leading political figure, Matthew Quay, the unscrupulous leader of the state Republican Party's political machine, whose coils were well lubricated by graft and malfeasance.

Quay controlled the machine—and the machine saw to it that only his cronies were elected. Quay himself was elected to the Senate in 1901.

Wanamaker's criticism of the Quay machine coincided with the Progressive Era, where muckraking journalists confronted corruption in American business, society, and politics. Newspaper editors also hired editorial cartoonists to increase readership by mocking politicians who editors believed were using their position for personal gain.

Wanamaker hired cartoonists Charles Nelan and Walt McDougall to attack Quay and his handpicked gubernatorial candidate, Samuel Pennypacker, a judge who was Quay's cousin.

Nelan regularly drew Pennypacker as a parrot of the corrupt Quay machine during the 1902 campaign. The cartoonist found that the best way to make a fool out of the candidate was merely to quote him—such as when Pennypacker defended Quay by saying was a greater statesman than either Daniel Webster or Henry Clay.

Pennypacker responded indignantly by charging Nelan “with the kind of slander which is closely akin to treason and leads directly on the road to anarchy and the overthrow of cherished institutions.” Shortly after this, Pennypacker called the *North American* “a worthless sheet, miscalled a newspaper that hires needy young artists to pervert their art.” Nelan responded by drawing the Pennypacker parrot ripping a copy of the *North American* while screaming, “Worse than worthless! Worse than worthless!”

Pennypacker easily won the election in November. The governor-elect should have ignored Nelan and the *North American* at this point.

He didn't.

In his inaugural address in January 1903, Pennypacker called for the suppression of disreputable newspapers like the *North American*. A week later, state representative Frederick Pusey, a faithful cog of the Quay machine, introduced a bill making it against the law to publish a cartoon “portraying, describing, or representing any person, either by distortion, innuendo or otherwise, in the form or likeness of beast, bird, fish, insect, or other unhuman animal.”

Walt McDougall responded with a front-page cartoon that depicted Quay as a dying oak, Pennypacker as a frothy stein of beer, and Pusey as a small potato. McDougall also included an editorial that referred to Pusey and explained how easily his bill could be circumvented. "He should have included more than the animal kingdom alone, for we have an ample field in the vegetable if not even the mineral field," McDougall said. "Every cartoonist has a Noah's Ark full of worn, broken and decrepit animals, bugs, and such, but the fresh vegetable field is untouched. What chances of caricature lie in the tomato, the string bean, the cucumber, the onion and the leek cannot be guessed."

A revised version of the bill passed the Legislature and needed Pennypacker's signature to become law. Nelan drew Pennypacker sabotaging a printing press, which was supported by wooden planks labeled "Constitutional Guarantee of Freedom of the Press."

Pennypacker signed the bill and said the bill "would be cordially and cheerfully accepted by the press."

It wasn't.

Hundreds of newspapers criticized the governor. The *New York Times* called the law "the most reactionary measure that has passed any American legislature in recent years." The *New York Evening Post* wrote, "It is late in the day for public men in this country to imagine that they may or should enjoy immunity from criticism. . . . If they are so thin-skinned, their remedy is private life."

The law was a clear violation of protections accorded to the press in both the state and federal constitutions. It was never challenged in court because no politician, not even Pennypacker, dared face the opprobrium that would result from taking legal action because they had been caricatured as a parrot, a frothy stein of beer, a string bean, or even a leek.

Pennypacker served one term as governor, did not seek reelection, and returned to private life.

CHRIS LAMB



One evening a nervous soprano struggled hopelessly before President Coolidge at a White House recital. “What do you think of the singer’s execution?” one of the guests asked the president.

“I’m all for it,” Coolidge replied.



Panama won independence from Colombia in 1903 with intervention from the Theodore Roosevelt administration. Roosevelt wanted a subservient Panama so he could build his canal. He tried to answer criticism that the United States had backed a revolt in Colombia for its own interests. Roosevelt asked Secretary of War Elihu Root if he had defended himself against accusations of wrongdoing.

“You certainly have, Mr. President,” a skeptical Root said. “You have shown that you were accused of seduction, and you have conclusively proved that you were guilty of rape.”



In 1904, Republican presidential candidate Theodore Roosevelt was addressing a rally when he was interrupted by a drunk who yelled, "I'm a Democrat!"

When Roosevelt asked why, the man replied, "Because my grandfather was a Democrat and my father was a Democrat."

Roosevelt patiently nodded and said, "Let me ask you, sir. If your grandfather had been a jackass and your father had been a jackass, what would you be?"

"A Republican!" the drunk shot back.



A White House visitor complained to President Theodore Roosevelt about his daughter Alice's frequent interruptions. "Mr. President," the friend complained. "Isn't there anything you can do to control Alice?"

Roosevelt replied firmly, "I can do one of two things. I can be president of the United States or I can control Alice. I cannot possibly do both."



After losing his third presidential bid in 1908, William Jennings Bryan was asked how he felt about the experience. Bryan said he understood the drunk who tried three times to enter a gentlemen's club. After being thrown out the third time, he picked himself off the street and said, "They can't fool me. Those fellows don't want me there!"



When William Howard Taft was campaigning, a heckler threw a cabbage, barely missing him. Taft stopped his speech, looked at the cabbage, and responded, "Ladies and gentlemen, I see that one of my opponents has lost its head."



When British prime minister David Lloyd George was asked what he thought of his fellow Liberal Party member, Herbert Samuel, who was Jewish, George replied, "When they circumcised Herbert Samuel, they threw away the wrong bit."



During World War I, Georges Clemenceau, who had served as France's prime minister, was called out of retirement to lead the French government. He named himself minister of war and announced a major change in the country's military strategy. One of the ministers questioned him, saying, "Sir, this is not in keeping with the thinking of the General Staff."

"War is much too serious a matter to be left to the military," he answered.



In 1910, President William Howard Taft asked former president Theodore Roosevelt to represent the United States at the funeral of King Edward VII.

While in London, Roosevelt ran into German Kaiser Wilhelm II. The Kaiser invited Roosevelt to call on him the next day, adding, "Be there at two o'clock sharp, for I can only give you forty-five minutes."

Roosevelt was no longer a head of state but was not about to be patronized. He graciously replied: "I will be there at two o'clock sharp, but unfortunately I have just twenty minutes to give you."



One night William Howard Taft, then a young law reporter, finished studying a case in Somerville, Ohio, and discovered that he couldn't return home that night unless he could get an express train to stop.

Taft sent a telegram: "Will you stop express at Somerville to take on large party?"

Promptly came the reply: "Yes."

When the train arrived, the conductor asked Taft, "Where's the large party we were to take on?"

Taft gestured to his own girth, then stepped aboard the train. "I'm it," he said.



New York senator Chauncey Depew looked quizzically at President Taft's girth and inquired what Taft and his wife intended to call the child when it was born.

"If it's a girl, I shall name it for my wife. If it's a boy I will call him Junior," Taft said. "But if it is, as I suspect, just gas, I will call it Chauncey Depew."



Opera singer Mary Gordon had a figure to match her magnificent voice.

Upon seeing her in a gown with a pronounced décolletage, a smitten Chauncey Depew asked her what kept her dress up.

“Two things,” she replied. “Your age and my discretion.”



At dinner one night, Senator Chauncey Depew joined a small group of friends in the midst of a spirited discussion.

“Oh, Mr. Depew!” one of the ladies in the group said. “You’re just in time to settle an argument. What is the most beautiful thing in the world?”

“A beautiful woman,” Depew responded.

“I contend,” the woman scoffed, “that sleep is the most beautiful.”

“Well,” Depew answered, “next to a beautiful woman, sleep is.”



Chauncey Depew once introduced diplomat Joseph Choate at an after-dinner speech, saying that if you opened Choate's mouth and dropped in a dinner a speech would come up.

Choate came to the microphone and said, "Mr. Depew says that if you open my mouth and drop in a dinner, up will come a speech. But I warn you that if you open your mouths and drop in one of Mr. Depew's speeches, up will come your dinners."



When Martin Dies Sr. of Texas was considering a run for Congress, he sought the advice of a former Texas governor.

The old politician counseled Dies to tell voters he supported more subsidies for farmers, larger pensions for veterans, and increased assistance for the poor, then added that Dies should also promise that he would be frugal with taxpayers' money.

"But governor," Dies protested, "if I advocate all of those spending measures and at the same time call for curbs in spending, don't you think the people will think me inconsistent?"

"Martin," the governor sighed, "the people don't think, and if they ever started, they wouldn't elect you anyway."



When Champ Clark of Kentucky was Speaker of the House of Representatives, an Indiana congressman named Johnson interrupted the speech of an Ohio congressman, calling him a jackass.

Clark ruled the expression in violation of protocol, and Johnson apologized.

“I withdraw the unfortunate word, Mr. Speaker, but I insist the gentleman from Ohio is out of order.”

“How am I out of order?” the Ohioan asked.

“Probably a veterinarian could tell you,” Johnson answered.



When Woodrow Wilson was governor of New Jersey, he was informed that one of the state’s US senators had died and it would be his responsibility to appoint a replacement.

Shortly thereafter, a state politician called Wilson and said, “Mr. Governor, I’d like to take the senator’s place.”

“It’s okay with me,” Wilson replied, “if it’s okay with the undertaker.”



In the early days of World War I, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany was talking to the head of the Swiss army. "You have an army of only 500,000 men. What would you do if attacked by an army of one million men?" the Kaiser snidely asked.

"Each of our soldiers," the Swiss officer answered, "would simply have to shoot twice."



At the beginning of World War I, Kaiser Wilhelm II asked Belgium's King Albert I for permission to march his army through Belgium on its way to attack France.

"Belgium is a nation," the king snapped, "not a road."



In his younger days, French statesman Georges Clemenceau fought a number of duels. On one such occasion he traveled with his second to a Paris railway station and bought a one-way ticket.

"A one-way ticket?" his companion said. "Pessimistic?"

"Not at all," Clemenceau said. "I always use my opponent's return ticket for the trip back."



French prime minister Clemenceau was approached by an acquaintance seeking political office, but who was widely believed to be stupid.

The man complained to Clemenceau: “They are saying everywhere that I am only an imbecile—but I am no more stupid than another. . . .”

“Which other?” Clemenceau asked dryly.



President Woodrow Wilson was told that he had been criticized by former president Theodore Roosevelt. Asked to respond, Wilson said, “What’s the use of wasting good serviceable indignation on him?”



At the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919, French prime minister Clemenceau held out for the harshest terms against Germany. Someone suggested that historians would be arguing for generations over who was responsible for starting the Great War.

“Yes,” Clemenceau said, “but one thing is certain: They will not say that Belgium invaded Germany.”



British prime minister David Lloyd George increased the size of the British army and ordered an increase in the production of weapons. Lloyd George's critics in his cabinet created a committee to investigate accusations of overspending.

When the committee issued its highly critical report, one of Lloyd George's ministers observed, "I suppose, sir, that means the end of your program."

"No," Lloyd George snapped, "it means the end of the committee."



Upon being introduced to the Welsh-born David Lloyd George, an obnoxious Londoner loudly remarked, "I had expected to find Mr. Lloyd George a big man in every sense, but you see for yourself he is quite small in stature."

"In North Wales we measure a man from his chin up," Lloyd George replied. "You evidently measure from his chin down."



President Wilson became an invalid after his stroke in 1919. Republican legislators, including Senator Albert B. Fall of New Mexico, suspected that Wilson's wife, Edith, was running the country.

Fall and a delegation of his colleagues showed up unannounced at the White House one afternoon. They found Wilson in bed but hardly enfeebled.

An unnerved Fall told Wilson, "Mr. President, I am praying for you."

Wilson responded, "Which way, Senator?"



President Wilson's dream of a League of Nations ended when he could not convince either the Congress or the American people that the United States should join. Henry Cabot Lodge, of Massachusetts, sealed the league's fate with a stirring speech on the floor of the Senate.

But not everyone was convinced.

Senator Thaddeus Caraway of Arkansas, the Democratic whip, responded: "I have long heard of the reputation for wisdom and wit of the senator from Massachusetts," Caraway said. "But his speech today has convinced me that his mind is like the land of his native state, barren by nature and impoverished by cultivation."



When William Howard Taft left the White House, his alma mater, Yale University, offered him a chair of law. Taft replied that a sofa of law would be more appropriate.



Learned Hand, the distinguished New York appellate judge, argued a point of law with his friend Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes.

“But,” Judge Hand said, “we’re talking about a court of justice.”

“No,” Holmes said, “it’s only a court of law.”



When Calvin Coolidge was president of the Massachusetts senate, two senators got into a bitter exchange in which one told the other to go to hell.

The recipient of the remark demanded that Coolidge come to his defense.

“I’ve looked up the law, Senator,” Coolidge told him, “and you don’t have to go.”



When Calvin Coolidge was vice president, his successor as governor of Massachusetts was Channing Cox.

Cox visited Coolidge in Washington and asked how he had been able to see so many visitors when he was governor, yet always left the office by 5 p.m. Cox said he often stayed on the job as late as 9 p.m.

“Why the difference?” Cox asked.

“Channing,” Coolidge replied, “the trouble is you talk back.”



As a rookie reporter for the *New York World*, Heywood Broun was told to interview Utah senator Reed Smoot.

“I have nothing to say,” Smoot told Broun.

“I know,” replied Broun. “Now let’s get down to the interview.”



Heywood Broun and another newspaperman were listening to a politician give a speech that was full of distortions and outright lies.

“He’s murdering the truth,” the newspaperman said.

“Don’t worry,” Broun said. “He’ll never get close enough to do it any harm.”



Florence Harding, the wife of the lightweight politician Warren G. Harding, helped engineer her husband's victory in the presidential election of 1920.

"Well, I've got you the presidency," she responded when they received the news, "what are you going to do with it?"



At a University of Illinois homecoming football game, writer Ring Lardner jumped out of his seat when the school's military honor guard fired a salute as Governor Len Small entered his box.

"What the hell was that about?" Lardner asked.

"For the governor," someone told him.

"Good heavens!" Lardner cried. "They missed him."



During a meeting with President Harding, whose administration was mired in scandal, comic Will Rogers said, "I would like to tell you all the latest jokes, Mr. President."

"You don't have to," Harding answered. "I appointed them all to office."



When Jimmy Walker was mayor of New York, a political opponent trapped him in a lie. The reporters asked Walker what he had to say. With nowhere to hide, Walker smiled and said, “Another good story ruined by an eyewitness.”



When longtime Boston mayor James J. Curley was speaking during one of his many political campaigns, a heckler shouted, “I wouldn’t vote for you if you were St. Peter.”

“If I were St. Peter,” Curley replied, “you wouldn’t be in my precinct.”



Senator George H. Moses stormed into the White House during the Coolidge administration, complaining that a man under consideration for a senatorial nomination was “an SOB.”

“That could be,” Coolidge conceded, “but there are a lot of those in the country, and I think they are entitled to representation in the Senate.”



Indiana senator Jim Watson bluntly gave his constituents his opinion on matters, adding, “Now you have the facts, and you know exactly where I stand on the issues. You can vote for me, or you can go to hell.”

When Calvin Coolidge heard this, he remarked, “He gave them a difficult alternative.”



Soon after Calvin Coolidge became vice president, he received a dinner invitation. His secretary checked the Social Registry but couldn't find the name of the host.

“No conclusion can be drawn from that,” Coolidge said. “I’ve only been in it myself for a half-hour.”



Calvin Coolidge Jr. apparently inherited his father's wit and his economy with words. On the morning after Calvin Senior took the oath of office as president, Calvin Junior was working at his job bundling tobacco.

"If my father were president," a coworker said, "I wouldn't be working in a tobacco field."

"If my father were your father, you would," Coolidge said.



Sitting next to President Coolidge at a White House dinner, a woman opened a conversation with "Silent Cal" by saying "Mr. President, I've made a bet I can make you say at least three words. What do you have to say?"

"You lose," Coolidge said.



During a White House press conference a reporter asked Calvin Coolidge, "Do you have any comments about tariffs, Mr. President?"

"No," Coolidge said.

"Do you have any comment about the farm bill?" another reporter asked.

"No," Coolidge answered.

"Do you have any comment about the naval appropriations?" another asked.

"No," Coolidge again answered.

As the journalists were leaving the Oval Office, Coolidge added, "And don't quote me."



Aviator Charles Lindbergh urged President Coolidge to fly in an airplane.

"Mr. President, it's the safest mode of passenger transportation," Lindbergh explained. "In 200,000 passenger miles, only one casualty."

Coolidge was unimpressed. "That's very little comfort for the casualty."



When someone teased Calvin Coolidge for his habitual silence, he replied, “Well, I found out early in life that you never have to explain something you haven’t said.”



When Calvin Coolidge arrived home from church, his wife, who was too ill to attend, inquired as to the subject of the sermon.

“Sin,” was all he said.

“And what did he say about it?” she inquired.

“He was against it.”



A political opponent charged New York governor Al Smith with telling lies about him.

“You ought to be glad,” Smith replied. “If I told the truth about you, they’d run you out of town.”



Governor Al Smith once implored a taxi to hurry to a radio station for a broadcast. The driver, not recognizing his passenger, begged to be excused because he was anxious to get home in time to hear the governor talk over the radio.

Smith offered the cabbie a generous tip and urged him to drive.

“Hop in mister,” the driver said, reaching for the money, “the hell with the governor.”



Al Smith was delivering a campaign speech when someone in the crowd yelled, “Tell us all you know, Al. It won’t take long!”

“Better yet,” Smith said, “I’ll tell them all we both know, and it won’t take any longer.”



Supreme Court justices Oliver Wendell Holmes and Louis Brandeis were walking home away from the court building one afternoon when the ninety-two-year-old Holmes spotted a beautiful young woman.

“Oh,” Holmes said, “what I wouldn’t give to be seventy again.”



After announcing he would not seek a second term as president, reporters pressed Calvin Coolidge for more details.

“Why don’t you want to be president again, Mr. Coolidge?” one reporter insisted.

“Because there’s no chance for advancement,” Coolidge explained.



Coolidge’s successor, Herbert Hoover, was president when the Great Depression seized America. Just before the 1932 election, actor Otis Skinner told Coolidge, “I wish it were you that we were going to vote for in November. It would be the end of our horrible depression.”

“And it would be the beginning of mine,” Coolidge replied.



After another big year, New York Yankees slugger Babe Ruth went to the team’s owner and demanded a raise to \$80,000. The shocked owner shook his head. He told Ruth that was more money than President Hoover made.

“Yes,” Ruth replied, “but I had a much better year than he did.”



Herbert Hoover was a Republican and deeply conservative ideologue, opposed to any government intervention in the nation's economy. He had little choice, however, when the stock market collapsed a few months after he became president in 1929, and the nation started sliding toward the Great Depression. He made several halfhearted attempts to stimulate the flagging economy, but nothing positive came of them. One day he was sharing his frustration with Calvin Coolidge, who had preceded him as president.

Coolidge tried to be encouraging: "You can't expect to see calves running in the field the day after you put the bull to the cows."

"No," Hoover agreed, "but I would at least like to see some contented cows."



Between World War I and World War II, Mohandas Gandhi led his campaign of civil disobedience to help India win its independence from the British Empire.

In 1931, when Gandhi traveled to London to meet with British authorities, he was constantly swarmed by reporters and photographers, and peppered with questions.

One day a reporter shouted, "What do you think of Western civilization?"

"I think it would be a good idea," Gandhi replied.

WINSTON CHURCHILL



Winston Churchill had been drinking heavily at a party when he bumped into a political rival, Labour Party leader Bessie Braddock.

“Mr. Churchill, you are drunk,” Braddock scolded him.

“And Bessie, you are ugly,” Churchill said and after a pause, added, “You are very ugly. I’ll be sober in the morning.”

The riposte left Braddock speechless and bruised, which was of course Churchill’s intent. No politician—perhaps no person—ever took such pride in being as quick or as cutting with a putdown. “It was my ambition all my life to be a master of the spoken word,” he said.

Churchill saw verbal exchanges as a blood sport and he used his wit like a cudgel, vanquishing anyone who dared engage him in a war of words.

American-born Lady Nancy Astor, the first woman to take a seat in the House of Commons, was a frequent sparring partner of Churchill’s. During an exchange in Parliament, Lady Astor told Churchill, “Winston, if you were my husband, I would put poison in your coffee.”

“If you were my wife, Nancy,” Churchill replied, “I would drink it.”

Churchill was the most extraordinary politician of the twentieth century, remaining a towering figure in his own country and beyond for decades. He did not merely serve the United Kingdom as prime minister during World War II, he perhaps saved it with his leadership, grit, courage, and stirring oratory. In addition, he was an accomplished painter, historian, and writer, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

But, as his critics pointed it, there was a dark side to his personality that manifested itself in the cruelty of his personal attacks. He was a white supremacist and a barbarous imperialist. He could be imperious, petty, dismissive, and misogynistic.

Churchill was a progeny of British nobility, educated in private schools among the ruling class, where he learned that the “white man was conquering the primitive, dark-skinned natives and bringing them the benefits of civilization,” as Johann Hari wrote in the *Independent*.

He never quit believing in the superiority of the British people, and in his own superiority in particular. He fiercely defended colonialism—and no more aggressively than when it was attacked by those whose own hands were dripping with blood.

Churchill was angrily confronted by Helen Reid, wife of an anti-British newspaper owner, at a White House luncheon in 1943. Reid assailed Churchill for Britain’s brutal colonial regime on the Indian subcontinent. Churchill coolly responded: “Before we proceed further, let us get one thing clear. Are we talking about the brown Indians of India, who have multiplied under

benevolent English rule? Or are we speaking of the red Indians in America who, I understand, are almost extinct?"

Churchill had little patience for those he considered his inferiors, which meant pretty much anyone. He showed no patience for any who challenged him, especially if they were, in his mind, of the "weaker sex."

Churchill left the Conservative Party early in his career to join the Liberals and grew a moustache, hoping to look older and more distinguished. A female constituent ran into Churchill on a London street and disdainfully remarked, "Mr. Churchill, I approve of neither your politics nor your moustache."

"Don't worry, Madam," Churchill snapped, "you are unlikely to come in contact with either."

Churchill's wit was often inspired.

He was often at odds with Clement Attlee, leader of the Labour Party, which advocated for a greater government role in economic policy.

Churchill once entered a men's room and, finding Attlee standing at the urinal, took a position at the other end of the trough.

"Feeling standoffish today, are we, Winston?" Attlee asked.

"That's right," Churchill responded. "Every time you see something big, you want to nationalize it."

But too often his wit was simply mean.

Former prime ministers Stanley Baldwin and Churchill had a complicated relationship that deteriorated as they grew older. When Baldwin turned eighty, Churchill did not send him a card.

Asked why, Churchill said, "I wish Stanley Baldwin no ill, but it would have been much better if he had never lived."

Queen Salote Tupou of Tonga attended the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. The ceremonies dragged on and on. When the rotund Queen Tupou passed by where Churchill was sitting, she was followed by a small boy.

Churchill was nudged by a companion who pointed to the child and asked, "Who's that?"

"Her lunch," Churchill grumbled.

CHRIS LAMB



Churchill was in the lavatory in the House of Commons and his secretary knocked on the door and said: "Excuse me, Prime Minister, but the Lord Privy Seal wishes to speak to you." After a pause, Churchill replied, "Tell His Lordship: I'm sealed in one Privy and can only deal with one shit at a time."



When staying at the White House as a guest of President Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill was coming out of his bath when FDR entered the room.

Startled at seeing the naked Churchill, FDR hurriedly reversed his wheelchair, but was stopped when Churchill said, "The prime minister has nothing to hide from the president of the United States."



The Ladies of the Temperance Union went to see Prime Minister Churchill toward the end of World War II. “Mr. Prime Minister,” the leader of the women said disapprovingly, “we have it on reliable authority that if all the alcohol and all the brandy you have drunk during this war would be emptied into this room it would come up to about here.”

She held her hand over her head in the giant room.

Churchill looked at the floor, looked at the ceiling, then paused and said, “My dear lady, so little we have done . . .” He took the woman’s hand and lifted it to where she had held it. He then looked up to the ceiling and said: “So much we have yet to do.”



Playwright George Bernard Shaw invited Winston Churchill to the premiere of a new play, enclosing two tickets: “One for yourself and one for a friend—if you have one.”

Churchill wrote back, saying he couldn’t make it, but he would like tickets for the second night—“if there is one.”



While listening to a member of the opposition party in the House of Commons, Winston Churchill began shaking his head, and eventually got more attention than the speaker.

Realizing he was being upstaged, the speaker turned toward Churchill and snapped, "I wish to remind the right honorable friend that I am only expressing my own opinion."

Impishly looking up, Churchill replied, "And I wish to remind the speaker that I am only shaking my own head."



Winston Churchill was approached by an admirer who said, "Doesn't it thrill you, Mr. Churchill, to know that every time you make a speech the hall is packed to overflowing?"

"It is quite flattering," Churchill answered. "But whenever I feel this way I remember that if, instead of making a political speech, I was being hanged, the crowd would be twice as big."



American-born Lady Nancy Astor was the first woman to take a seat in the British House of Commons, where she was the object of great antagonism from many members, including Winston Churchill.

Churchill told Astor he found her intrusion into the all-male society as embarrassing as if she had burst into the bathroom.

“Winston,” she said, “you are not handsome enough to have worries of that kind.”



When Winston Churchill showed a close friend a group of paintings he had recently completed, the friend asked him why he painted only landscapes and never portraits.

“Because a tree doesn’t complain that I haven’t done it justice,” Churchill said.



On hearing that Calvin Coolidge had died, writer Dorothy Parker replied, “How could they tell?”



During a session of the House of Commons, Lady Astor was in debate on agriculture when Churchill interrupted to question her knowledge of farming.

“I’ll make a bet she doesn’t even know how many toes a pig has,” Churchill said.

“Why don’t you take off your little shoesies and we’ll count them together?” Astor replied.



Worried about Winston Churchill's eccentric behavior, one Parliament member confided to Lady Astor, "We just don't know what to make of him."

"How about a nice rug?" Astor replied.



Lord H. H. Asquith, the former British prime minister who became a Labour Party leader in Parliament, suggested what he considered a more appropriate final resting place for Bonar Law, who became known as the "Unknown Prime Minister," because he was the UK's shortest-serving PM.

"It is fitting that we should have buried the Unknown Prime Minister by the side of the Unknown Soldier," Asquith said.



Lady Margot Asquith, the wife of British prime minister Herbert Asquith, was introduced to Jean Harlow, the American actress.

Harlow kept mispronouncing Lady Asquith's first name as MAR-gut, as if it rhymed with "harlot."

"My dear," Asquith replied, "the 't' is silent—as in Harlow."



Artist Pablo Picasso lived in Paris during the German occupation in World War II. Nazi authorities regarded Picasso as a Communist sympathizer and routinely harassed him.

During one investigation, a Nazi officer looked at a photograph of Picasso's antiwar painting *Guernica*. The mural—over twenty-five feet in width—depicts the German destruction of the Spanish town of Guernica in 1937.

Pointing at the photograph, the Nazi officer said brusquely, "Did you do that?"

"No," Picasso snapped. "You did!"



British ambassador Sir Eric Phipps was appalled after his posting to Germany in the mid-1930s. The Nazis were consolidating power and they did little to hide their brutality or their intentions. Phipps had a scheduled meeting one day with Hermann Goering, one of Hitler's chief deputies. Goering was late for the appointment and Phipps was kept waiting, to the point of exasperation, then anger. When the Nazi finally made his appearance, he tried to explain his tardiness, saying he was detained with a shooting party.

"Animals, I hope," the Brit replied.



When the infamous Huey Long was governor of Louisiana, he kidded Texas governor James "Pa" Ferguson, "If there had been a back door at the Alamo, there wouldn't have been a Texas."

"But there was a back door," replied Ferguson, "and that's why there's a Louisiana."



In 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt named financier Joseph P. Kennedy to head the new Securities and Exchange Commission, regulating Wall Street.

Democratic National Chairman Jim Farley protested, telling FDR of the unscrupulous methods Kennedy had used to build his fortune.

FDR did not deny Farley's charges, but held firm, explaining, "You set a thief to catch a thief."



In 1935, a French diplomat suggested to Soviet leader Joseph Stalin that he might warm frosty relations with the Vatican if he were to show more tolerance to Catholics, to which the dictator replied, "How many divisions does the Pope command?"

When told of Stalin's answer, Pope Pius XI replied, "You may tell my son Joseph he will meet my divisions in heaven."



Asked if he would appoint labor leader John L. Lewis ambassador to the United Nations, President Harry Truman said, “I wouldn’t appoint him dogcatcher.”

“Of course he wouldn’t,” Lewis responded when he heard what Truman said. “Because if he did, he’d have more brains in the dog department than in the State Department.”



Dorothy Parker and Representative Clare Boothe Luce bumped into each other entering a restaurant.

“Age before beauty,” Luce sniffed, stepping away.

“And pearls before swine,” Parker gloated, walking past her.



Socialite Clare Boothe Luce, wife of publisher Henry Luce, served in Congress during the 1940s. The Connecticut Republican sided with President Franklin Roosevelt on some issues, but the two strong personalities eventually clashed. Roosevelt campaigned against her reelection, calling her “a sharp-tongued glamour girl of forty.” Luce responded by accusing Roosevelt of being “the only American president who ever lied us into a war because he did not have the political courage to lead us into it.”



While in America, Winston Churchill was invited to a buffet luncheon where cold fried chicken was served. Returning for a second helping, he asked politely, "May I have some breast?"

Overhearing this, his hostess scolded him, "Mr. Churchill, in this country we ask for white meat or dark meat."

Churchill apologized.

The following morning, Churchill sent the lady a magnificent orchid with a note that read, "I would be most obliged if you would pin this to your white meat."



When Frank Knox was secretary of the Navy, a friend asked him a casual question about the movement of certain ships in Atlantic waters.

Knox leaned over and said, "Can you keep a secret?"

"Of course I can," the friend replied eagerly.

"Well," the secretary said, "so can I."



In the washroom of his London club, Lord William Beaverbrook, then a newspaper publisher, bumped into Edward Heath, who was then a young member of Parliament and future prime minister, whom Beaverbrook had castigated in an editorial a few days earlier.

Embarrassed by the encounter, Beaverbrook said, "My dear chap, I've been thinking it over and I was wrong. Here and now, I wish to apologize."

Heath nodded. "Next time, I wish you'd insult me in the washroom and apologize in your newspaper."



In Winston Churchill's radio address celebrating the end of World War II in Europe, he chastised Ireland for remaining neutral during the war while he praised the relatively small country of the United Kingdom for standing alone against the mighty Germans after France had surrendered and before America entered the war.

Irish leader Eamon de Valera, who had played a prominent role in his country's War of Independence, reminded listeners how England had brutalized the Irish for centuries when they were part of the British Empire.

Could Churchill, de Valera said, "not find in his heart the generosity to acknowledge that there is a small nation that stood alone, not for one year or two, but for several hundred years against aggression; that endured spoliations, famine, massacres, in endless succession; that was clubbed many times into insensibility, but that each time on returning to consciousness took up the fight anew; a small nation that could never be got to accept defeat and has never surrendered her soul."



After leading England through World War II, Winston Churchill was voted out as prime minister in 1945. He was devastated by the defeat. “Perhaps it’s a blessing in disguise,” his wife Clementine said, trying to console him.

“Perhaps,” Churchill responded, “but at the moment, it seems quite effectively disguised.”



When Winston Churchill delivered his famous Iron Curtain Address at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, in 1946, a ceremony was held to dedicate a bust of the wartime prime minister.

After the ceremonies were over, a buxom woman approached Churchill and gushed, “Mr. Churchill, I traveled over a hundred miles this morning for the unveiling of your bust.”

“Madam,” the statesman replied, “I assure you that I would gladly return the favor.”



President Harry Truman's daughter, Margaret, sang at Constitution Hall. In his review of Margaret's recital, *Washington Post* critic Paul Hume characterized her as having "a pleasant voice of little size and fair quality," adding that she was "flat a good deal of the time."

Truman reviewed Hume's work in a personal letter to the critic: "I have read your lousy review of Margaret's concert. I've come to the conclusion that you are an eight-ulcer man on a four-ulcer pay. Some day I hope to meet you. When that happens, you'll need a new nose, a lot of beefsteak for black eyes and perhaps a supporter below."



In 1948, the Democratic Party won its fifth consecutive presidential election when Harry Truman upset Republican Thomas Dewey. Comedian Groucho Marx remarked, "The only way a Republican will get into the White House is to marry Margaret Truman."



After Truman's vice president, Alben Barkley, gave a speech, he sat down and asked a friend, "What did you think of my speech?"

"Well," his friend answered candidly, "I have only three criticisms. First, you read it. Second, you read it poorly. Third, it wasn't worth reading."



Robert Maynard Hutchins, who was named president of the University of Chicago at age thirty, spent two decades implementing sweeping academic reforms, including abolishing the university's football program. In the age of Joseph McCarthy and the Red Scare, Hutchins outraged conservatives by opposing loyalty oaths and defending academic freedom.

Upon his retirement in 1951, a conservative reporter asked with a sneer, "Is communism still being taught at the university?"

"Yes," Hutchins replied, "and cancer at the medical school."



A speaker was well along in his boring speech on the floor of the House of Commons when he observed Winston Churchill napping.

“Must you fall asleep while I’m speaking?” the speaker demanded.

“No,” Churchill said, eyes still closed. “It’s purely voluntary.”



Clement Attlee had supported Churchill during World War II, but often disagreed with him and his imperiousness during cabinet meetings. In one such meeting, Attlee attempted to raise a matter for discussion. Churchill dismissed him, saying that the topic had been discussed in a previous meeting.

Impatient with Churchill’s long-winded lectures, Attlee replied, “A monologue is not a discussion.”



During a reception in Washington, DC, during World War II, Winston Churchill was asked if he had been negatively affected by his alcohol consumption. “All I can say,” he replied, “is that I have taken more out of alcohol than alcohol has taken out of me.”



At the end of a speech, New York Rep. Emanuel Celler was approached by a female supporter who asked if she might have his notes as a souvenir.

The congressman said he had no notes.

She said she would be satisfied with a transcript of the address.

But no transcript had been made, Celler explained.

“Do you think there’s any possibility of your speech being published?” the woman persisted.

“Maybe posthumously,” Celler replied jokingly.

“Well,” she said, “let’s hope it’s soon.”



California governor Earl Warren opened a speech, saying, "I'm pleased to see such a dense crowd here tonight."

"Don't be too pleased, Governor!" a voice shouted, "We ain't too dense!"



Former Georgia governor Eugene Talmadge was asked what would be the effect of all the people moving from Georgia to Florida.

"I am sure," Talmadge said, "it will enhance the level of intelligence of both states."



British Labour Party leader Aneurin "Nye" Bevan once asked Harold Wilson, his successor as prime minister, "Were you really born in Yorkshire?"

"Not just born, Nye," Wilson said proudly. "Forged."

"I always thought there was something counterfeit about you," Bevan replied.



In arguing a case before the Vermont Supreme Court, state Attorney General Robert T. Stafford could not bring the chief justice to his point of view.

Finally, Stafford said, “Mr. Chief Justice, I shan’t pursue this line of argument any further, as obviously there is no use of banging my head into a stone wall.”

“No, Mr. Attorney General, there isn’t,” the chief justice replied, “but I know of no one who could do so with less fear of personal injury than you.”



When Dr. Robert Oppenheimer, who supervised the creation of the first atomic bomb, was asked by a congressional committee if there was any defense against the weapon, he answered, “Certainly. The defense is peace.”



On Winston Churchill's eightieth birthday, a young man was sent to take his photograph. The photographer, awestruck to be in the presence of the great man, stammered, "Sir Winston, it is wonderful to take your photograph on your eightieth birthday and I do look forward to taking it again on your hundredth birthday."

Churchill replied, "Young man, you appear to me in good health and sound in wind and limb. So I see no reason why you should not."



Well into his eighties, Churchill periodically attended the House of Commons. As he was helped down the aisles by two aides, one young MP said to another, "You know, I don't think he should come in anymore; he's getting so doddery."

The other then whispered: "They say the old man's getting gaga."

And Churchill added, "And they also say he's getting hard of hearing."



Someone asked Senator Margaret Chase Smith, “What would you do if you woke up and found yourself in the White House?”

“I would go to the president’s wife,” Mrs. Smith said, “apologize and then leave at once.”



Charles de Gaulle led the French resistance during World War II. He was chair of the provisional government of the French Republic before becoming the country’s president. Asked about his prickly relationship with British prime minister Winston Churchill, he said, “When I am right, I get angry. Churchill gets angry when he is wrong. We are angry at each other much of the time.”



French president Charles de Gaulle emerged unharmed after 110 bullets were fired at his car in an assassination attempt.

Unruffled and unflappable, the old soldier assessed, “Those people really aim very badly.”



Theodore Roosevelt's daughter Alice married Republican congressman Nicholas Longworth III in 1906 and remained involved in politics the rest of her life. During the Red Scare of the 1950s, she attended a party and found herself standing next to Senator Joseph McCarthy, who was leading the witch-hunt against suspected Communists in government.

"Here's my blind date," McCarthy joked. "I am going to call you Alice."

Alice would have no part of any familiarities with the loathsome McCarthy. "Senator McCarthy, you are not going to call me Alice," she said. "The truck man, the trashman and the policeman on my block may call me Alice, but you, Senator McCarthy, will call me Mrs. Longworth."



In 1965, Alice Roosevelt Longworth's black chauffeur, Richard Turner, was driving her to an appointment. When Turner inadvertently pulled in front of a taxi, the cabby shouted, "What do you think you're doing, you black bastard?"

Alice returned fire: "He's taking me to my destination, you white son of a bitch!"



A French citizen approached President Charles de Gaulle and said, “My friends are not content with your policies.”

De Gaulle answered, “I demand that you change your friends.”



In the 1950s, senators began installing phones in their cars as a symbol of status. When Republican Minority Leader Everett M. Dirksen got his phone, he immediately called Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson.

“Lyndon,” he said smugly, “I just got a car phone. I thought I’d make my first call to you.”

“Can you hold a minute, Ev?” Johnson replied, “My other phone is ringing.”



Senator Everett Dirksen was cast in the mold of fellow Illinoisan Abraham Lincoln—a pragmatic Republican, eloquent orator, and master of the quick riposte. Once, while debating on the Senate floor, he was interrupted by an opponent trying to make a point.

“Sir,” Dirksen said, “you are interrupting the man I most like to hear.”



Statesman and two-time presidential nominee Adlai Stevenson was approached by an enthusiastic supporter during one of his losing campaigns against Dwight Eisenhower.

“Governor, every thinking person will be voting for you,” she gushed.

“Madam,” he deadpanned, “that’s not enough. I need a majority.”



Before Henry W. Maier was mayor of Milwaukee, he served in the Wisconsin state senate. During one of his senate campaigns, he introduced himself to a woman who told him, “Sorry, but you’re my second choice.”

“Well,” Maier asked, “who’s your first choice?”

“Anybody else,” she said.



Australian prime minister William McMahon's balding pate, quavering voice, and mild demeanor made him vulnerable to criticism.

He once confided to Queensland MP James Killen: "I'm my own worst enemy."

"Not as long as I'm alive," Killen replied.



Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev was condemning the late Joseph Stalin for his political purges in a speech. He was interrupted by a voice in the crowd that shouted, "You were one of Stalin's colleagues! Why didn't you stop him?"

"Who said that?" Khrushchev demanded.

A silence fell over the room.

"Now you know why," Khrushchev said.



A bright young man had just joined the staff of “Uncle Joe” Cannon, then Speaker of the House, and he was terribly anxious to learn everything. For weeks, he questioned the veteran members of the staff constantly—and all too often irrelevantly.

He noticed that in the Senate there was a Committee on Foreign Relations, while in the House of Representatives, doing the same work, there was a Committee of Foreign Affairs. This time he caught Uncle Joe himself. “Why?” he asked, “does the title read Affairs in the House and Relations in the Senate?”

Wearily, the Speaker laid down his sheaf of papers, drew the young man aside and explained in confidential tones: “Well, since you are old enough to ask about such things, I suppose it’s all right to tell you. You see, the House Committee, being junior to the Senate Committee, is not old enough to have relations; it can only have affairs.”



When Arizona senator Barry Goldwater was told he couldn't play golf at a Chevy Chase, Maryland, country club because it was restricted, he said, "I'm only half Jewish, so can't I play nine holes?"



During a three-man race for the Republican nomination for lieutenant governor of Iowa, Jack Miller was the last of the three to speak. Miller saw a prominent local Republican in the audience and directed many of his points in her direction. After seeing her nod, he felt he had won her approval. When the meeting ended, he approached her.

As she shook his hand, she said, "I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. Miller. I liked your speech very much."

Miller smiled broadly.

"Well, you are now my second choice," she added.

"Who's your first?" Miller asked.

"Anybody else," she answered.



During tensions between the Soviet Union and the West in 1960, British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was addressing the UN General Assembly when he was interrupted by Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, who began pounding his shoe on the table—a traditional Russian custom of expressing displeasure with a speaker. Macmillan was aware that Khrushchev had done this before, in hope of distracting the speaker or at least stealing the audience's attention.

Unperturbed, Macmillan looked at an interpreter and said, "Could I have that translated, please?"



During an interview, a reporter asked British prime minister Harold Macmillan, "Sir, what do you think is the real meaning of life?"

"Good god!" Macmillan replied. "If you want to know the meaning of life, see your archbishop, don't ask a politician."



Asked where she thought the Democrats should hold their 1960 presidential convention, Jackie Kennedy, the stylish wife of Democratic candidate John F. Kennedy, said, “Acapulco.”



During the Democratic primaries of 1960, Senator Lyndon Johnson and his family believed that LBJ would be the party’s nominee for president. But the nomination ultimately went to John F. Kennedy at the party’s convention in Los Angeles. Johnson would instead be JFK’s running mate.

Johnson’s mood grew darker when one of his daughters was late returning from Disneyland. As the Johnsons hurried for the convention for the official announcement of the Kennedy-Johnson ticket, LBJ grouched, “We didn’t come out here to see Disneyland.”

“I know,” his daughter answered dejectedly. “But we didn’t come out here to see you run for vice president either.”



Vice President Richard Nixon faced Senator John F. Kennedy during the 1960 presidential election. Nixon was completing his second term as Dwight Eisenhower's vice president, yet Ike said little to support Nixon.

A reporter asked Eisenhower to provide an example of how Nixon had contributed to the administration during his eight years in office.

Eisenhower paused for a painfully long moment, then said, "If you give me a week, I might think of one."



In 1960, JFK's campaign was dogged by rumors that his father was planning to use the family fortune to "buy the election."

Speaking at the annual Gridiron Club dinner in Washington, DC, Kennedy said he had just received a telegram from his father. "Jack," it said, "don't buy a single vote more than necessary. I'll be damned if I'm going to pay for a landslide."



The relationship between President John F. Kennedy and Canadian prime minister John Diefenbaker deteriorated when Canada hesitated in supporting the United States during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1961. Kennedy irritated Diefenbaker by repeatedly mispronouncing his name. While visiting JFK in the Oval Office, Diefenbaker saw paintings of American naval victories in the War of 1812. For Kennedy's next visit to Toronto, Diefenbaker arranged for a painting of Canada's capture of the US frigate *Chesapeake* to be prominently hanging in his executive office.

"We must teach him some history," Diefenbaker quipped.



John F. Kennedy was famous for his press conferences in which he bantered and sparred with the journalists. In 1963, he was confronted by a reporter who said, "The Republican National Committee recently adopted a resolution saying you were pretty much a failure. How do you feel about that?"

"I assume it passed unanimously," Kennedy answered.



After hearing John Kennedy's presidential inaugural address, Richard Nixon, who had narrowly lost to Kennedy, bumped into Ted Sorensen, one of JFK's speechwriters, and said, "I wish I had said some of those things."

"Which things?" Sorensen asked. "The part about, 'Ask not what your country can do for you'?"

"No," said Nixon. "The part that starts, 'I do solemnly swear.'"



Several months after his retirement, President Eisenhower was asked if leaving the White House had affected his golf game.

"Yes," he said, "a lot more people beat me now."



Early in his term, John Kennedy was asked by a reporter, “If you had to do it over again, would you run for the presidency and would you recommend the job to others?”

“Well,” JFK replied, “the answer to the first is yes, and the answer to the second is no. I don’t recommend it to others, at least not for a while.”



President John Kennedy was speaking with a conservative industrialist. “You know,” he said, “if I weren’t president, I’d be buying stocks now.”

“Yes,” said the businessman. “And if you weren’t president, I’d be buying stocks now too.”



Joseph P. Kennedy, father of John F. Kennedy, once remarked to his son that his granddaughter Caroline was very bright—“smarter than you were, Jack, at that age.”

“Yes, she is,” Jack agreed. “But look who she has for a father.”



In Dallas in 1963 for a United Nations Day speech, Adlai Stevenson, then ambassador to the United Nations, was interrupted again and again by a heckler who challenged the ambassador to state his beliefs.

Stevenson ignored the first few interruptions, then looked toward heckler and said, “I believe in the forgiveness of sin and the redemption of ignorance.”



When Henry Cabot Lodge, the US ambassador to the United Nations, was taking his turn as president of the Security Council, the Russian delegate Semyon K. Tsarapkin demanded the floor.

“For what purpose does the gentleman from the Soviet Union seek the floor?” Lodge asked.

“I am not a gentleman,” Tsarapkin said. “I am a delegate.”

“I had hoped that the two were not mutually exclusive,” Lodge said.



Carl Rowan, the journalist-turned-government bureaucrat, moved to Washington to work in the Kennedy administration. Rowan and his wife purchased a home with a large front lawn in a newly integrated neighborhood.

One Saturday, Rowan, dressed in old clothes, was mowing his lawn. A chauffeured car pulled over to the curb and a white man in the back seat said, "Hey, boy, how much do you get for cutting the grass?"

Rowan walked over to the car and said, "I don't charge the lady in the house anything," he said. "She lets me sleep with her."



For more than thirty years, conservative pundit and guru William F. Buckley Jr. hosted *Firing Line*, a weekly television program of political debate and discussion, in which guests were invited to spar and match wits with the host. One of Buckley's friends and favorite guests was the liberal economist John Kenneth Galbraith. But on one occasion, Galbraith declined Buckley's invitation to appear on his show, saying, "I'm sorry, but that week I'll be teaching at the University of Moscow."

In response, Buckley said, "Oh, what do you have left to teach them?"



FBI director J. Edgar Hoover was a pain in the backside for several presidents, and Lyndon Johnson inherited the problem when he became president after the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963. LBJ disliked and distrusted the director and sorely wanted to fire him, as had his predecessors, Dwight Eisenhower and JFK. But Hoover was a cagey manipulator and knew how to protect himself. After several months in the Oval Office, it became clear that Johnson would not replace the FBI chief, and one of his advisers wanted to know why.

“Well,” Johnson said, “I’d rather have him inside our tent pissing out than outside pissing in.”



There were rumors that President Lyndon Johnson would select as his running mate Robert Kennedy, the brother of the man whose assassination had made LBJ president.

A reporter asked Kennedy, “How do you feel about a Johnson-Kennedy ticket?”

RFK answered, “I’d be willing, but I’m not sure Mr. Johnson would accept the vice presidency.”



President Johnson had a reputation for verbally abusing his staff, but Press Secretary Bill Moyers, on at least one occasion, got the last word.

After Moyers delivered grace over dinner, LBJ complained to Moyers that he couldn't hear him.

"Mr. President," replied Moyers, "I wasn't addressing you."



When Ronald Reagan was running for governor of California, he was interrupted by protestors who screamed, "Make love, not war!" Reagan won over the crowd who came to see him by telling the protestors, "By the looks of you, you don't look like you could do much of either."



Israeli prime minister David Ben-Gurion often described his minister of labor Golda Meir as “the only man in his cabinet.” Meir said she was amused that Ben-Gurion thought that this was the greatest praise he could pay a woman. “I very much doubt,” Meir said, “that any man would have been flattered if I had said about him that he was the only woman in government.”



Israeli prime minister Golda Meir visited the White House when President Richard Nixon had just made Henry Kissinger his secretary of state. Nixon observed that both their countries now had Jewish foreign ministers. Noting Kissinger’s thick German accent, Meir said, “Yes, but mine speaks English.”



When told that President Nixon called him “a son of a bitch” and “an asshole,” Canadian prime minister Pierre Trudeau replied, “I’ve been called worse by better people.”



Israeli prime minister Golda Meir responded impatiently with what she believed was an insincere display of humility by military leader and politician Moshe Dayan. “Don’t be so humble,” Meir snapped, “you’re not that great.”



Golda Meir listened to a discussion in her cabinet about an outbreak of assaults on women at night. One minister, a man, suggested a curfew that would prohibit women from leaving their homes after dark.

“But it’s the men who are attacking the women,” Meir responded. “If there’s to be a curfew, let the men stay home, not the women.”



During the 1972 presidential election, Democratic nominee George McGovern was pressured to drop his running mate, Thomas Eagleton, who had once been treated for depression. Julian Bond, a Georgia politician, found it ironic that Eagleton should be dropped from the ticket for reasons of mental health, when McGovern was running against Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew, two politicians whose state of mind were often questioned in popular discourse.

“At least we know ours had treatment,” Bond said. “What about theirs?”



President Richard Nixon's supporters accused CBS News television reporter Dan Rather of being hostile toward the president. During a Houston news conference in March 1974, in the middle the Watergate investigation that would doom Nixon's presidency, Rather introduced himself even though he was one of the best-known television journalists in the country. "Thank you, Mr. President. Dan Rather, of CBS News," he said.

There were immediate jeers and applause, prompting Nixon to joke, "Are you running for something?"

Rather replied, "No, sir, Mr. President. Are you?"



Vice President Gerald Ford became president in 1974, after the resignation of Richard Nixon. Ford then issued a pardon for Nixon—for which he was widely criticized, if not condemned. During the 1976 presidential campaign, Ford tried but could not escape the fallout from the pardon. During a press conference in early October, a reporter said, "Mr. President, twice in this press conference, you've referred to 'your predecessor.' Once you referred to 'Lyndon Johnson's successor.' Are you deliberately trying to avoid saying Richard Nixon's name?"

"Yes," Ford said.



While playing a round of golf during the 1976 presidential primaries, candidate Mo Udall was asked about his handicap. “Handicap? I’m a one-eyed Mormon Democrat from conservative Arizona,” he said. “You can’t find a higher handicap than that.”



When Mo Udall ran for president in 1976, he knew his chances of winning the Democratic nomination were low because of his weak name recognition. When he walked up to a group of elderly men in New Hampshire before the first primary of the campaign, he introduced himself and said he was running for president.

“Oh, yeah,” one of them said, “we were just laughing about that.”



When Mo Udall dropped out of the 1976 presidential campaign, he was asked why. “The voters have spoken—the bastards,” he said.



During the vice presidential debate in 1976, Senator Bob Dole, GOP presidential candidate Gerald Ford's running mate, said that all the wars in the century had been "Democrat wars." The remark was widely perceived as being excessively mean-spirited. After Democratic president Jimmy Carter narrowly defeated Ford in the election, Dole was asked to reflect on his debate performance. "I was supposed to go for the jugular," he said. "And I did—my own."



Once when television reporter Andrew Kirtzman was interviewing New York Mayor Ed Koch, the reporter pressed the mayor on an inconsistency.

Finally, Koch, a bit frustrated, leaned closer to the reporter and said, "I can explain this to you; I can't comprehend it for you."



In 1978, mild-mannered Sir Geoffrey Howe attacked the budget proposals of Labour Leader Denis Healey on the floor of the House of Commons. When asked for a response, Healey said, “That part of his speech was rather like being savaged by a dead sheep.”



During a press conference, a reporter droned on with his question to President Jimmy Carter. “Mr. President, there have been a lot of confusing statements from the White House on where exactly the United States stands in terms of Palestinian-PLO participation in a Geneva peace conference, if one comes about. Can you clarify this point?”

“I doubt it,” Carter said.



Walter Mondale lost to Ronald Reagan in a landslide in 1984. Several years later, Mondale was asked how long it took to recover.

“I’ll let you know when the grieving ends,” he said.

RONALD REAGAN



President Ronald Reagan struggled in his first debate with Democratic challenger Walter Mondale when he ran for reelection in 1984. A *Newsweek*/Gallup poll concluded that 54 percent of the people who watched the debate thought Mondale had won, while only 35 percent thought Reagan had. Republicans worried publicly that Reagan, who was then seventy-three, might be too old for the rigors of the presidency.

Henry Trewitt of the *Baltimore Sun* questioned Reagan about this issue at the beginning of the next debate. “You already are the oldest president in history, and some of your staff say you were tired after your most recent encounter with Mr. Mondale,” Trewitt said. Trewitt then mentioned that President John Kennedy had gone days with little sleep during the Cuban missile crisis. “Is there any doubt in your mind that you would be able to function in such circumstances?” he asked.

Reagan was prepared for the question.

“I want you to know I will not make age an issue in this campaign,” Reagan responded. “I am not going to exploit for political purposes my opponent’s youth and inexperience.”

The crowd laughed. So did Mondale, who was standing a few feet away. But as Mondale later admitted, his laughter hid the grim acknowledgment that Reagan had just erased the doubts about him.

Reagan won the debate and the election.

Reagan became one of America's most popular presidents because his experiences as an actor taught him the power of sincerity—and how to fake it—and because he used his sense of humor to connect with voters in a way that made him appear trustworthy, congenial, and genuine. Few of the former actor's comebacks, however, were spontaneous, including his most memorable one. But his timing and delivery were impeccable.

Reagan was a New Deal Democrat while working as an actor and serving as president of the Screen Actors Guild in the 1940s and 1950s. By the 1960s, he was a political conservative, dramatically shifting careers, abandoning the gleaming, superficial artifice of show business for the gleaming, superficial artifice of politics.

Reagan used his telegenic charisma, aw-shucks geniality, and commonsense conservatism to win election and then reelection as governor of California. He was rarely caustic but could respond forcefully if necessary—such as when he ran for the Republican nomination for president in 1980.

Three days before the New Hampshire primary—the first primary of the campaign—the Federal Election Commission ruled that the *Nashua Telegraph* could not sponsor the debate because this would violate election regulations. Reagan provided

the funding for the debate and the *Telegraph's* editorial staff moderated. The newspaper invited only the front-runners, Reagan and George H. W. Bush, to participate. Reagan argued for all candidates to be included. The *Telegraph's* editor insisted that the other candidates could only make closing remarks.

When moderator John Breen, the newspaper's editor, began to ask the first question, Reagan interrupted, saying he wanted to make an introductory statement expressing his objection that the other candidates were not included in the debate.

"Would the sound man please turn Mr. Reagan's mic off for the moment?" Breen responded, prompting booing from the crowd.

"I am paying for this microphone, Mr. Green!" Reagan answered angrily.

The crowd applauded loudly. Reagan got the editor's name wrong but the moment was his.

He easily won the GOP nomination and the election in November.

Two months after he was inaugurated in January 1981, Reagan was shot by a would-be assassin outside the Washington Hilton Hotel.

To Reagan, whose injury was far more serious than initially reported, it was important to project calm, both to the American people and to his wife Nancy.

"Honey, I forgot to duck," he told her in the hospital, paraphrasing Jack Dempsey after he lost his heavyweight title to Gene Tunney.

In the operating room, Reagan smiled and told surgeons, "Please tell me you're Republicans." After surgery he paraphrased comedian W. C. Fields in a written note: "All in all, I'd rather be in Philadelphia." He quoted Winston Churchill in another note, saying, "There's no more exhilarating feeling than being shot at without result." And finally, he said this in yet another note: "Send me to L.A., where I can see the air I'm breathing."

While recuperating, Reagan asked an aide how things were running in his absence. The assistant said he should be happy to know the government was functioning normally.

Reagan, who had been in good spirits, became agitated and snapped: "What makes you think I'd be happy about that?"

CHRIS LAMB



Senator Fritz Hollings of South Carolina found himself in an elevator with the diminutive Senator John Tower of Texas, who puffed out his chest to show Hollings the expensive suit he had just purchased.

“What do you think?” Tower gushed.

“That’s a nice suit,” Hollings snapped. “Does it come in men’s sizes?”



Vice President George H. W. Bush wanted those watching his debate with Democratic vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro to know he was more knowledgeable on the politics of the Middle East. “Let me help you with the difference, Ms. Ferraro, between Iran and the embassy in Lebanon,” Bush began his response to Ferraro, who interrupted him, “Let me just say first of all that I almost resent, Vice President Bush, your patronizing attitude that you have to teach me about foreign policy.”



During the 1980s, Garry Trudeau's *Doonesbury* comic strip ridiculed George H. W. Bush for being a political opportunist. Bush had switched positions on a number of critical issues after becoming Ronald Reagan's running mate in 1980. Trudeau drew Bush putting his manhood in a blind trust, and Bush responded indignantly.

When Trudeau continued to ridicule Bush's lack of character, Bush whined again, telling journalists he wanted to "kick the hell out of him." Nothing changed when Bush became president, as Trudeau goaded and Bush complained. The *Oakland Tribune* admonished Bush to reserve his ire for weightier issues. "President Bush has been reading *Doonesbury*," the newspaper said, and "taking it far too seriously."



Garry Trudeau's *Doonesbury* strip was equally hard on President Ronald Reagan. In one series, Trudeau took readers on a tour of the president's head and found only marbles. Reagan's response was more presidential than his vice president's. "Cartoonists occupy a special place in my heart," he said. "I hope Garry Trudeau will remember that. It's heart, not brain, heart."



Jim O’Keeffe, an Irish politician, went to London to plead for help from Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to address a short-fall in revenues. Thatcher was resistant to O’Keeffe’s entreaty.

“Now, Prime Minister,” O’Keeffe said, taking his pipe out of his mouth, “in Ireland we have a saying that when you’re building a house, you put the roof on as soon as possible, so as to keep the rain out. That’s what we’re trying to do with the emergency budget.”

The prime minister would have none of O’Keeffe’s metaphor.

“And you say that to me, a Thatcher?” she asked.



Canadian prime minister Brian Mulroney met with British prime minister Margaret Thatcher in Montreal to make his case for sanctions against South Africa's apartheid regime. Thatcher opposed sanctions and pressured Mulroney to fall in line.

"Margaret, I am not a member of your government," he said. "I am the prime minister of a sovereign nation. If you want somebody to follow you, go get someone from your own government."



When reporters asked President George Herbert Walker Bush to display the middle finger from which he was about to have a cyst removed, Bush replied, "Don't tempt me."



In 1981, before Dan Quayle became vice president, he joined a group of congressmen for a weekend golf outing. The group was accompanied by a female lobbyist who journalists reported was looking to trade sex for votes.

The scandal threatened Quayle's political ambitions until his wife, Marilyn, said that she knew her husband had done nothing inappropriate on the trip.

"Anyone who knows Dan," she said, "knows that he would rather play golf than have sex any day."

FRITZ HOLLINGS



One simple zinger propelled US Senator Fritz Hollings, Democrat of South Carolina, to reelection in 1986.

For Republicans then, the heady days of the Reagan Revolution were in full swing with candidates eager to show how tough they were on crime. Hollings's opponent Henry McMaster, a young former federal prosecutor who wanted to show how tough he was, apparently thought it was savvy to take a line from the GOP playbook and challenge his sixty-four-year-old opponent to a drug test.

Hollings, who looked like a senator straight from central casting in Hollywood, was never afraid to meet a challenge head on. He simply replied, "Henry, I'll take a drug test when you take an IQ test."

Game over for McMaster, who went on to become the state's governor in 2017. At speeches as governor, he continued to tell the story of how Hollings bested him with that line more than thirty years before. And the crowds still laughed.

Hollings, who passed away in 2019 at age ninety-seven, is remembered for creative quips. He told former GOP congressman

Tommy Hartnett during a 1992 debate that he was “full of prunes.” Six years later, then-congressman Bob Inglis, a Greenville Republican trying to oust Hollings, got called “a goddamned skunk” for campaign antics. Again, the one-liner stuck and framed the election

It wasn't only Republicans who were on the receiving end of Hollings's barbs.

In 1990, broadcaster Sam Donaldson tried to pigeonhole Hollings, an avowed protectionist, at the end of the final segment of ABC's *This Week* by asking whether he had a Korean tailor. “I think I got that suit—this is not the one—the same place right down the street where—if you want to personalize this thing—where you got that wig, Sam.” The show ended immediately.

During a 1984 Democratic presidential primary debate, Hollings referred to fellow candidate Senator John Glenn's accomplishments as an astronaut by asking, “But what have you done in this world?”

But Hollings wasn't shy about poking fun at himself.

“People always wonder how [late wife] Peatsy and I stay together with so many divorces these days,” Hollings once said. “And a friend of ours used to say, ‘It's simple. They have a lot in common. They're both in love with the same fella.’”

Years after Hollings's 2005 retirement from the Senate, people continued to talk about how he would talk.

"That's like delivering lettuce by way of a rabbit," Hollings could be heard when discussing something dysfunctional about government spending.

When a program was off the rails, you'd likely hear, "The ox is in the ditch." You might wonder, *Where? Where is the ox in the ditch? Why did he say that?* before realizing, perhaps, that he was harkening to a colloquial saying from agricultural days to make the point that America needed to pull together as a team.

And then there was the old classic, general-purpose standby for government stupidity: "That's like the fireplug wetting the dog."

Fairly frequently, you'd also hear about mules, specifically how there was no second education in the kick from one, or how he was tired of the "shenanigans" and "monkeyshines."

With a rich baritone inflected with the mesmerizing Gullah sounds of his Low Country heritage, Hollings's voice could charm or mince, depending on what he wanted to accomplish. Staffers often didn't know what would come out of his mouth.

It also was fairly easy to figure out when you were losing an argument, with Hollings asking, "How many times have you been elected to the United States Senate?" Or, "Son, when I was your age, I was governor. What do you know?"

And then there was the sentence I occasionally heard as a press secretary: “You don’t know from sic ‘em.” I never knew what “sic ‘em” was, but I knew it was not something good. I also knew the conversation was over. It was definitely over if you heard this: “Close that door . . . with you on the other side.”

ANDY BRACK

Andy Brack was Senator Hollings's press secretary.



The three living former presidents Jimmy Carter, Gerald Ford, and Richard Nixon stood side by side at a White House event during the Ronald Reagan administration.

Observing the three standing together, Senator Bob Dole said, “Carter, Ford, and Nixon: See no evil, hear no evil, and . . . evil.”



In 1988, George H. W. Bush selected little-known senator Dan Quayle as his vice presidential running mate. The youthful-looking Quayle tried to deflect concerns about his age and inexperience by comparing himself to John F. Kennedy. Quayle’s handlers told him not to bring up the comparison during his debate with the Democratic vice presidential candidate, Lloyd Bentsen.

But Quayle ignored the advice. When the issue was raised during the debate, Quayle answered, “I have as much experience . . . as Jack Kennedy did when he sought the presidency.”

Bentsen was ready. “Senator, I served with Jack Kennedy. I knew Jack Kennedy. Jack Kennedy was a friend of mind. Senator, you’re no Jack Kennedy.”



When Robert Casey, the Democratic governor of Pennsylvania, was running for reelection after his first term, he made a campaign stop in a small town in the state's largely Republican northwest corner.

"Hi, I'm running for governor," Casey told the gas station attendant who was filling his tank, "and I'd like to have your vote."

There was an awkward pause and the attendant looked up. "Sure, I'll vote for you."

"Why?" Casey asked.

"Because," the attendant said, "anybody would be better than the guy they have in there now."



After losing the New Hampshire primary to George H. W. Bush in 1988, Senator Bob Dole was asked how he slept the next night.

"I slept like a baby," Dole said, then added, "I woke up every two hours and cried."



In 1988, British junior health minister Edwina Currie said most eggs in the United Kingdom had salmonella, which led to a dramatic decrease in the sale of eggs, the slaughter of millions of hens, and such ridicule that she was forced to resign.

“The honourable Lady was once an egg,” Scottish politician Sir Nicholas Fairbairn said. “And very many members of all sides of this House regret its fertilization.”



During a debate between Democratic presidential candidates, Missouri congressman Richard Gephardt was rambling on with an anecdote about his childhood. At one point Gephardt mentioned that when he was a boy his mother used to give him castor oil every morning.

Two of the other candidates, Senator Al Gore and Jesse Jackson, were sitting next to each other when Gore whispered to Jackson, “Your mother give you castor oil, Jesse?”

“No,” Jackson responded, “but I wasn’t full of shit all the time.”

Vice President Dan Quayle complained publicly after satirist Garry Trudeau poked fun of him in his *Doonesbury* comic strip.

“It’s well known that Garry Trudeau has a personal vendetta against me,” Quayle complained.

In response, the late-night talk show host Johnny Carson said, “Vice President Quayle is mad at Garry Trudeau for satirizing Quayle in his comic strip. That’s the way to get through to Quayle—make fun of him on the comic page. He’s bound to see it.”

ANN RICHARDS



Ann Richards, the Texas state treasurer, delivered a series of stinging criticisms of George H. W. Bush, the Republican presidential candidate, in her keynote address at the Democratic National Convention on July 18, 1988. Richards had questioned whether Bush, who, born and raised in Connecticut and educated at Yale, was a bona fide Texan. "George Bush claims to be from Texas," Richards said. "But someone who lives in Maine and stays in a Houston hotel room is called a tourist in Texas, not a Texan."

Richards followed up by adding, "I am delighted to be here with you this evening because after listening to George Bush all these years, I figured you needed to know what a real Texas accent sounds like."

Richards's most famous line, however, came when she juxtaposed Bush's patrician upbringing with the garbled syntax of his speeches.

"Poor George," Richards said dryly, her words dripping with sarcasm. "He can't help it. He was born with a silver foot in his mouth."

The partisan Democratic crowd erupted into laughter.

Republicans didn't like the speech, and neither did a lot of political observers. Texans were particularly dismissive because they thought it wasn't ladylike. "What came out of Richards's mouth," as one Fort Worth, Texas, woman put it, "was crude oil and a real disservice to the Texas woman."

Would Richards's comments have received a more favorable reaction if she had been a man?

Probably.

Richards was well aware of sexism in politics. In her speech, she mentioned that she was just the second woman in history to give the keynote address at the National Democratic Convention. Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, another Texan, was the first, in 1976.

Richards bluntly referred to the scarcity of women and minorities during a speech at a Democratic fundraiser shortly before the national convention. "Are there any other white men who haven't spoken yet?" she began her speech. "God knows we wouldn't want to leave any of you out."

The Democratic Party, Richards once said, "was run by men who looked on women as little more than spare parts."

This is even truer of the Republican Party today, where women are less likely to either run for office or be elected. The dearth of women in this book is indicative of the disproportionately small number of women who have served—and continue to serve—in politics but also of the double standard in how we

respond to those with a sharp tongue. We admire men who can silence their critics with sharply worded riposte in the bare-knuckled world of politics. But if a woman does this, she's criticized for not acting like a lady, or worse, she's called a "bitch."

During a 2016 presidential debate, GOP candidate Donald Trump responded to a tough question by moderator Megyn Kelly by suggesting she must have been having her menstrual period.

Richards said that men often find funny women "threatening." She quoted a survey that said that when women were asked what about men frightened them, they said they were most afraid of being physically hurt. "And they asked men what they were most afraid of from women," Richards said, "and they said being laughed at."

Does a verbal comeback—like the ones in this book—carry more of a punch when it's delivered by a woman than when it's delivered by a man? Probably. But the same sample size is admittedly too small to draw any real conclusions.

Here's an example:

American-born Lady Nancy Astor was the first woman to take a seat in the British House of Commons, where she was the object of great antagonism from many members, including Winston Churchill.

Churchill told Astor he found her intrusion into the all-male society as embarrassing as if she had burst into the bathroom.

"Winston," she said, "you are not handsome enough to have worries of that kind."

In addition, would Richards's keynote address have received the same negative response if a man had delivered it? Probably not. And neither would the monologue that comic Michelle Wolf delivered at the 2018 White House Correspondents' dinner.

Wolf ridiculed White House press secretary Sarah Sanders's lack of candor by juxtaposing a slogan from the cosmetics company Maybelline—"Maybe she's born with it? Maybe it's Maybelline"—to compare Sanders's dishonesty with her dark eyelids. "She burns facts and then she uses that ash to create a perfect smoky eye," Wolf said. "Like, maybe she's born with it, maybe it's lies. It's probably lies."

Critics referred to Wolf's jokes about Sanders as "disgusting," "shameful," "low," "ugly," and "unnecessarily cruel."

Wolf's routine paled in comparison to comic Stephen Colbert's devastating critique of President George W. Bush at the 2006 correspondents' dinner or the crudeness of talk radio personality Don Imus's comments at the 1996 correspondents' dinner when Bill Clinton was president. In his routine, Imus skewered Bill Clinton's extramarital affairs, First Lady Hillary Clinton's legal issues, Republican Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich's lesbian half sister, and Democratic Senator Bob Kerrey's wooden leg.

One journalist dryly summarized the overreaction to Wolf.

"Calling a woman a liar is bad," he said. "But criticize the press secretary's makeup? Now you've gone too far."

Two years after Ann Richards's speech at the Democratic National Convention, she ran for governor of Texas against Clayton Williams, an oilman who was as sexist as he was oily.

Williams compared the cool, foggy weather on his ranch to rape, telling his workers, "If it's inevitable, just relax and enjoy it." He also joked about the drinking of Richards, a recovering alcoholic. And he gleefully told supporters that he "would head her and hoof her and drag her through the dirt."

Richards ignored the temptation to engage in a name-calling fight with her opponent. Instead, her campaign used Williams's words against him in television ad.

Sometimes, the best way to make an ass out of someone is to quote him.

Richards won the election.

CHRIS LAMB



During the 2008 presidential election, the wealthy Mitt Romney blasted the front-runner, John McCain, in a series of nasty television ads. Asked to respond, McCain said, “Never get into a wrestling match with a pig. You both get dirty—and the pig likes it.”



Just after the 1992 Republican national convention, Vice President Dan Quayle revealed that he planned to be “a pit bull” in the upcoming campaign against Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton.

When Clinton was asked for his reaction, he replied: “That’s got every fire hydrant in America worried.”



Tom Murphy is not remembered for much in his twenty-nine-year career as speaker of the Georgia House of Representatives, but in 1999 he had his moment, when Rep. Anne Mueller stood to speak. She discovered that her microphone was turned off and requested, “Mr. Speaker, will you please turn me on?”

“Thirty years ago,” Murphy said, “I would have tried.”



During a stop in the 1992 presidential campaign, one of the Democratic candidates, Rhodes scholar Bill Clinton, was introduced as the most intelligent of the candidates.

Clinton observed wryly, “Isn’t that like calling Moe the most intelligent of the Stooges?”



Molly Ivins was a liberal who had little patience for moderates like Bill Clinton who tried to pass themselves off as progressives. “If left to my own devices, I’d spend all my time pointing out that he’s weaker than bus-station chili,” Ivins said. “But the man is so constantly subjected to such hideous and unfair abuse that I wind up standing up for him on the general principle that some fairness should be applied. Besides, no one but a fool or a Republican ever took him for a liberal.”



Pat Buchanan, former speechwriter and columnist, failed to win the GOP presidential nomination. In his speech at the 1992 Republican National Convention, Buchanan called for a culture war against the Left in a speech that was so extreme it reminded a Texas newspaper columnist of a Nazi demagogue from the 1930s. “Many people did not care for Pat Buchanan’s speech,” Molly Ivins said, “it probably sounded better in the original German.”



President Bill Clinton was dining with Senate Republicans when someone asked him if he had read the new mystery novel, *Murder in the Senate*, by Senator William S. Cohen, a Maine Republican. Clinton said he had. “You know, it’s a Democratic senator who gets murdered,” he said.

“Yeah,” Republican senator Bob Dole replied. “It has a happy ending.”



Democratic vice presidential nominee Joseph Lieberman was told he had more in common with the Republican candidate for president, George W. Bush, than his own running mate, Albert Gore.

“With all respect,” Lieberman said, “I think that’s like saying the veterinarian and the taxidermist are in the same business because either way you get your dog back.”



When Republican vice presidential candidate Dick Cheney debated the Democratic vice presidential candidate Joe Lieberman in 2000, Lieberman responded to the high salary that Cheney had made as an executive for the Halliburton Corporation. Lieberman suggested he, too, had considered giving up public life for the private sector.

“I’m going to try to help you do that, Joe,” Cheney said.



In July 2000, George W. Bush, then a presidential candidate, told reporters on board his campaign plane, “I don’t read half of what you write.”

“We don’t listen to half of what you say,” one of the reporters responded.

Bush replied, “That’s apparent in the other half of what I read.”



Barbara Bush told friends that when she first saw her future husband George Bush in 1941, she thought he was the most handsome man she had ever seen. Sixty years later, television journalist Diane Sawyer asked the former first lady if she still felt that way about her husband.

“Yes,” she said. “But my eyesight is getting bad.”



In 2002, the United States and the United Kingdom were preparing to invade Iraq because the George W. Bush administration claimed that country had weapons of mass destruction. Canada had joined the United States when it invaded Afghanistan in 2001, but Canadian prime minister Jean Chrétien questioned the Bush administration's evidence that Iraq did, in fact, have WMDs. A reporter asked Chrétien if the Bush administration met the standard of proof necessary to invade Iraq.

"I don't know. A proof is a proof," Chrétien said. "What kind of a proof? It's a proof. A proof is a proof, and when you have a good proof, it's because it's proven."



After a conference between Russian president Vladimir Putin and US president George W. Bush, the two men met the press together. Bush said he had told Putin that he wanted a more democratic Russia.

“I talked about my desire to promote institutional change in parts of the world, like Iraq, where there’s a free press and free religion,” Bush told reporters. “I told him that a lot of people in our country would hope that Russia would do the same thing.”

When Putin spoke, he reminded everyone of the chaos and violence that had resulted in the US attempt to impose democracy on Iraq.

“We certainly would not have the same kind of democracy as they have in Iraq,” Putin said.



John Kerry and John McCain had a lot in common. They were both decorated Vietnam War veterans and United States senators with White House ambitions; and they were close friends, though they belonged to different political parties. Kerry had locked up the Democratic presidential nomination by the spring of 2004 and rumors were swirling around Washington that he would choose McCain as his running mate.

Conan O'Brien, host of a late-night television talk show, asked McCain if he was interested in becoming vice president.

McCain ended the rumors with his answer. "I spent several years in a North Vietnamese prison camp, kept in the dark, fed scraps," he said. "Why the heck would I want to do that all over again?"



Des Moines Register editor Carolyn Washburn, the moderator of a Democratic presidential debate in Iowa on December 13, 2007, mentioned Senator Barack Obama's promise for a new approach in the country's foreign policy. She then asked the first-term senator from Illinois how he could achieve this when so many of his advisers had worked for President Bill Clinton.

Before Obama could answer, he was interrupted by Senator Hillary Clinton, the former first lady and the front-runner to win the Democratic nomination. "I want to hear that," she said, provoking laughter.

Obama paused for a moment and replied, "Well, Hillary, I'm looking forward to you advising me, as well."

Laughter followed from the audience and the other candidates—except Clinton, whose self-satisfied smile disappeared.



Republican presidential nominee John McCain chose Sarah Palin as his running mate in 2008. The selection of the little-known Alaska governor initially surprised and then appalled observers—including many Republicans—after it appeared she lacked the faintest idea of, well, just about everything. Palin compounded their dismay when she compared herself to Ronald Reagan, the iconic Republican president.

One of her critics was Reagan speechwriter and biographer Peggy Noonan. “Excuse me,” Noonan said, “but this was even ignorant for Ms. Palin. The point is not, ‘He was a great man and you’re a nincompoop,’ though that is true.”



Former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, while running for the GOP presidential nomination in 2008, announced his campaign slogan would be “the candidate of change.” This came after Romney changed his position on a number of issues, including abortion rights, which he once supported. During a debate with his fellow GOP presidential hopefuls, Romney criticized Senator John McCain for an immigration proposal that was unpopular with those in his party.

McCain responded by turning Romney’s campaign slogan against him.

“We disagree on a lot of issues,” McCain said dryly. “But I agree, you are the candidate of change.”



During NBC News anchor Brian Williams’s interview with the 2008 Democratic vice presidential candidate, Senator Joseph Biden, Williams brought up the senator’s well-chronicled verbosity. “Senator Biden, words have, in the past, gotten you in trouble, words that were borrowed and words that some found hateful. An editorial in the *Los Angeles Times* said, ‘In addition to his uncontrolled verbosity, Biden is a gaffe machine.’ Can you assure the voters in this country that you would have the discipline you would need on the world stage, Senator?”

Biden replied, “Yes.”



President Barack Obama passed health-care reform during his first term. But when the GOP took control of Congress in the midterm elections, it repeatedly tried but failed to gut the Affordable Care Act—or Obamacare, as it became known. When Obama ran for reelection, he mentioned health care. “In my first term, we passed health-care reform,” he observed. “In my second term, I guess I’ll pass it again.”



During one of the 2012 presidential debates, Republican Mitt Romney repeated one of his favorite campaign lines, saying that under President Barack Obama’s administration, the Navy was the smallest it had been since 1917.

Obama answered, saying, “Well, Governor, we also have fewer horses and bayonets because the nature of our military’s changed. We have these things called aircraft carriers, where planes land on them. We have these ships that go underwater, nuclear submarines. And so the question is not a game of Battleship where we’re counting ships. It’s what are our capabilities?”



Shortly after Barack Obama, who liked golfing, became president, he was asked if he would play a round of the game with right-wing talk radio host Rush Limbaugh, a frequent critic who also regularly played golf.

“Limbaugh can play with himself,” Obama snapped.



When Elena Kagan was going through her Supreme Court confirmation hearing in the Senate, she faced questioning from GOP senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, who asked her about Christmas Day. She initially assumed that Graham wanted to ask her about a failed terrorist attack on that day. When she started to answer, Graham clarified his questioning. He wanted to know Kagan’s religion.

“I just asked you where you were at on Christmas,” he said.

“Like all Jews,” Kagan said. “I was probably at a Chinese restaurant.”



Justice Anthony Kennedy, who was often the swing vote on the Supreme Court, wrote the majority decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, legalizing gay marriage in 2015. “The Constitution promises liberty to all within its reach, a liberty that includes certain specific rights that allow persons, within a lawful realm, to define and express their identity,” Kennedy wrote.

Justice Antonin Scalia, who was often the voice of the conservatives on the court, responded in his dissenting opinion by writing that if he ever joined an opinion for the court that began that way, “I would hide my head in a bag. The Supreme Court of the United States has descended from the disciplined legal reasoning of John Marshall and Joseph Story to the mystical aphorisms of the fortune cookie.”



During his final State of the Union address on January 20, 2016, Barack Obama said, “I have no more campaigns to run.”

Before he could continue, Republicans interrupted the president with snarky applause and adolescent laughter.

Obama waited for the applause to end before responding.

“I know, because I won both of them,” he said.

BARACK OBAMA AND DONALD TRUMP



The White House released copies of President Barack Obama's birth certificate on April 27, 2011, in an effort to end the so-called "birther" controversy that questioned whether Obama was born in Hawaii as he claimed but was actually born outside the country, perhaps in his father's home country of Kenya.

Obama would have been ineligible to become president if he had been born outside the United States.

"We do not have time for this kind of silliness," Obama told reporters at the White House after the release of his birth certificate. "I've been puzzled at the degree to which this thing just kept on going."

The rumors had persisted in part because of billionaire real estate developer and reality television star Donald Trump, who raised concerns about whether Obama was born in Hawaii, a week before the president released his birth certificate.

"I have people that have been studying it and they cannot believe what they're finding," Trump said on NBC's *Today Show*. "I would like to have him show his birth certificate, and can I be honest with you, I hope he can. Because if he can't, if he can't, if he wasn't born in this country, which is a real possibility . . . then

he has pulled one of the great cons in the history of politics.”

Three days after the release of the birth certificate, Obama, speaking at the annual White House Correspondents’ Association dinner, mocked Trump, who was sitting in the crowd of Washington insiders, journalists, and media personalities.

“Donald Trump is here tonight,” Obama said. “Now, I know that he’s taken some flak lately, but no one is happier –no one is prouder–to put this birth certificate to rest than The Donald.”

Obama said that Trump could now move beyond the “birther” controversy to other conspiracy theories such as aliens landing in Roswell, New Mexico, or the circumstances behind the deaths of rap singers. “Like, did we fake the moon landing?” Obama added. “What really happened at Roswell? And where are Biggie and Tupac?”

Obama then joked about Trump’s judgment by referring to his experience as host of the reality program *Celebrity Apprentice*, where actors and singers such as Lil Jon, Meatloaf, and Gary Busey competed to impress Trump with their business acumen.

“We all know about your credentials and your breadth of experience,” Obama said. “For example, on a recent episode of *Celebrity Apprentice*, at the steakhouse, the men’s cooking team did not impress the judges from Omaha Steaks. And there was a lot of blame to go around, but you, Mr.

Trump, recognized that the real problem was a lack of leadership. And so ultimately, you didn't blame Lil Jon or Meatloaf; you fired Gary Busey.

"These are the kinds of decisions that would keep me up at night. Well handled, sir! Well handled."

Obama, aware of Trump's self-promotion and lofty political ambitions, added that he would bring change to the White House if he became president. Obama then referred to a photo of a Trump White House, which showed "Trump," in large letters on top of the president's residence, with the words "The White House," in purple letters, followed by "hotel," "casino," and "golf course."

Trump sat expressionless during Obama's monologue while the crowd erupted in laughter.

This wasn't the end of Trump's ridicule that night. When Obama was finished, Seth Meyers, host of the dinner, continued with several more minutes of insults directed at the billionaire. "Donald Trump has been saying that he will run for president as a Republican—which is surprising, since I just assumed that he was running as a joke," Meyers said.

Adam Gopnik, a political writer for the *New Yorker*, remembered watching Trump as the jokes kept coming at his expense. "Trump's humiliation was as absolute, and as visible, as any I have ever seen: his head set in place, like a man in a pillory, he barely moved or altered his expression as wave after wave of laughter struck him," Gopnik wrote. "There was not a trace of feigning good humor about him, not an ounce of the normal politician's, or

American regular guy's 'Hey, good one on me!' attitude—that thick-skinned cheerfulness that almost all American public people learn, however painfully, to cultivate.”

Roger Stone, one of Trump's top advisers, said Trump decided to run for president after feeling he had been publicly humiliated at the 2011 White House Correspondents' dinner. “I think that is the night he resolves to run for president,” Stone said in an interview with the PBS program *Frontline*. “I think that he is kind of motivated by it: ‘Maybe I'll just run. Maybe I'll show them all.’”

Trump, if Stone and other political observers are correct, sought the presidency to avenge that humiliation. Once Trump became president, he sought to destroy everything Obama had achieved during his presidency. This is how he would have the last word.

CHRIS LAMB



Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump questioned Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton's fitness for office. She "doesn't have the stamina" to be president, Trump said during one of their televised debates.

"As soon as he travels to 112 countries and negotiates a peace deal, a cease-fire, a release of dissidents, an opening of new opportunities in nations around the world, or even spends eleven hours testifying in front of a congressional committee, he can talk to me about stamina," Clinton responded.



When Hillary Clinton ran for president in 2016, she faced Republican billionaire developer Donald Trump. When a reporter asked Trump during one of the television debates about his close relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Trump said that Putin had "no respect" for Clinton.

"That's because he'd rather have a puppet as president," Clinton responded.



Senator Al Franken, a liberal Democrat, bumped into Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, whose 2016 presidential campaign was struggling. “Lindsey, if I were voting in the Republican primaries, I’d vote for you,” Franken, told the South Carolina conservative.

“That’s my problem,” Graham answered.



Al Franken, the comedian-turned-Democratic senator from Minnesota, was asked what he thought of Ted Cruz, the divisive Republican senator from Texas. “I like Ted Cruz more than most of my colleagues like Ted Cruz,” Franken said. “And I hate Ted Cruz.”



During one of the Donald Trump-Hillary Clinton debates, Trump said he had the temperament to be president but Clinton did not. “I have much better judgment than she does. There’s no question about that. I also have a much better temperament than she has,” Trump said. “I think my strongest asset, maybe by far, is my temperament.”

Clinton responded during a later debate: “It’s just awfully good that someone with the temperament of Donald Trump is not in charge of the laws in the country.”

“Because you’d be in jail,” Trump shot back.



Vice President Mike Pence mentioned his boss in a speech to the attendees of the Munich Security Conference in 2019, saying he was there on behalf of a “great champion of freedom and of a strong national defense.”

“I bring greetings from the forty-fifth president of the United States of America, President Donald Trump,” Pence said.

Pence’s script said “applause” and he waited for it, but it didn’t come.

There was not a sound. Only silence.



When Nikki Haley, the US ambassador to the United Nations, announced that the country was imposing new economic sanctions against the Russian government, Larry Kudlow, the White House economic adviser, contradicted her.

Kudlow said the Trump administration was considering sanctions but they had not yet been put into effect. “There might have been some momentary confusion about that,” he said.

Haley quickly shot back at Kudlow for his public—and patronizing—criticism of her. “With all due respect,” she said, “I don’t get confused.”



Trump frequently takes to Twitter to vent his anger at whoever or whatever happens to annoy him at that moment. In 2018, he directed a series of tweets against French president Emmanuel Macron, Macron’s approval rating, and his statement that European countries should prepare to build up their own armies without US support.

Macron responded: “I do not do policy or diplomacy by tweets.”



When a federal judge blocked President Donald Trump's attempt to deny asylum to migrants who illegally crossed the US-Mexico border, the president criticized him as an "Obama judge," because he had been appointed by President Obama.

Supreme Court chief justice John Roberts responded with a rare rebuke from the bench for questioning the independence of the judiciary. "We do not have Obama judges or Trump judges, Bush judges or Clinton judges," Roberts said. "What we have is an extraordinary group of dedicated judges doing their level best to do equal right to those appearing before them. That independent judiciary is something we should all be thankful for."



No president in modern times has been more contemptuous of the press than Donald Trump, who called reporting critical of him “fake news” and the press “the enemy of the people.” In 2018, Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi Arabian journalist and *Washington Post* columnist, was assassinated on what appeared to be orders from the Saudi government, a frequent target of the journalist.

Trump, however, refused to sanction or even criticize Saudi Arabia, an important oil partner of the United States.

As indifferent as Trump appeared to the murder of a respected international journalist, he did not hesitate to blast comic Michelle Wolf after she scorched him at the annual White House Correspondents’ Association dinner.

“I bet you’d be on my side if I had killed a journalist,” Wolf responded to Trump in a tweet.



On February 15, 2019, President Trump held a Rose Garden news conference, declaring a national emergency and giving himself authority to build a wall on the Mexico border. In a Q&A with the news media after the declaration, he took a shot at one of his right-wing critics, Ann Coulter, who had called Trump “the biggest wimp ever to serve as president” for agreeing to a deal with Congress to open the government without the funding for a border wall.

“I haven’t spoken to her. I don’t follow her. I don’t talk to her . . .,” Trump said. “Probably if I did speak to her, she would be very nice, but I just don’t have time to speak to her.”

Coulter heard about Trump’s remarks a few minutes later, while doing a radio interview. “Thank God [Trump has] relieved me of any responsibility for what he’s been doing,” Coulter said. “That was the biggest favor anyone could do me today.”



The late-night comedy program *Saturday Night Live* satirized Trump as it has done with every sitting president since Gerald Ford. Unlike other presidents, however, Trump frequently lashed out at the comedy program.

“Nothing funny about tired Saturday Night Live on Fake News NBC!” Trump tweeted. “Question is, how do the Networks get away with these total Republican hit jobs without retribution? Likewise for many other shows? Very unfair and should be looked into. This is the real Collusion!”

Rep. Ted Lieu of California responded with the following tweet. “One thing that makes America great is that the people can laugh at you without retribution.”



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a political novice, ran for the House of Representatives from New York City in 2018. She appealed to young and progressive voters in her district and throughout the country with her sharp wit on Twitter. Outspoken conservative activist Ben Shapiro, editor of the Daily Wire website, sent AOC, as she became known, a tweet challenging her to a debate—even though he wasn't a candidate for anything. Shapiro said he would donate ten thousand dollars to her campaign if she accepted. AOC ignored the tweet. A reporter for the website then sent a tweet that chided AOC for ignoring his editor's debate challenge. Ocasio-Cortez then responded by ending the debate before it began. "Just like catcalling, I don't owe a response to unsolicited requests from men with bad manners," she tweeted. "And also like catcalling, for some reason they feel entitled to one."



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez won her congressional election and became, at age twenty-nine, the youngest woman elected to the US Congress. She tweeted her political objectives: free college for all, free health care for all, and the Green New Deal, which addressed climate change and economic inequality. Conservatives responded by attacking the ideas as “socialism.” AOC responded with the following tweet: “Oh no! They discovered our vast conspiracy to take care of children and save the planet.”

“REMEMBER THE LADIES”



On March 31, 1776, Abigail Adams wrote her husband, John, urging him and the other members of the Continental Congress not to forget about the women in the fight for America's independence from Great Britain.

She told her husband that any new government must include women. “I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors,” she said. “Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands.”

America won the War for Independence but Abigail Adams's words went unheeded. Women were excluded from the new government and prohibited from voting for nearly 150 years, and only now, nearly 250 years after her letter, do women have a significant voice in politics.

In the late stages of editing this book, it became glaringly obvious that something was missing—women. The dearth of women in this book is indicative of the disproportionately small number of women who have served—and continue to serve—in politics. On the surface, it is easy to

understand why there are so few women in the book. Since time immemorial, pious voices—religious and secular—have intoned against women participating in the public sphere. The Germans captured this spirit in a quaint expression: “*Kinder, Küche, Kirche*”—or: “children, kitchen, church.”

Barred by tradition and law from the councils of power, women weren't allowed to have a platform to match wits with the likes of John Wilkes, Abraham Lincoln, Benjamin Disraeli, or Pericles. But one suspects this only partially explains the paucity of woman in these pages. We can blame some of this on socialization. Traditionally, boys were encouraged to make jokes and crack wise; girls were taught to be sweet, nice, and, above all, deferential to men. Men used humor to attract attention. Women showed their interest with polite laughter. A quick-witted woman would have been threatening to the less-evolved male psyches who were in power (and though much progress has been made, it's safe to say this is still occurring today).

Hattie Carraway was the first woman elected to the US Senate; and in her thirteen years representing the state of Arkansas (1931-1944), she never uttered a public word on the Senate floor. Asked to explain her reticence, she said, “I haven't the heart to take a minute from the men. The poor dears love it so.”

Much has changed since Hattie Carraway's silent political career. Today women constitute 24 percent of Congress,

and one of them, Nancy Pelosi, is currently Speaker of the House of Representatives. Women predominate in several national legislatures around the world and have served as heads of state in a number of countries.

It took women little time to adjust to politics; it took men far more time to adjust to women in politics. When Agnes Macphail became the first woman elected to the Canadian House of Commons, not all her colleagues welcomed her. One of them pointedly asked her, “Don’t you wish you were a man?”

“No,” Macphail replied. “Don’t you?”

When Pat Schroeder ran for her first term in Congress in 1972, a man asked how she could serve in Washington and be a mother at the same time. “I have a brain and a uterus,” she replied, “and I use both.”

Two decades into the twenty-first century, popular culture abounds with funny women. Indeed, they may have emboldened women in politics—and many other fields.

After the 1992 election, women finally reached the 10 percent mark in Congress. One angry congressman confronted Colorado congresswoman Pat Schroeder, saying, “Well, I hope you’re happy. This place looks like a f***ing shopping mall.” Schroeder quipped, “Where do you shop where there’s only 10 percent women?”

In 2018, Tammy Duckworth of Illinois became the first US senator to give birth while serving in office, only to

discover that there was a rule barring babies from the floor of the Senate. She approached her colleague Minnesota senator Amy Klobuchar for advice on getting the rule changed. When Utah senator Orrin Hatch learned of these discussions, he asked what would happen “if there are ten babies on the floor of the Senate.” Klobuchar answered, “We already have ten babies on the floor of the Senate.”

WILL MOREDOCK

Will Moredock died before the publication of this book. He was a very good friend who I miss. This book is dedicated to his memory.

CHRIS LAMB

CHRIS LAMB is a professor of journalism at Indiana University–Indianapolis. He's an author, historian, satirist, and columnist. He is the author of ten books, including *Jackie Robinson: A Spiritual Biography*, *Conspiracy of Silence: Sportswriters and the Long Campaign to Desegregate Baseball*, and *Drawn to Extremes: The Use and Abuse of Editorial Cartoons*. His work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *Sports Illustrated*, *ESPN.com*, *NewRepublic.com*, and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

WILL MOREDOCK was a staff and freelance writer for more than thirty years. His work appeared in magazines and newspapers, including the *Washington Post*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the *Charlotte Observer*. He was a columnist for *Charleston City Paper* for more than ten years, where he wrote about South Carolina politics. His books include *Banana Republic Revisited: 75 Years of Madness, Mayhem and Minigolf in Myrtle Beach*, and *Living in Fear: Race, Politics and the Republican Party in South Carolina*.

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