

compliance." We've reached a point where, as Cory Doctorow noted, "if you don't comply fast enough with a customs officer, he can beat you, gas you, jail you, and then imprison you for two years." That was the sentence Watts could have gotten, though in the end he was let off with a fine — that's right, he had to pay for the privilege of being beaten by U.S. officers, and had to act grateful they weren't going to lock him up at the end of it.

And the financial cost doesn't end there — as a science-fiction writer, a significant portion of his income came from book signings and convention appearances, but as a convicted felon, the American market is now closed off to him. Nor can he visit his sick brother in New York. If there is any remedy, it will come from a civil lawsuit against the Border Patrol agents who, again in the words of one juror, "escalated the situation with sarcasm and miscommunication . . . in my opinion, they committed offenses against Mr. Watts." Until then, he can only brood on the cost of asking "Why?" to power.

— Andrew Ferguson

Base maneuvers — In the face of multiple demonstrations drawing thousands of protesters on Okinawa and nearby Tokunoshima, the Obama administration has demanded that the 2006 Futenma accord remain not only unaltered but also expanded, to allow for new facilities on Okinawa.

The accord states, among other things, that the United States will transfer 8,000 marines to Guam by the end of 2014. But newly elected Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama, whose party has been out of power for decades, repeatedly pledged to have the U.S. base facilities transferred out of Okinawa if not out of Japan entirely. He first vowed to take care of this issue by the end of 2009. When that didn't happen, he set a new deadline: May 31, 2010. When it became clear that Hatoyama could not meet this deadline and have his way, he flew to Okinawa, where locals held signs that read "Anger," and he announced that the Futenma base would change locations but would remain on the island.

Bowing to U.S. pressure, Hatoyama, who was once pur-

ported to have staked his life on moving the base off the island, recently claimed that his views have changed. He said that gradually he came to appreciate the U.S. Marines for deterring military conflicts in the region.

If the United States withdrew all of its marines from Okinawa, the political dynamics of the region would not change. China would still dispatch submarines and other warships into waters near Okinawa, as China has done despite the U.S. military presence. North Korea would continue to lob missiles over Japan and into the Pacific Ocean, as North Korea has done despite the U.S. military presence. The U.S. military doesn't deter so much as provoke warfare in Asia.

Now is not the time to provoke China, the sleeping giant, or to give it a reason to ally with its restless neighbor, North Korea. Yet the U.S. presence in Okinawa has made both China and North Korea more than a little suspicious about U.S. intentions.

Japan can fend for itself, despite Article 9 of the Japanese constitution — which forbids the threat or use of Japanese military force — if only because Japan's self-defense forces *could* one day become a true military. Some "conservatives" in the Liberal Democratic Party have pushed for amending Article 9 and for creating a conventional army, and this could happen. The threat of Japanese retaliation is enough to deter regional conflict. Rumors have it that Japan could go nuclear in less than 40 days. True or not, these rumors make other Asian countries hesitant to meddle with the country that has the second strongest economy in the world.

Hatoyama wants (or recently used to want) Japan to fend for itself. Okinawans want the U.S. base off their island. Tokunoshimans don't want the U.S. base transferred to their island. It seems that no place, save for Tinian, a small island that's part of the Northern Mariana Islands, a U.S. territory, wants to host the U.S. troops currently stationed in Okinawa. So why isn't Tinian the top option for the Obama administration? And why not accelerate the process of troop withdrawal to Guam? Why would Obama insist on maintaining troop

Dido and Aeneas. Here they are an instance of what "Fowler's Modern English Usage" sarcastically names "elegant variation" — the substitution of one word for another, just to prevent a verbal repetition.

Repetition of words is sometimes necessary. It isn't here. Something bad happened to the government of Poland; that we know. But must we go on saying it — "tragedy . . . catastrophe"? And if we're embarrassed about repeating our concepts, must we try to cover ourselves by varying our words? Here's where pomposity takes precedence over ease of reading. The reader is supposed to see that "tragedy" and "catastrophe" are the same. But intelligent readers know they are not the same. They know that a lot of catastrophes aren't tragedies, and a lot of tragedies aren't catastrophes. A loss of 100 seats in Congress would be a catastrophe for the party that lost them, but it might not be a tragedy. It might be a comedy. On the other hand, the death of someone's spouse might be a tragedy, but it wouldn't be a catastrophe, at least for anyone else.

When you shuffle words about, like marbles on a Chinese checker board, pretending they're the same, you make your reader pause and perform a kind of verbal algebra: "Ah, I see. 'Tragedy' and 'catastrophe' are ordinarily different, but here they must

refer, symbolically, to the same thing." Why not write, simply and clearly, "Tusk and Putin showed solidarity by holding a joint press conference at the place where the plane went down"?

Ah, but when did it go down? And what does "going down" really mean? These are problems introduced, quite by accident, in the unfortunate Time account: "When descending, the plane clipped the tree line and broke in two, resulting in the deadly crash that has sent Poland into mourning."

When I read that I thought, Yes, thank you for wasting my time once more. The report laboriously assured me that it wasn't starting to discuss some crash other than *the deadly crash that has sent Poland into mourning* — but what's the good of that information? I never thought it was some other crash. Now: *when* did the plane "crash"? According to Time, the plane "broke in two," and then it "crash[ed]." Very interesting. It gives me hope that, the next time I'm on an airplane that breaks in two, there may not be a "deadly crash," because the crash and the breaking in two will be two distinct and separable things.

All nonsense, of course. The Time report is literal nonsense: read literally, it makes no sense. But that's the weird thing about purists: we actually object to using words without making sense.

presence in Okinawa despite the option to relocate to a nearby island on U.S. soil, an island whose legislators have gone so far as to lobby to host the troops? Disturbing explanations come to mind — anything from U.S. preparations against North Korea, which recently sank a South Korean submarine, to good-old-fashioned hegemony.

Hatoyama and his party will soon lose power in Japan, in large part because of the Futenma base dispute. Obama has more or less guaranteed Hatoyama's political demise. Let's hope that Obama won't force too many foreign leaders out of office. That might taint his saintly image. — Allen Mendenhall

Cultural capital — A recent piece in the New York Post (May 23) observes that there is no recession for New York City's culture mavens. The article reports that cultural attractions such as museums have been hit hard by the recession. Donations and endowments have dropped, resulting in revenues shrinking by up to 50%. So these organizations — 33 zoos, museums, and music halls — have had to slash jobs and programs. But all the while the executives kept getting ever more lavish pay and benefits.

For example, in 2008 the Metropolitan Museum of Art saw its revenues drop by 40% and had to lay off nearly 400 workers, but it still paid its chief investment officer \$1.2 million in annual compensation, including a \$350,000 bonus. It refuses to disclose what it is paying its new director.

Carnegie Hall, likewise, had to cut its schedule as revenue dropped \$6 million, but it still paid its executive director nearly \$1 million a year (including such benefits as a membership in a tony dining club). And the Lincoln Center, which cut its staff by 9% as it saw its investment income disappear, still paid its president \$1.18 million a year in total compensation (including reimbursement of some of his companions' travel expenses).

Nice to know that some people are doing swell in tough economic times!
— Gary Jason

Bottom feeders — In the weeks leading up to passage of the statist self-aggrandizement imprecisely called "financial reform," the Obama Administration's Big Labor masters concocted an anachronistic public relations campaign called "The Showdown on Wall Street."

This Showdown consisted of hundreds of mumbling half-wits, bused in from the outer boroughs, shuffling through six blocks of office building lobbies in lower Manhattan. Pushing them along was a brain trust of Big Labor bosses and radical poseurs. As one press release boasted:

The Showdown on Wall Street is co-sponsored by the AFL-CIO and National People's Action and includes the following New York City Community Organizations: Brooklyn Congregations United from the PICO National Network, Community Voices Heard, Families United for Racial and Economic Equality, The Good Old Lower East Side, People United for Sustainable Housing, Make the Road New York, NYCAHN/VOCAL, The Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, Syracuse United Neighbors and endorsed by The Neighborhood Economic Development Advocacy Project.

You're no doubt familiar with the AFL-CIO, which is managing to squeeze a few last dollars from dying industries across the land. According to Richard Trumka, who currently

presides over this group: "America is about more than making easy money and looking out for number one. Our lives and our livelihoods are all bound together. And we are all paying the price for those who knew no limits on their greed." By implication, Trumka is a better man because he knows the limits on his.

Evidently, some things never change: The top of each Ivy League class goes to work for Goldman Sachs; the middle heads to grad school; the bottom writes speeches for labor bosses.

You may not be familiar with the cosponsoring organization, National People's Action. Here's some unreconstructed agitprop from its web site:

National People's Action (NPA) is a Network of community power organizations from across the country that work to advance a national economic and racial justice agenda. . . . All people, regardless of race, class, gender, and national origin must be ensured a high quality of life.

NPA was started in the early 1970s by Gale Cincotta and Shel Trapp. They are generally credited with writing the first draft of the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA). So, there's some irony in the group's recent kvetching. The housing bubble that crashed in 2007–8 was an unintended (I imagine) consequence of the "economic justice" that Cincotta and Trapp sought in the CRA.

Of course, irony is lost on most of the "community organizers" and other dolts drawn to the economic and social justice industries. That may be a feature rather than a bug, though. It's easier to control the narrative when you attract the dumbest, most gullible people.
— Jim Walsh

Doomed to repeat — I have taken many graduate political science classes during my years in academia. In almost every one, at one point or another, the professor posed a certain question. I doubt this question is unique to political science graduate seminars. I expect that it is asked in many other social science and humanities classes. The question is: does society learn?

When I first heard the question as a young graduate student, I found both it and the debate that followed it very interesting. The professors' intent was to get us to think about whether society evolves, whether it learns from knowledge of mistakes, or of history. But after hearing the question in class after class, it grew tiresome — especially since there was never a definitive answer.

Lately, the more news I read about the Obama administration, Congress, and government bureaucracy at all levels, the more this tiresome question comes to mind. Like other libertarians, I find it troubling. The idea of society learning, rather than individuals, is fundamentally problematic. Initially, I thought the appropriate question should be, "Do people learn?" But the more I've been thinking about it, the more I believe the question is, "Does society learn?" and that the answer is no.

The key is "society." Individuals have the potential to learn — from history, from good and bad experiences, from mistakes. But society cannot learn. Groups cannot learn. Groups always repeat the same mistakes and atrocities in attempting to manifest well-intentioned ideas that are "fair to everyone" or "good for mankind."