

The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



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A SINGLE BRUSHSTROKE DOES NOT A MURAL MAKE

Most of us, I am sure, have, of late, been receiving a seemingly endless stream of emails about the Iran nuclear deal. Some urge us to contact our senators and representatives and demand they vote for its passage, for sure as God made little green apples, the only alternative would be war. Maybe yes, maybe no. Other emails urge that we contact these same senators and representatives and tell them in no uncertain terms that a vote endorsing the *Joint Comprehensive Plan of*

Fonda Speaks To Vietnam Veterans At Anti-War Rally



Actress And Anti-War Activist Jane Fonda Speaks to a crowd of Vietnam Veterans as Activist and former Vietnam Vet John Kerry (LEFT) listens and prepares to speak next concerning the war in Vietnam (AP Photo)

Action (its official name) is tantamount to appeasement; a vote which will mean the death of Israel and, in the words of Senator Cruz, make us "the leading sponsor of terrorism in the world."

The tenor of these emails -- both pro- and anti-treaty -- range from the cogent and dispassionately measured to the apocalyptic and downright dystopian. A prime example of the latter was an email containing a photo of the then 27-year old John Kerry standing alongside actress Jane Fonda at a 1971 anti-Vietnam rally. The email's wording is not terribly important; it's the image which carries the meaning: that Secretary of State John Kerry, the man who negotiated the Iran nuclear deal, like "Hanoi Jane" has long hated America -- that he is a notorious traitor -- ergo, the treaty is both traitorous and treasonable.

(n.b. One should know that this photo -- which originally started making the rounds during Kerry's 2004 White House bid -- is a prime example of what is called 'fauxtography.' It is an altered image, plain and simple; two photos actually taken years apart, then, through the magic of Photoshop, conjoined to make a new -- and mendacious -- visual reality. For more on this classic fauxtographic urban myth check out [iMediaEthics](#).)

Seeing that photo again after so many years -- and realizing that there are still people who believe it to be real -- got me to thinking . . . not so much about John Kerry as about Jane Fonda. For there are still a ton of folks who's two-word, knee-jerk response to Fonda -- who, in a now 55-year career has starred in 52 motion pictures, won two best-actress Oscars and nominated for 5 others -- their immediate two-word response is still, nearly two generations later -- "Hanoi Jane." It's a case of a single brushstroke making an entire mural; a long life of multiple achievements being summed up by a single action. And never mind that Fonda called her anti-war phase (she was photographed seated in a helmet on a North Vietnamese antiaircraft battery) "a huge, huge mistake"; there are still lots and lots of people for whom Fonda is first, last and always defined by that "huge, huge mistake." She will always be "Hanoi Jane."

She's not the only one . . . by a long shot. A few examples:

Mention the name of California Governor **Jerry Brown** and sooner or later you will hear either "Governor Moonbeam" or "Linda Ronstadt." For those who are either too young to remember or having a junior moment, the nickname "Governor Moonbeam" was [coined by Mike Royko](#), the famed Chicago columnist, who in 1976 said that Brown appeared to be attracting "the moonbeam vote," which in Chicago political parlance meant young, idealistic and nontraditional. It should be noted that in a 1991 *Chicago Tribune* column, Royko called the label, an "idiotic, damn-fool, meaningless, throw-away line," and pleaded with people to stop using it. And yet, despite a more than 40-year career of stellar, often ahead-of-the-curve achievement, "Jerry Brown" and "Governor Moonbeam" are still conjoined: a single brushstroke making an entire mural.

There are, of course, still others whose "mural" has been defined by a single brushstroke:



There's New Jersey Governor **Chris Christie**, who has yet to live down his once-budding friendship with President Obama. One may recall that in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, the two forged a close working relationship and were



photographed over and over again – both smiling, both happy in each other's presence. Indeed, at the time all the stories and photographs were released, more than one pundit speculated that Christie would be leaving the Republican fold and becoming a Democrat! Never mind that within less than two weeks of their "mutual admiration society photos," Christie

used an appearance before the Conservative Political Action Conference to blast President Obama in personal terms, as a weak leader. And still, there are those who define Governor Christie by nothing but a series of photographs; once again, a single brushstroke being mistaken for an entire mural.

And there are still others:

- ✚ No matter what he has done or failed to do; no matter what where he goes or how long he lives, former Texas Governor **Rick Perry's** life mural will always be defined by a single brushstroke: the word OOPS!
- ✚ Over the course of a 20-year major league baseball career, **Bill Buckner** played for the Dodgers, Cubs, Red Sox, Angels and Royals. He amassed 2,715 hits, drove in 1,208 runs, won a batting title (.324 in 1980) and was named to the 1981 All-Star team. And yet, all he is remembered for is a single bone-headed error he made in game six of the 1986 World Series.
- ✚ Between 1914 and 1975, actress **Gloria Swanson** was in more than 80 motion pictures. She starred in many films directed by Cecil B. DeMille, was the first to play "Sadie Thompson," and at one time, was the number one box office star in the world, earning more than *a million dollars a year* (and that was in the 1920s!). And yet, for most people, say the name "Gloria Swanson" and all you are liable to hear is "Oh yes, Norma Desmond in Sunset Blvd."
- ✚ Hands down though, the champion in this realm has got to be former President Bill Clinton. For despite a career containing more accomplishments and mistakes, more good deeds and human failings than most, there are those who will always define the entire mural of his life with a single brushstroke: Monica Lewinsky.

OK, by now one gets the point: all too often, we encapsulates a lifetime's worth of achievements and misdeeds, of successes and failures (what we are calling a

mural) with but a single brushstroke -- a photo, a slip of the tongue, a momentary brain-freeze . . . or a Mookie Wilson dribbler that somehow through an otherwise sure-handed first baseman's legs.

It's one thing for those who entertain -- actors, athletes, artists -- to have their murals defined by a single brushstroke. Often, they are the kinds of people who say "*Talk about me good, talk about me bad, I don't care . . . just talk about me.*" But when it comes to our politicians and elected officials, it is really a horse of a different color. When our lone bit of "knowledge" about, say, a Jerry Brown consists of nothing more than "Governor Moonbeam," or a Rick Perry and "Oops!" or a John Kerry and "lifelong traitor," to name but three, we are barely, barely scratching the surface of a human life. To define an individual by a single, often irrelevant brushstroke is not a terribly smart way to live; it is definitely bad citizenship. And while one can easily point a finger at our various sources of news -- so many of which prefer inane, lightweight gossip to heavyweight journalism -- we the people must shoulder the lion's share of the blame; *we* are the ones who prefer entertainment to enlightenment.

Who treat a single brushstroke as if it were an entire mural . . .

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