

the Atlantic

Five Best Tuesday Columns

By: J. K. Trotter - April 2, 2013

Catherine Rampell in *The New York Times* on the dream of paid paternity leave
Borrowing the vocabulary of Sheryl Sandberg's Facebook memoir, *Lean In*, Catherine Rampell calls for new fathers to "lean in" at home — by way of mandatory paternity leave. And not necessarily as a boon to men, but as a way to lessen the dominance of gender roles. "Social scientists are coming around to the notion that a man spending a few weeks at home with his newborn can help recast expectations and gender roles, at work and home, for a long time," Rampell writes. The benefits are economic, too. "In the United States, women represent not only a majority of college graduates but also a majority of advanced-degree holders. But the lack of policies facilitating the work-life balance — like paid maternity leave and flexible work hours — has millions of them underemployed." NBC's Lauren Prince calls Rampell's column a "great addition to the [*Lean In* phenomenon]."

Francesca Mari in *Dissent* on Jill Lepore's American history *New Yorker* critic and Harvard professor Jill Lepore has made her name in "microhistories," writes Francesca Mari, who assesses Lepore's unlikely writerly success through her work on American history. "Lepore is not a normal exception; she is an exceptional exception," Mari writes. "She turned a liability into her biggest asset, and her success shows that the stories of history—exuberant with rich scenes and characters resplendent in all their quirks—sell like flax seed in America." By tracking Lepore's ascent — she originally worked as a secretary, and she performed so well that she won an award — Mari makes the case for Lepore to be read, and reread, as our appetite for history grows greater and greater. "[*Dissent*] is killing it lately," *The New Yorker's* Caitlin Kelly remarked this morning, alluding to the magazine's well-received essay on Sheryl Sandberg.

Farhad Manjoo at *Slate* on Evgeny Morozov's technological cynicism
Evgeny Morozov has made his name with sharp critiques of the tech industry, culminating in his recent book, *To Save Everything, Click Here*. But, Farhad Manjoo argues, Morozov can't decide whether the industry he's critiquing matters as much as it says it does. Morozov is "strangely inclined to accept its marketers' most overhyped claims about the potential of their wares," he writes. Nor is Silicon Valley of a single mind: "The tech industry is much messier, more contentious, and savvier about hype than [Morozov makes] it out to be." Anticipating Morozov's inclination to engage his critics, *Slate* published Morozov's rebuttal alongside Manjoo's column. (In a long but worthwhile response, Morozov retorts, "My real interest is in figuring out how/why/if public institutions should delegate problem-solving to Silicon Valley.") *The New York Times's* Lydia Polgreen praised the exchange, calling Manjoo "brave" for facing Morozov head-on.

Alison Gash at *Washington Monthly* on the portent of gay adoption
"Same-sex parenting rights have successfully advanced precisely because the legal wrangling over them has

remained largely below the radar," writes Alison Gash, pointing to Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia's series of questions about California's rules regarding who can adopt. Noting how gay couples, when seeking to adopt a child, hewed to family courts — where reporters were largely absent — Gash explains that social conservatives were largely caught off guard when arguing over gay marriage. "This below-the-radar strategy created a foundation of 'facts on the ground'—tens of thousands of intact gay and lesbian-headed families with children—well before most conservative activists were even aware the phenomenon existed, making their subsequent efforts to block same-sex parenting an uphill fight." Jason Kuznicki at the libertarian Cato Institute considers Gash's piece an "excellent piece on the legal history of gay and lesbian adoption."

Megan McArdle at The Daily Beast on the absurdity of college admissions Responding to a much-discussed column in The Wall Street Journal by a high school student deriding the elite college admissions process, Megan McArdle wonders why, exactly, college admissions continue to select for those who begin with the most advantages in life, and those who are most shameless about puffing up their own credentials and life experiences. "I understand why kids engage in this ridiculous arms race. What I don't understand is why admissions officers, who have presumably met some teenagers, and used to be one, actually reward it," McArdle, who attended the University of Pennsylvania, concludes. Gawker's Caity Weaver, who also attended the University of Pennsylvania, was less kind to the high school columnist. "[Her] mistake, it seems, was interpreting the advice 'Just be yourself' literally," Weaver writes. "Being yourself is not a talent. ... It's important to make time for yourself, of course, but you should be making other things in addition to that. Like goals and plans and effort."