



## The Five Worst Op-Eds of 2013

By [Gene Healy](#)

Picking the year's worst op-eds — an [annual tradition](#) in this space — wasn't easy in 2013. There's the Slate [writer who announced](#) you're "a bad person if you send your children to private school"; the *New York Times* [piece arguing](#) that conservative Dallas "willed the death" of JFK (by getting a communist to shoot him?); and the [fellow who worried](#) that allowing more high-skilled immigration would exacerbate "America's Genius Glut."

If you've been losing sleep over the genius glut in American punditry, rest easy. That threat's a long way off.

To narrow the choices and give this pudding a theme, I've decided that 2013's malicious listicle will focus on the perverse affinity for executive power of our alleged "[Thought Leaders](#)." In a year when presidential [incompetence](#) and [power lust](#) ruled the headlines — when [record numbers](#) of Americans feared big government — the leading lights of the American commentariat clamored for more presidential power. Go figure.

### 5. Amitai Etzioni, "[Why It Should Be Harder to Impeach a President](#)," *The Atlantic* (May 16)

Early on in [President Obama's](#) summer of scandal eruptions, communitarian honcho Amitai Etzioni was incensed that anyone dared invoke the I-word. After all, the president likely "did not know diddly squat" about [IRS](#) harassment of the [Tea Party](#).

Only a constitutional amendment making it harder for [Congress](#) to impeach the president could save us, Etzioni insisted. But since we manage [fewer than one](#) presidential impeachment per century, how much harder could it be?

### 4. Maureen Dowd, "[Barry's War Within](#)," the *New York Times* (Sept. 7)

MoDo routinely uses [her space at the Times](#) to work through her [daddy issues](#): Why can't President Obama be "[the strong father](#) who protects the home" instead of an aloof "professorial president"?

In this column, Dowd's father figure disappoints her once again. Instead of "hurl[ing] a few missiles, Zeus like," at [Syria](#), Obama had been contemptibly weak: "When it came time to act as commander in chief,

he choked,” reverting to “Barry, president of the Harvard Law Review.” Apparently, only a legalistic sissy would ask Congress to authorize a war.

### **3. Norman Podhoretz, “[Obama’s Successful Foreign Failure](#),” *Wall Street Journal* (Sept. 8)**

But Obama only looks weak, according to neoconservative godfather Norman Podhoretz. Going to Congress was part of his sinister Kenyalinskyite plan to destroy US hegemony. Even when he golfs, he’s hellbent on the “erosion of American power.”

### **2. Richard Cohen, “[The NSA Is Doing What Google Does](#),” *Washington Post* (June 10)**

The *Post*’s Cohen greeted the revelation that the administration had been secretly collecting data on millions of innocent Americans with a spurt of bile against leaker [Edward Snowden](#), that “cross-dressing Little Red Riding Hood.”

“No one lied about the various programs disclosed last week,” Cohen declared. Instead of Snowden being remembered as an heroic whistleblower, “[h]istory is more likely to forget him. Soon, you can Google that.”

In his [very next column](#), Cohen had to issue a correction. He “was not aware” that director of national intelligence James Clapper had blatantly [lied to Congress](#) about NSA spying. That column, urging the president to bomb Syria, contained yet another glaring error, praising the “NATO bombing campaign in 1999 that ended the bloodshed in Bosnia.” It was Kosovo, actually. Cohen could’ve [Googled that](#).

### **1. David Brooks, “[Strengthen the Presidency](#),” *New York Times* (Dec. 12)**

“It’s a good idea to be tolerant of executive branch power grabs,” said David Brooks (a conservative writer for the Times) in [this year’s winner](#). What’s more, Brooks writes, “[t]his is a good moment to advocate greater executive branch power because we’ve just seen a monumental example of executive branch incompetence: the botched Obamacare rollout.”

If that sentence confuses you, it’s OK. Not all of us have what it takes to be thought leaders.