

Five Best Thursday Columns

By [Caitlin Dickson](#) Apr 28, 2011

Jameel Jaffer and Larry Siems on Honoring Objectors Jameel Jaffer and Larry Siems [urge](#) the Obama administration to "recognize and honor the public servants who rejected torture." Though the Bush Administration clearly endorsed torture as an interrogation tactic, many soldiers in Afghanistan, Iraq and Guantanamo, and even members of the C.I.A. refused to participate in and reported what they believed was wrong. "Thus far, though, our official history has honored only those who approved torture, not those who rejected it," they point out at the *New York Times*. "Averting our eyes from recent history means not only that we fail in our legal and moral duty to provide redress to victims of torture, but also that we betray the public servants who risked so much to reverse what they knew was a disastrous and shameful course."

Joshua Green on the Reality of Debt Defaulting Our country is in imminent danger of running out of money, Joshua Green [warns](#) at the *Boston Globe* and *The Atlantic*. Green explains that the question of whether to raise the debt ceiling--"an arcane problem that stems from a quirk of our political system"--is like fighting over the bill at a restaurant after you've enjoyed a meal. "Where the analogy with restaurant dining ends is what happens if you don't pay. The country can't wash dishes," he writes. "Were the United States to default, interest rates would soar, the stock market would crash, and the good faith and credit of the US government would be ruined, which would raise future borrowing costs substantially. Even the perception that a default was possible could roil the markets." This is a reality our country may experience for the first time as Republicans plan to use the threat of default as leverage to for further spending cuts. Obama's "debt fail-safe" plan to allow spending cuts and tax increases if Congress can't make a decision would at least "put off the tough decisions a little longer."

The New York Times Editors on the Birth Certificate *The New York Times* Editors [find](#) President Obama's decision to release his birth certificate to the public to be "a profoundly low and debasing moment in American political life." They argue that this gesture "will not quiet the most avid attackers. That's because the birther question was never really about citizenship; it was simply a proxy for those who never accepted the president's legitimacy, for a toxic mix of reasons involving ideology, deep political anger and, most insidious of all, race." By not outrightly rejecting this fringe idea, mainstream Republicans, in effect, perpetuated it, allowing "cartoon candidate, Donald Trump, [to ride] birtherism directly to the rime-time promontories of cable TV." In the face of this new low, they argue, "Mr. Boehner, and other party leaders, have a new reason to call a halt to the politics of paranoia and intolerance."

Fareed Zakaria on Preparing for Crisis Fareed Zakaria [suggests](#) that "as Leon Panetta and David Petraeus move into their new jobs at the Pentagon and the CIA, they should use the occasion to fundamentally reorient U.S. intelligence and national security planning." The U.S. should be prepared for crisis and manage risks accordingly, like certain investment firms did to survive the financial crisis. He argues that a crisis in Saudi