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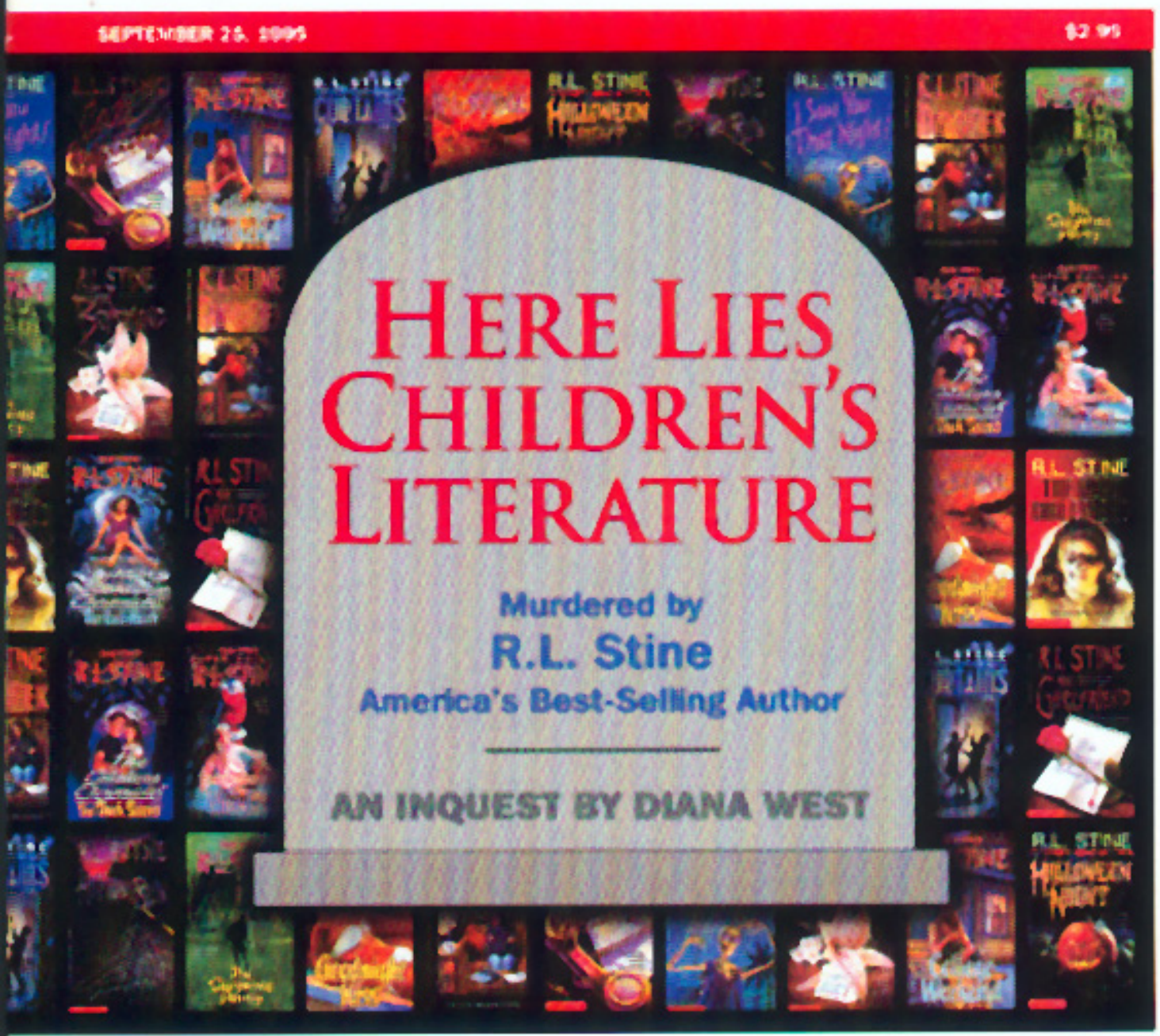

HERE LIES CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Murdered by
R.L. Stine
America's Best-Selling Author

AN INQUEST BY DIANA WEST

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 2 • SEPTEMBER 25, 1995

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Cover by Kent Bain

Casual

Living with Naomi Wolf

Ward 3, where I live, is the District of Columbia's largest, taking up practically all of the land west of Rock Creek Park and north of Georgetown. This year, in the "murder capital of the United States," there have been *zero* murders in Ward 3. The ward is 88 percent white and has no one of working age living in poverty. It has few homeless people and many playgrounds. However statistically bad D.C.'s problems may sound, to get a true picture you'd have to take out Ward 3 and multiply everything else—poverty, murder, illiteracy, illegitimacy—by, say, 1.25. Which sounds like a Henny Youngman set-up: "Take Ward 3 out of the District—please." Isn't that what most of these rich white people huddled in the city's northwest corner think?

Oh, no. The troglodytic right may live in suburban Virginia, the "I moved to the suburbs for the good school system" liberals in Maryland. We Ward 3ers love the raffish combination of an inner-city address and an overclass lifestyle, and the whole community has been built around maintaining this balancing act. The bagel shop, for instance, is probably the only deli in the country with *aerobics* fliers stacked by the front door. There's the same schizophrenia in politics: Even though Ward 3 cast 97 percent of its votes against Marion Barry in the Democratic mayoral primary in 1994, its residents seem determined to preserve every last vestige of atmospheric slumminess—provided it doesn't hike crime or lower real-estate values.

Which is why the neighborhood has recently been the scene of strident popular agitation aimed at securing *lousier* services. At the beginning of September, posters announced the formation of a "Save Our Supermarket" committee. "Our supermarket" is a real past-the-sell-by-date, goop-on-the-floor, bugs-on-the-fruit establishment. Apparently, it needs to be "saved" because a high-quality supermarket—one that would actually purvey the mozzarella and saffron and ugly fruit the neighborhood subsists on—plans to move in nearby. The flier warns that the new store is "challenging" our crummy one and "wants to push it out of our community!!!"

It's not as if "our supermarket" is a historic monument; it's only been around since 1987, when the neighborhood Safeway closed and the same activists *rallied* to have a replacement moved here. By gathering "hundreds of volunteers, [and] thousands of petition signatures," they pulled off the Gandhian political feat of enticing a grocery store into a competition-free area with the highest per capita grocery expenditure in the city. The protesters promise us we can preserve this victory if we all just "volunteer our time." Not to enrich ourselves, mind you, nor even to help the less fortunate—but to ensure ourselves a continuing supply of bad produce.

The epicenter of this politics is the 350-unit apartment building I live in, the stately Kennedy-Warren. LBJ lived here once, but now it's a writers' building. We have several people from the *Washington Post*, two from the *American Spectator*, three from the *New Republic*, and two from the The Weekly Standard. And don't forget feminist author Naomi Wolf, the pretty expositor of "the beauty myth" in her bestseller of the same name, who shares her apartment with Clinton speechwriter David Shipley (formerly of the *New Republic*).

Until April, the building had the meanest, laziest, most ill-mannered front desk staff in the city. They sent away Chinese-food and pizza deliverymen when they didn't feel like accompanying them to tenants' apartments. They insulted visitors. They lost packages. They snarled when asked such demeaning questions as, "Any mail for me?" And not surprisingly, when they were fired in April—to be replaced by a "concierge service" that threatened to hail cabs for the older residents, send for laundry, make restaurant reservations, and maybe even smile—the tenants went berserk.

Resident Paul Steven Miller, commissioner of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, led the meetings on behalf of the fired staffers, in which the eccentric octogenarian reporter Sarah McClendon was a vocal participant. The first signature on the petition that resulted was that of Naomi Wolf, who later told the *Washington Post*: "The choice that the people at the front desk made to humanize their relations with the tenants is a choice for the transcendence of the human bond. And that quality can't be entered into a balance ledger." As for the concierge service, she deemed it "the height of *haute bourgeois* frivolity."

The petitioners launched a newsletter, but by the time the first issue appeared, alas, all but one of the front desk staff had buckled and accepted the buyout package offered by the management—scotching a gleefully anticipated class-action suit. So the first issue consisted largely of sneering digs at the same proles the tenants had been championing just days before.

Clearly Naomi and her friends had transcended the human bond—at least those of them who knew what the word "transcend" meant.

Christopher Caldwell

Taking Abortion Seriously

On February 19, 1993, in Chillicothe, Ohio, President Clinton made a statement on abortion. Leading American politicians, pro-choice *or* pro-life, rarely edge so close to the heart of the matter.

"Very few Americans believe that all abortions all the time are all right," the president said. "Almost all Americans believe that abortions should be illegal when the children can live without the mother's assistance, when the children can live outside the mother's womb."

As an assessment of public opinion on the issue, that seems about right. It is even a judgment Mr. Clinton was prepared to act on at one point in his career. In 1985, he signed Act 268 of the Arkansas legislature, which prohibited late-term abortions (after the 25th week of pregnancy). The measure made exceptions for minors in cases of rape or incest, or when the mother's life was endangered. Then-Governor Clinton called the bill "appropriate."

But *why* do Americans believe what Mr. Clinton suggested they believe? Why, by the same token, was the bill he signed ten years ago in Little Rock appropriate? It is the great unasked question of the abortion debate, at least as it is conducted—beneath a rigidly generalized rhetoric of rights—in our day-to-day politics.

The answer lies in the president's startlingly ingenuous language. He made no reference to "the unborn" that day in Ohio. He did not say "fetus," the clinical term reluctantly preferred by his pro-choice constituency. He called them, as most non-ideologues instinctively would, *the children*. Late-term abortions force us, when they are considered in their particulars, to confront what is true of *all* abortions, at least as a matter of cold science. They are each directed against a recognizably, indisputably human being. And they each involve the deliberate interruption, deprivation—termination—of a human life.

The dictionary term for this is "killing." It is an act, in its concrete reality, against which the moral intuition of almost all Americans rebels—whatever their ostensible, general opinions about abortion.

The Sept. 18 issue of *Newsweek* has a report on last summer's FDA-sanctioned clinical trials of mifepristone, or RU-486. This "abortion pill" would, in the popular imagination at any rate, ease the nation's abortion controversy—and conscience—by permitting a nonsurgical, vastly more "convenient," and private end to early-term pregnancy. The story makes painful reading. After nine days of heavy bleeding and cramps, Sarah, one of the two women the magazine's correspondents followed, "expels the pregnancy sac" while bathing at home. She sees "the fetus swirling around the shower drain." It "doesn't go down." She "scoops it up, wraps it carefully in toilet paper and flushes it away." Sarah says this experience "really emotionally hit me."

Becky, *Newsweek*'s other main subject, never leaves the clinic at which her RU-486 is administered. In a matter of hours, following similarly intense pain and bleeding, the procedure ends in a bathroom. "There is a fist-sized glob of red and white at the bottom of the toilet. Becky can see the curled-up fetus, the size and color of a cocktail shrimp. . . . Its hands are curled into tiny fists." Becky is struck by the hands. "'It's sad. It's sad,'" she says, "turning away."

Turning away. Of course. There have been almost 30 million abortions in the United States, most of them by surgical dismemberment, since the Supreme Court's jurisprudentially and morally unsound 1973 *Roe* v. *Wade* and *Doe* v. *Bolton* decisions created the most liberalized abortion regime in the democratic world. We now live in a country in which, as a matter of constitutional law, there are human beings—millions each year—whose continued existence is entirely contingent on whether somebody else *wants* them. An unborn American child now enjoys less legal protection than an endangered bird in a national forest.

These are facts with profound implications for the

meaning and future of American society. And they are facts that many Americans are not eager to understand. Asking someone closely to consider his complicity in or proximity to something like abortion—and to acknowledge that something's essential ghastliness—is asking a very great deal indeed. The human mind quite naturally flees the burden of such guilty knowledge.

And political parties, which as a practical matter live or die on popular approval, just as naturally flee the call to promote that knowledge. Which is why national political debate over abortion among major party spokesmen, when it takes place at all, remains arid and sterile, dominated by a "rights" discourse in which the hard reality of actual abortions remains largely obscured. Such argumentation only speaks to the firmly committed on one or the other side of the question's vast divide. It cannot appeal to, or trouble the conscience of, the rest of America, which has its ears defensively closed against the crux of the issue: that abortion is about the killing of human beings. And that killing can only be stopped, as we believe justice requires, if consciences *are* troubled and ears *are* pried open. By organized political parties and party leaders willing to risk votes in the effort.

The resolution of large, painful questions of societal morality like abortion (or racial segregation before it) demands two things that only politics can provide. The first is a stage large enough to command and focus ongoing national attention, a stage on which a process of full-scale, start-to-finish moral education may be conducted. The second is an ability to change the law. At this point in our history, only a fool would expect much help in either task from the Democratic party, which has all but formally excommunicated such members as Pennsylvania Governor Bob Casey who dare to challenge its pro-choice catechism.

And what of the Republican party? It is better. Much better, even. Many of its state-based leaders regularly press necessary rear-guard actions and tactical thrusts against the abortion-on-demand regime—opposing government funding, for example, or proposing governmental restrictions and regulations within bounds permitted by the Supreme Court's *Casey* edict. Many of the party's federal legislators do much the same, all to the good. And, most notably, the Republican party as an institution remains committed to a platform plank on abortion whose five sentences each express an unimpeachable goal.

But there is an important sense in which Republicans continue to dodge the issue. A future Republican president might, as the platform endorses, appoint Supreme Court justices who would finally tip the constitutional balance against *Roe* and *Doe*. But that would be no guarantee against a continuance of legalized abortion in the various states. Such a guarantee can rest only on enactment of the so-called "human life amendment" to the Constitution, a separate piece of the platform puzzle. And that achievement requires something barely imaginable in today's America: passage of such an amendment by a two-thirds vote of both Congressional bodies, and ratification of the amendment by three-fourths of the 50 state legislatures.

Voters are not yet sufficiently engaged by the pro-life movement for that to happen. And they will likely remain that way until more has been demanded by that movement of the Republican party, which should—and must—be its primary voice in organized politics. Let's be clear about what we're suggesting here. If threats of schism sometimes made against the Republican party by disappointed pro-life activists were ever carried out, they would almost certainly set the effort against abortion back for many years. Politics, especially anti-abortion politics, takes an investment of time and diligence and patience that cannot be underestimated. The pro-life downpayment in the Republican party should not be abandoned.

Neither should the movement allow so much of its energy and attention to be absorbed, as it now is, in the effort to maintain the Republican platform language on abortion, word for word. Party platforms do matter. The Republican platform should remain vigorously pro-life. But between now and next August, when the Republican National Convention meets to debate such questions, and nominate a president, well more than a million new abortions will be performed in the United States. And the present platform language, by itself, absent other efforts, will have done nothing to stop them.

It is cheap grace for leading Republicans, ordinarily content to remain almost entirely mute on the issue of abortion, to appear before pro-life audiences while campaigning for this or that office and wave around pledges of loyalty to what is for them, in effect, little more than a piece of paper. It's just talk, issued with a wink at their pro-choice donors. And it fails the pro-life cause. Instead, the Republican party's leading lights need to *speak*, over and over again, with the subtle, insistent force necessary to change America's mind on abortion—for good.

There is one big reason to be hopeful about the ultimate end of the abortion catastrophe. Abortion, the act itself, produces an intuitive moral disgust—in almost everyone. *That* is why President Clinton, no doubt hardly knowing what he was saying, used the word "children" in Chillicothe. And why even Kate Michelman of the National Abortion Rights Action

League, in an unguarded moment, can call abortion "a bad thing."

Sometime soon, probably next month, the full House of Representatives will take up a bill to ban the use of "partial-birth abortions," a late-term procedure in which a baby is delivered, breach but alive almost all the way out of the birth canal—only to be killed by a stab wound to the head, still inside the mother's womb.

Who can defend such a thing? Who would *want* to? The legislation will probably pass the House. It may get sidetracked in the Senate. If it passes the Senate it may—*may*—be vetoed by the president. And even if it becomes law, it will retard the progress of abortion by only a few hundred lives each year. But they are worth it. And the debate over this legislation, for the national attention it deserves and the educative benefits it can provide, is worth it every bit as much.

The country needs initiatives like this one, in Washington and the states. It needs them pressed consistently and conscientiously, each building on the last, each inviting the next. And it needs the public debate they will provoke and concentrate for years to come. That way, and that way only, will we ensure that our laws and practices reflect the fact that abortion is wrong.

—David Tell, for the Editors

White House

Travelgate Redux

by Thomas M. DeFrank

Travelgate—the all-but-forgotten Clinton White House scandal of May 1993—is about to reemerge with a vengeance. In an internal Clinton administration memorandum obtained by The Weekly Standard, a senior Justice Department official accuses the White House of withholding key evidence in a probe of the FBI's role in Travelgate—a handwritten notebook belonging to the late White House deputy counsel Vincent Foster.

"The fact that we have just now learned of the existence of obviously relevant notes written by Mr. Foster," writes Michael J. Shaheen in the extraordinary July 24 memo to associate deputy attorney general David Margolis, "is yet another example of the lack of cooperation and candor we received from the White House throughout our inquiry." Shaheen heads the Office of Professional Responsibility at Justice.

Moreover, information developed by Congressional investigators and lawyers for the former chief of the White House travel office suggests that the roles of First Friend Harry Thomason and longtime Clinton aide Patsy Thomasson (no relation) in Travelgate are more extensive than publicly known. Harry Thomason, who had a clear conflict of interest, attended a previously undisclosed damage-control meeting the day the scandal broke. Patsy Thomasson has been linked to the disappearance of a key document. And court papers allege she urged another White House official to lie about the existence of another important memorandum—which, if substantiated, could raise the specter of obstruction of justice within the West Wing.

Travelgate first blew up after the White House fired travel office chief Billy Dale and six colleagues all at once, citing a host of financial irregularities. It was quickly revealed that some West Wing officials intended to throw White House travel business to a Little Rock travel agency with links to a distant Clinton cousin. The same officials had been maneuvering to clean out the travel office for weeks before the firing. It was also disclosed that Harry Thomason, the Hollywood producer who made the celebrated "Man from Hope" convention film about his old friend Bill Clinton, owned a one-third stake in a company that hoped to get in on the lucrative business of transporting the White House press corps accompanying the president.

Five of the seven fired civil servants were later reinstated and given other government jobs. Four White House aides were subsequently reprimanded after an internal review headed by then-Chief of Staff Mack McLarty for making improper contacts with the FBI. The Bureau had been contacted directly by the White House a week before the firings to investigate possible criminal violations in the travel office—leading to charges that the law-enforcement agency was being used for political purposes.

The FBI's involvement was the subject of Shaheen's 1993 inquiry. In the memo he wrote two months ago, Shaheen said of the Foster notebook, "We were stunned to learn of the existence of this document, since it so obviously bears directly upon the inquiry we were directed to take. . . . Even a minimal level of cooperation by the White House should have resulted in its disclosure to us at the outset of our investigation."

The memo notes that during the Office of Professional Responsibility's interrogation of White House officials, "no one suggested, hinted or disclosed the existence of Mr. Foster's notes"—including senior Clin-

ton aide John Podesta, who had interviewed Foster as part of a White House internal management review.

It's theoretically possible the White House hadn't learned about the notebook until recently. But Shaheen and his associates apparently don't believe this. In a private note, another staffer in Shaheen's office suggested that the following language be included in Shaheen's letter: "Thus, it is our view that this notebook was in the possession of the White House at each and every juncture of our inquiry."

This intramural fingerpointing is among several new disclosures certain to be spun out in Congressional hearings later this fall, as well as at the trial of former travel office chief Dale, charged with embezzling $50,000 from news organizations, which reimbursed the travel office for the expense of flying their reporters around with the president. Dale insists he used the funds for legitimate travel office expenses. His trial is scheduled to begin in October:

In a motion filed in federal district court earlier this month, Dale's attorneys assert they have obtained evidence that a missing petty-cash log they believe will exonerate their client was removed from Dale's office by a "Senior White House Official" before his firing. They cite a sworn affidavit from "a credible and disinterested third party" who says that on the very day Dale and the others were let go, the White House official gave him a sealed manila envelope matching the one in which Dale had placed the missing log. Several weeks later, the "Senior White House Official" took back the envelope.

Government officials confirm that the "Senior White House Official" cited in this document is Patsy Thomasson, now the deputy director of the White House personnel office.

In the same document and a second filing still under court seal, Dale's lawyers assert that "the same Senior White House Official asked a witness to lie to investigators" about the existence of a White House memorandum urging that Dale and his colleagues be fired and replaced by Little Rock's World Wide Travel, which had handled candidate Clinton's air travel in 1992. The lawyers call this "evidence of an attempt to obstruct justice."

When the firings were announced on May 19, 1993, press secretary Dee Dee Myers said the White House decided to act after a review of travel-office procedures by the accounting firm of Peat Marwick that found "gross mismanagement" inside the travel office. But in a meeting later the same day—a meeting heretofore unknown—senior White House officials learned to their great agitation that the review hadn't actually been completed. There's no mention of this meeting in the chronology that had been prepared as part of McLarty's internal management review. When Peat Markwick's report was finally rushed to completion under White House pressure on May 21, it was critical of sloppy accounting procedures, but nowhere alleged "gross mismanagement." In fact, some officials involved in the audit privately believe its findings weren't sufficient to warrant any dismissals. Curiously, the Peat Marwick report is dated May 17—two days *before* the firings and four days before its completion. (The White House has previously said a preliminary draft of the report had been prepared by May 17.)

One of the attendees at this meeting was Harry Thomason, whose involvement in the travel affair was a subject of considerable internal debate at the time. Senior adviser George Stephanopoulous told reporters that Thomason had no financial interest in the travel matter. Several other White House aides, however, privately disagreed with that assertion at the time, including Vince Foster. (Thomason, incidentally, has hired Washington superlawyer Bob Bennett to represent him.)

It's now beyond reasonable dispute that some White House aides, notably Catherine Cornelius, a distant cousin of President Clinton, lobbied to have the travel office fired and funnel its air travel operations to political and business cronies. The 1993 White House review also concluded that Harry Thomason's interest in travel office matters was inappropriate and contributed to "an appearance of financial conflict of interest."

"The evidence is overwhelming," says one official, "that they decided to fire these guys to give their friends some charter business, and then set about to come up with a reason to justify that decision."

What's left to determine is whether some White House staffers were actively engaged in a cover-up to keep the entire story from emerging. "There's a lot of misrepresentation and lying here," says one well-placed source. "It's possible this still may be more bumbling than anything else. But all the signals point to something more serious than that."

Previous investigations have been inconclusive, hamstrung by less-than-stellar cooperation from the White House—or a helping hand from Democrats in Congress and Congress's investigative arm, the General Accounting Office. During the GAO's 1994 investigation, GAO staffers allowed the White House to sit in on interviews and limit the scope of the inquiry by declining to make several key officials available. What's more, says one official, GAO documents detail "an amazing amount of amnesia on the part of White House aides."

Over the summer, investigators with the House Government Reform and Oversight Committee were assured of full cooperation by the White House. In recent weeks, however, the West Wing began to change its tune. White House officials demanded that a government lawyer be present at any interviews with administration officials—a precondition for cooperation the president's lawyers failed to secure in the Whitewater matter. When committee staffers resisted, on the grounds that such a presence would create an obvious chilling effect, the White House refused to make any officials available and began canceling all interviews already scheduled with committee investigators. Even former White House officials no longer in the government have been urged by the White House to stiff the committee.

And the administration refused to produce critical documents for the investigators to review—until Sept. 14, when the White House counsel's office backed off its threat to impose "executive privilege" on the documents and supplied House investigators with 400 of the 900 pages they requested.

Still, the White House has repeatedly asserted that documents relating to Harry Thomason are "beyond the scope" of the Congressional probe. And the fact remains that, as one source puts it, "their public statements and their private actions are quite different." All this means that Rep. William Clinger, chairman of the House oversight committee, may be issuing subpoenas for White House officials. Travelgate is headed for the front pages once again.

Thomas M. DeFrank has covered the White House for* Newsweek *since 1970 and is the collaborator on the memoirs of James A. Baker III.

Medicare

Shy and Retiring

by Fred Barnes

House Speaker Newt Gingrich met with Horace Deets, the executive director of the American Association of Retired Persons, last spring to discuss Medicare reform. They got together again over the summer, and then talked about Medicare for an hour in Gingrich's office on September 11. When Deets tried to reach Gingrich in August, the speaker's staff tracked him down during his book tour in Tennessee and hooked the two up by phone. Meanwhile, AARP lobbyist Martin Corry has been chatting regularly with Ed Kutler, Gingrich's Medicare expert. "We have a lot of fun kidding each other," says Corry.

All this camaraderie has produced exactly the result Gingrich wants. AARP, the nation's most powerful lobby for seniors, has not joined Congressional Democrats in opposing the Republican plan for restructuring Medicare and saving $270 billion. In fact, practically no one except organized labor has signed on, preventing Democrats from putting together a coalition powerful enough to block sweeping changes in Medicare. AARP, which backed President Clinton in the losing fight on health care in 1994, is leery now of crossing Gingrich and Republicans. So is the American Medical Association. And so are hospital groups, which have raised strong objections but aren't likely to mount a full-blown campaign against Republicans.

Gingrich "has done a great job of getting the opponents to sit on their hands," concedes Tom Scully, who runs the Federation of American Health Systems, the lobbying arm of for-profit hospitals. Meanwhile, Gingrich has organized a coalition of his own for Medicare reform: insurance companies, the managed care industry, corporate groups like the Business Roundtable, and reliable GOP allies such as the Christian Coalition and the National Restaurant Association. That coalition is necessary but not sufficient to assure the revamping of Medicare. What's also required is that foes be neutralized. Republicans aren't too worried about opposition by hospitals, which aren't popular. A top Republican official told the lobbyist for the American Hospital Association: "If we had to pick one opponent, you'd be the one."

AARP wouldn't be. Gingrich and other Republicans have gone to great lengths to mollify AARP. From the start, Gingrich insisted that Medicare savings not be drawn primarily from higher deductibles and copayments. Thus, monthly premiums will increase only $7 to $10 a month by 2002, Gingrich insists. Moreover, there are sweeteners for AARP in the Republican bill, so long as AARP doesn't join the opposition. Among other things, the group may get the right to compete with private companies to sell health insurance to seniors under Medicare. Its insurance business is AARP's largest source of revenue.

There's a raw political reason for AARP's skittishness about opposing Congressional Republicans. "They're a traditional Democratic group," says a GOP leader. "Their natural inclination is to gravitate toward where the power is. They want to be in the game." AARP might prefer dealing with Democrats. "But Democrats are offering absolutely nothing, no Medicare bill at all," the official adds.

Besides, AARP doesn't want to be on the losing side again, as it was on catastrophic health care in 1998

and on health care reform last year. When Gingrich offered to listen to AARP's concerns, Deets jumped at the chance. He also agreed not to send John Rother, AARP's legislative director, as his representative. Gingrich regards Rother as a wholly owned subsidiary of the Democratic party.

Without the muscle of AARP, Democratic opposition to Medicare reform has been lame. "Medicare is the one issue the left believes they can lie about and demagogue and scare, and we'll crumble and they'll win," Gingrich told a House-Senate Republican conference on September 14. Last summer, Democrats claimed Republicans would boost Medicare premiums by $2,000 a year. They've trimmed that to $1,000.

Next to AARP, the most important exile from the Democratic side is Clinton. Unlike Congressional Democrats, he's offered an alternative on Medicare. When Republican and Democratic leaders conferred with Clinton at the White House on September 11, the president ran down a list of issues on the fall agenda, pausing to note that something should be done to avert the Medicare trust fund's bankruptcy. Republicans nodded in agreement. House Minority Whip David Bonior, the ideological czar among Democrats on Capitol Hill, didn't say a word in the meeting. But he looked furious. ♦

Middle East

Two-Faced Yasir

by Daniel Pipes and Alexander T. Stillman

When Yasir Arafat shook hands with Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in September 1993, he made two main promises: to include in his public statements that the PLO "encourages and calls upon" Palestinians to take part in "rejecting violence and terrorism"; and to "achieve coexistence" with Israel—implying an acceptance of the Jewish state as a permanent fact of life.

Israelis vociferously disagree on how well he has kept those promises. Foreign Minister Shimon Peres declares Arafat to be "the one and only Palestinian leader with whom Israel can and should negotiate." A Likud party statement calls Arafat someone "who continues the Nazi way." Who's right? Has Arafat fulfilled his obligations or not?

There is no easy answer, for Arafat is a study in contradiction. Accepting the Nobel Prize in Oslo, he seemed genuinely to advocate peace and stability: "Like their Arab brethren, the Palestinians, whose cause is the guardian of the gate of the Arab-Israeli peace, are looking forward to a comprehensive, just, and durable peace on the basis of land for peace and compliance with international legitimacy and its resolutions."

But in Gaza a few months later, he repeatedly called for jihad (righteous war) against Israel: "We will go on with the jihad, a long jihad, a difficult jihad, an exhausting jihad, martyrs, battles. But this is the path of victory, the path of glory, the path of jihad, not just for the Palestinian people but for the entire Arab nation."

We have systematically analyzed 244 public statements (including speeches, press conferences, and interviews) made by Arafat in the year starting July 1, 1994, just as he took control of the Gaza Strip and Jericho, and ending on June 30, 1995. In all, slightly over half (126) were addressed to Westerners, and slightly fewer (118) to Muslims.

• *Rejecting Violence:* Fifty-one statements are helpful in assessing whether Arafat kept his promises to discourage violence against Israel. Not only did Arafat take up this subject with Westerners three times more often than with Muslims (38 to 13), but the former heard a message significantly different from the latter. In just over half of his statements to a Western audience, Arafat condemns violence. For example, to an Israeli journalist, he said that he abhorred the suicide bombing by Islamic Jihad in November 1994: "We hold a very grave view of the attack in Netzarim. . . . We totally reject such acts. It has been decided to take the appropriate steps in reaction. Such steps are the arrests carried out among the Islamic Jihad activists. We have arrested 136 Islamic Jihad members." A month later, responding to the suicide bombing of a Jerusalem bus, Arafat (through his spokesman) called the incident a "criminal act" and wished the wounded "a speedy recovery."

But on the 13 occasions Arafat mentioned terrorist violence to Muslim listeners, he not once condemned its practice against Israelis. Arafat is a master of avoidance; though he immediately condemned the suicide bombing at Netzarim to Israelis, not one of his nine statements to Arab audiences in the week that followed even mentioned the atrocity. At other times, he wiggles out of questions. When a London-based Arabic newspaper asked him in February 1995 whether Hamas's violence against Israelis constituted legitimate acts of jihad, Arafat insouciantly ignored the question: "What I would like to say is that we must all respect the agreements concluded in the times of war and peace. . . . I wonder why Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Syria-based and Jordan-based factions do not carry out their operations from Syria and Jordan, par-

ticularly since there are borders between Syria and Israel and between Jordan and Israel. Why are they making us look as if we are held responsible for this?" Arafat, it would appear, cares not to discourage violence but to make sure Jordan and Syria get blamed for it.

Arafat also hints that Israel's government is partly behind the violence against its own citizens, to discredit the Palestinian Authority he heads, and thus to slow down the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the West Bank. Along these lines, he stated in April 1995 that "The target is not Israel, which is not against" the members of Hamas who are engaging in anti-Israel terrorism. "These operations' objective is to allow Israel to use the issue of security or the lack of it as an excuse for stopping the implementation of what we agreed on."

Finally, Arafat sometimes invites more violence. At the Seventh Islamic Conference Organization Summit in December 1994, he called for continued jihad: "Today, I come to you for the first time from Palestine, the homeland which has not yet been liberated from the Israeli occupation which is weighing heavily on our people. . . . Let our jihad continue until an independent Palestinian state is established, with holy Jerusalem as its capital." An Arab audience in May 1995 heard a similar appeal: "Everyone should view himself as a recruit in the ferocious battle we are fighting to protect Jerusalem and our sanctities in it."

So Arafat keeps his word in condemning violence to Westerners—those least likely to strap on a bomb and blow up an Israeli bus in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv. But he fails to follow through with his fellow Arabs, before whom he never condemns a specific terrorist attack against Israelis. Arafat thus keeps the letter but not the spirit of his promise.

• *Accepting Israel.* What about accepting the State of Israel's permanence? Although Arafat refers to Israel in nearly all of his public statements (often as "the occupation"), only 20 or so of them are pertinent to this question. Just as with violence, Arafat sends a mixed message in these 20 statements.

To Westerners, he fully accepts Israel's permanence. For example, addressing Israeli youth in a July 1994 interview, he spoke of "a new era for our new generations," pointing to a break from the past. He went on: "A new era in the Middle East has started. And, we are neighbors, we can coordinate, cooperate, in all fields by all means for the sake of our new children." On another occasion, Arafat spoke warmly of an enduring peace based in the holy city of Jerusalem: "There must be no walls between East Jerusalem and West Jerusalem, no Berlin Wall. Jerusalem will be a symbol of the peace of the brave, of coexistence between two peoples—the Israelis and Palestinians."

To Arab audiences, predictably, Arafat sends a different signal. While he never denies Israel's permanency, he does hedge, stressing legal obligations rather than political attitudes. He talks dramatically of respecting the agreement with Israel, not of accepting Israel. "We have signed the peace of the brave," he told a press conference on July 1, 1994. "Our views may differ, but if a Palestinian child signs an agreement on behalf of the Palestinian people, we will be committed to his signature. So it is the case if the signing is made by a Palestinian delegation or authority. We will build the peace of the brave and preserve it." In a speech to an Arab audience in Gaza, Arafat said: "We call [the Declaration of Principles] an agreement of the courageous, and we will honor this agreement of the courageous just as we have pledged." With Arab audiences, Arafat skips the more emotional sentiments he occasionally expresses to the West (mutual recognition, peaceful coexistence of Palestinians and Israelis) in favor of an official, legalistic endorsement of the agreement's sanctity.

Which is the real Arafat? A clue may lie in the revealing statement he made to a Spanish newspaper in October 1994, when asked if he differed from the Arafat of 1974, the one who appeared before the United Nations with an olive branch in one hand and a Kalashnikov in the other. "In no way at all," he replied. "I am not a chameleon, I cannot change my coat." By his own words, then, Arafat is the same person of twenty years earlier. The only difference is that, for the most part, he now holds up only an olive branch for the West and a Kalashnikov for his fellow Arabs.

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Supreme Court

Sharpton's Mote

by Matt Labash

Just look at Rev. Al—with his processed Mother-Popcorn tresses, that canary yellow shirt sheathing the brick-oven belly, and the neckwear explosion that could pass for a Maryland state flag jammed into a six-button sausage casing. Say this for the new gear, it beats the living hell out of his old Le Coq Sportif

sweatsuits and Richard Roundtree medallions.

But the man has a charm that's all his own, sitting on the stage of the Israel Baptist church in northeast Washington on the eve of his planned "prayer vigil" in front of Clarence Thomas's house. To hear Al Sharpton tell it, not since *Plessy* v. *Ferguson* has such injustice been perpetrated by the Supreme Court, what with Thomas lending his highly treasonous vote throughout last summer's spate of decisions against affirmative action, minority set-asides, and voter districts drawn on the basis of race. For God's sakes, Thomas has set The Movement back 30 years (Sharpton still calls it "The Movement," as if he's just off the Selma red-eye). "I remember growing up reading Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," barks Sharpton. "Now I get to see it."

With a chorus of *well-well*s and *ah-yeah*s, Sharpton's in his groove, holding the assemblage in the palm of his puffy hand like a buttered cob fresh out of the shuck. He's dropping quips and couplets, popping and zinging and growling and gurgling—and launching a froth-like projectile that hits this reporter some seven rows back and 30 feet away.

From his front-man performances in hot-button racial cases ranging from the slaying of Yusuf Hawkins to the fabrications of Tawana Brawley, Sharpton has had cause to see it all, wobbling straight into the belly of Klan country, or worse still, Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, where his face-off with the angry Sons of Sicily once earned him a knife in the chest. Now, on this outing, he was packing the troops off to the battlefields of . . . suburban Fairfax County, Va.? "We're going to make a house call on a very sick and ill brother," Sharpton explained.

At issue as much as Thomas's votes were seemingly benign quotes given to black talk radio host Armstrong Williams, such as: "You cannot embrace racism to deal with racism, it's not Christian," and, "If I write racism into law, then I am in God's eyes no better than they are."

"Clarence could've gotten away with a lot, but when you've brought God into it, Clarence, then we've got the right to come ring your bell," said Sharpton, who'd been planning the drive-by nearly a month before these comments appeared. "The main beneficiary of affirmative action was white women," he continued. "In fact, if we check, his wife may have an affirmative action job." Sharpton brought the house down by denouncing the company Thomas keeps. "His only black friend is Armstrong Williams, which means he don't have no black friends," Sharpton said. "[Armstrong] couldn't get 20 Negroes together if he was passing around free fried chicken."

Over 600 people turned out for the vigil, many caravanning from as far away as New York or Atlanta, then enjoying a police escort from Israel Baptist to Thomas's bucolic spread. I freedom-rode with former D.C. delegate and longtime pastor of D.C.'s New Bethel Baptist Church, Rev. Walter Fauntroy, sitting shotgun in a church van worth about one-third as much as his watch.

In the hour-long excursion, Fauntroy, who recently pled guilty for falsifying a financial report to Congress over a church donation, told me how O.J. was framed by "senseless fascists," James Earl Ray was innocent, the black community is due reparations from all nonblack taxpayers because of slavery's legacy, and how he almost set Clarence Thomas straight during his confirmation hearings: "He said, 'I'm a Supreme Court Justice for life, is that what you're telling me? Then I'm going to do right.' And he's disappointed me because he hasn't."

We rolled past the Clifton Pottery Shop, with its birdbaths, fountains, and acrylic lawn ornaments, up to Thomas's development. Turned out the police had blocked off Thomas's street, at the homeowners' request, keeping us a quarter-mile from his residence.

Sharpton worked the bullhorn as timid *hausfraus*, hauling their kids to soccer practice in Plymouth Voyagers, navigated past bowed-armed, bristle-headed cops and the well-ordered, spiritual-singing throng. Dick Gregory had said, "You can never humiliate someone with prayer." But with God on their side (Sharpton: "So many ministers who are in the God business clearly say that he is off base. . . . It is not the will of God that he vote against affirmative action"), they gave it a fair shot.

In the course of the two-day extravaganza, alternating clergy deemed Thomas "an educated fool," "a pygmy in a high place," an "oreo cookie," "ungrateful, despicable, and gutless," "wide-nosed, big-jawed and big-eared," "a disgrace to the Negro race." And when Sharpton scoffed at the paddy wagons and marshals surrounding his house as if such activities were commonplace, Gregory himself said, "They got that because they thought Mark Fuhrman was coming looking for a nigger with a white lady"—causing a gleeful eruption.

This, after Sharpton recited Matthew 21:22: "And all things whatsoever ye should ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive." Nary a soul brought up the earlier passage in Matthew, chapter 7, verse three, the one about the mote in your own eye. Consider the Sharpton in the field: "Clarence has to ask himself who he's speaking for when he talks about God. . . . He uses his

skin to give him immunity to say the most outrageous things." ♦

The Presidency

Where's the Buck?

by A.J. Bacevich

When Harry S Truman announced in June 1950 that he was committing U.S. forces to defend South Korea without prior Congressional approval, he redefined the role of the president as commander in chief. Without fanfare but with implications potentially as significant, Bill Clinton seems determined to forfeit that role.

Truman's assertion of the authority to make war in this way established a precedent that his successors regardless of party would affirm. Yet in explaining his actions to the American people, Truman established a second precedent: *responsibility* for the decision to intervene was irrefutably and undeniably his. Acting in his capacity as commander in chief, Truman was accountable. Americans knew precisely where the buck stopped.

This union of authority and accountability in matters relating to war and peace virtually defined the presidency throughout the Cold War. In an era marked by the frequent use of force in actions ranging from major wars to minor incursions, American presidents guarded fiercely their prerogative of choosing when and where to employ American military power. Yet they did not flinch from accepting the parallel requirement of justifying their actions to the American people. From the 1960s onward, it became something of a ritual; the grim-faced Commander in Chief appearing on television to explain to the nation why he felt compelled to send young Americans into harm's way.

The recent escalation of hostilities in Bosnia signifies a fundamental break with this tradition. As a result of the American-led air campaign, the United States is today a de facto belligerent in the complex civil war within the former Yugoslavia. Yet at no time in the history of the United States has responsibility for a major American military action been more ambiguous.

Under whose authority do Americans fight in the Balkans? U.S. officials seem content to convey the impression that military developments there are the product of negotiations between two supranational entities, NATO and the United Nations. Newspapers report—without contradiction by administration officials—that "the decision to launch the attacks was made jointly" by two *military* officers, an admiral commanding NATO's southern flank and a French general responsible for UN operations in the former Yugoslavia. Likewise, we are told, "the aerial campaign can be formally ended only by a joint decision of these two men."

That the U.S. involvement in this war proceeds without the sanction of an old-fashioned declaration of war and with minimal consultation with Congressional leaders is unsurprising. That it has occurred without the explicit authorization of President Clinton as commander in chief is astonishing. Indeed, the president has gone out of his way to avoid the appearance of being in charge. Rather than asserting responsibility for directing events, Clinton has kept the lowest of low profiles, limiting himself to endorsing actions already in progress.

In effect, the commander in chief has assumed the pose of kibitzer. With the U.S.-led air campaign well underway, for example, the vacationing president allowed that he viewed escalation as "an appropriate response," venturing so far as to aver that "I think it is something that had to be done." In the days to follow, he would find infinitely more to say about the accomplishments of Cal Ripken than about the activities of American pilots delivering ordnance near Pale or Sarajevo.

From the very beginning of his term, Clinton's uneasiness with his role as civilian head of the armed forces has been palpable. When it comes to high stakes military enterprises such as the United States is presently engaged in in the Balkans, the presidential interest in minimizing his political exposure is readily apparent.

Yet however much Clinton may want to wipe his fingerprints from decisions involving the use of force, in doing so he shirks a fundamental responsibility. The consequences go far beyond Bosnia. In conveying the impression that NATO and UN military officers possess the authority to decide when to initiate hostilities and when to desist, Clinton tampers unwittingly with the principle of civilian control. Worse still, in adhering to the fiction that American actions in the Balkans are merely those of a loyal agent or obliging proxy for NATO and the UN, Clinton has allowed U.S. forces to become involved in a shooting war without either constitutional standing or popular endorsement—with implications likely to become apparent should that war show signs of turning sour.

It is precisely at such moments that the nation requires the moral courage of a genuine commander in chief. One recalls the words of John F. Kennedy, Mr. Clinton's hero, following the debacle at the Bay of Pigs. "I am the responsible officer of this govern-

ment," Kennedy told the nation. With the United States today at war in the Balkans, who is that responsible officer? It is yet another indication of the abiding weakness of this presidency that we don't really know.

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Welfare Reform

One-Party Debate

by Matthew Rees

The bitter squabbles last week over welfare reform among Senate Republicans suggest the political difficulties of advancing the conservative agenda through that body. But they also suggest that today, the policy debate in America is among conservative ideas—and virtually among conservative ideas alone. The debate over welfare reform took place without the president, who ran on a platform to "end welfare as we know it." Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the Democratic party's wise man on the subject, complained about the president's inaction but did little more than predict the direst of consequences from Republican policies.

That left the field to his colleagues on the other side of the aisle, whose disagreements over the bill were far more interesting than the presidential-political spin (Dole vs. Gramm) that dominated the press coverage. The "conservatives" insisted that any welfare-reform package must include measures to restrict and prevent illegitimacy. But the supposedly "moderate" solution—sending welfare money to the states and thereby ending a 60-year federal entitlement in one fell swoop—was also to the right of any position actively pushed only a year ago.

All 56 Senate Republicans agreed the federal welfare system is broken and needs fixing. They also agreed that the best way to achieve this is for the federal government to provide block grants to the states, an act that immediately eliminates one massive layer of federal bureaucracy. What divided them is how much control Washington should have over these block grants.

The "conservatives," led by Sens. Lauch Faircloth and Phil Gramm, believe that if the federal government is going to distribute money to the states, it's reasonable to place restrictions on how this money is spent, particularly when it comes to out-of-wedlock births. This position has been tirelessly and brilliantly promoted by Robert Rector, the Heritage Foundation's single-minded welfare majordomo. Faircloth reflected Rector's thinking in a September 12 floor statement: "It is essential that any welfare reform legislation enacted by Congress send out a loud and very clear message that society does not condone the growth of out-of-wedlock childbearing."

But nearly all governors, including such conservative stalwarts as John Engler of Michigan and most of the Senate's less ideologically driven Republicans have argued that the states should be freed from the heavy federal hand. The block-grant money should be sent to the states with no strings attached, permitting the governors to experiment with the best ways to destroy the pernicious culture of welfare dependency.

The debate over the so-called "family cap" in the welfare-reform bill before the Senate last week highlighted the fault lines. "Moderates Kill 'Family Cap' In Senate Welfare Measure" trumpeted the Sept. 14 *Washington Post*. The headline referred to a 66-34 vote the day before that rid the welfare-reform bill of a provision dear to the "conservatives"—one denying states the right to increase cash benefits to welfare mothers when they have additional children.

While the "conservatives" mostly opposed the measure, which was introduced by "moderate" Pete Domenici, the ideological divide was not as neat as the *Post* headline would suggest. Voting with the "moderates" were such genuinely conservative Republicans as Spencer Abraham, Robert Bennett, Orrin Hatch, Mike DeWine, and William Roth. They invoked the traditionally conservative principle of federalism to justify their vote, arguing that they didn't want to impose additional mandates on the states. "The more that's moved out of Washington, the more difficult it will be to recentralize it" later, Abraham says.

Domenici claimed that federalism was the motive force of his effort to kill the "family cap," but he may have been disingenuous. "There's no consistency for Domenici. He wanted to strike the family cap amendment because he disagreed with it," sniffs a livid Senate aide. The "moderates" were uncomfortable with the idea of the family cap, concerned that such measures might appear "punitive" toward women.

Domenici actually supported an anti-federalist policy idea called "maintenance of effort" that would require states to maintain at least 80 percent of their 1994 welfare spending for the next five years. Rector of the Heritage Foundation sums up conservative disgust with Domenici: "He has placed a permanent black star over his career."

We'll see. But while conservatives may delight in having the welfare debate limited to conservative approaches, the Senate's behavior last week is politically worrisome for the GOP. This was the second time Majority Leader Bob Dole has had to put off voting on welfare reform (the first was in August).

If it's so difficult to get welfare reform (the easiest of the big items on the Republican docket) through the Senate, how will the next parts of the agenda—Medicare, budget cuts, and tax cuts—fare in the weeks to come? ♦

Adoption

Marriageable Men

by John E. Coffey

In the spring of 1995, Americans watched in horror as a sobbing 4-year-old was handed over to parents he had never seen. Raised by adoptive parents from the age of four days, the boy pleaded with the only mother and father he knew and promised to "be good" if they would let him stay. But the child was delivered to strangers and driven away forever, as his 7-year-old adoptive brother looked on. To many, the sickening sight of a child's anguish was compounded by the knowledge that the tragedy had been played out under the auspices of both the Illinois and United States courts.

Commentators searched for villains to explain Baby Richard's fate. They variously singled out the biological father, unmarried at the time of the boy's birth, for his relentless pursuit of custody in disregard of the child's well being; the biological mother, for lying to the absent father, telling him the baby was dead; the adoptive parents, who fought for custody long after learning of the natural father's wish to be united with his child; and the legal system, for taking an unconscionable four years to reach an unsatisfactory result. If the goal is to prevent similar tragedies, however, one must look elsewhere: to common-sense reform of adoption statutes.

A society that would discourage litigation over potentially adoptable children like Baby Richard must restore the link between marriage and parental rights. That link has eroded since the 1970s, under the influence of expansive notions of individual rights and gender equality foisted on the states by the U.S. Supreme Court. Nowhere was this trend more evident than in a line of decisions beginning in 1972 with *Stanley* v. *Illinois*.

In that landmark case, the court overturned an Illinois statute that presumed the children of a deceased, unmarried mother to be wards of the state. The presumption could be challenged; the birth father could come forward and prove his fitness as a parent—but no such demand was made of women, should the circumstances be reversed. Hence the court found a violation of equal protection and due process.

In *Stanley*, the court flirted with the notion that biology alone entitled an unmarried father to constitutionally protected parental rights. The implications of that concept are bizarre—witness the recent case of a donor who is suing to locate children sired from sperm misappropriated by a crooked sperm bank. At this writing, the father has not sought custody, but under *Stanley* he could make a case.

By 1983, however, the court—possibly influenced by the familial breakdown already in overdrive throughout society—was pulling back. In *Lehr* v. *Robertson*, it adopted language from an earlier dissent, stating: "Parental rights do not spring full-blown from the biological connection between parent and child. They require relationships more enduring." Six years later, in *Michael H.* v. *Gerald D.*, a plurality of the court retreated even further, leaving states free to pass adoption statutes that favor marital families.

Unfortunately, many legislatures have yet to follow the high court's lead, even though it should be obvious by now that the nation has an interest in stable two-parent families. Divorce and illegitimacy have made single-parent households and step-families commonplace, with disturbing consequences for children. Why, then, would a reasonable community subsidize child bearing outside marriage? The question is familiar in the context of the financial subsidy provided by welfare. But it is also time to reconsider the legal subsidy that was created when states enshrined unmarried fathers' rights.

In practice, this means that when an unmarried mother places her baby up for adoption, the father can demand a custody hearing. He enjoys this right regardless of his fitness or demonstrated willingness to take responsibility for the child—and in the face of his refusal to take the one step society asks, marriage. For the adoption to go forward, someone must prove the father's unfitness in court.

According to the doctrine of gender equality, this is as it should be. Both biological parents should possess identical rights to custody in preference to an adoptive family. But to assign two parties equal rights in a matter as emotionally complicated as child custody is to embrace intervention by third parties, brought in like Solomon to break the inevitable dead-

locks. Such intervention is unavoidable when marriage ends in divorce. Outside marriage, however, there is no need to replicate this unhappy pattern. Cases like that of Baby Richard, whose unmarried father sought custody of a child he had never seen, show the terrible cost of laws *inviting* litigation over children.

When parents are unmarried and the father has yet to form a relationship with, and to support, the child, the mother should have an unfettered right to place the child for adoption. The mother, at least, has invested her energy in bearing the child. The situation is different, of course, if a single mother chooses to keep her child and accepts support from the father (to which the child is legally entitled). Then a good case can be made for the father's receiving protection from the law—as a matter of state discretion, not constitutional right.

If state politicians—especially Republicans, who have fared well bemoaning the fraying social fabric—are serious about making fatherlessness rare, they can begin by undoing the legal subsidy of illegitimacy. The gravity of our cultural problems is such that legislators who profess the social ideal of marital childbearing have a duty to advance that ideal through law wherever they reasonably can.

It would take courage to withstand the inevitable charge that any such reform is reactionary or morally imperialistic. The true reactionaries, however, are those who cling to the discredited policies of the libertine 60s and 70s, despite the bitter harvest we now reap.

A state does have the right to say to its men, through its laws: If you want rights over how your children are raised, there are requirements. Marry the mother of your children, or at least support them once they are born. Otherwise you take your chances. For that matter, states should consider saying to their women, in all charity and true compassion: Take as much time as you need on the adoption decision. It is an enormous one. However, once you relinquish your child, you forgo all rights.

Baby Richard's nightmare was avoidable. Under the adoption reform proposed here, his case would have ended when he was a newborn, not an impressionable child. The manmade emotional scars he may bear for a lifetime challenge the authors of state adoption laws to moderate their fervor for abstractions like gender equality, as the Supreme Court already has, and to show more realistic concern for the welfare of actual children.

John E. Coffey, a Philadelphia lawyer, served formerly on the Senate Judciary Committee staff.

THE STANDARD QUESTION: President Clinton had a pretty good summer, politically speaking. But did he overcome one of his worst problems, lack of trustworthiness? That's what we asked pollster Frank Luntz to find out for us last month: Of the last five presidents—Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton—who has been the most dishonest with the American people?

The bad news for Clinton is that he finished first—or is it last?—with 29 percent. The good news for Clinton is that he was only a whisker ahead of Reagan, who stood at 28 percent. The others: Bush (8), Carter (7), Ford (4). All of this suggests to us the extent to which Reagan and Reaganism remain fault lines in American politics—and that conservative realignment has a ways to go.

But so does Clinton. Those over the age of 30—folks who were adults during the 1980s—found Clinton even more dishonest (31 percent). And among men, 33 percent said Clinton is the most dishonest.

♦

YES, MINISTER: The political newsletter *Hotline* recently interviewed the top strategist for the Lamar Alexander presidential campaign, Mike Murphy—known inside the Beltway as the spin doctor of spin doctors, king of one-liners, one of the best talkers in the business, and a good friend to many on the staff of this magazine. So you'll forgive us for thinking that our loquacious pal could have tap-danced a little bit better when asked the following (admittedly difficult) question about the status of Alexander for President: "You're currently in most national polls somewhere below five percent. Is this where you wanted to be on Labor Day 1995?"

"Yes," Murphy said.

Sure, Mike.

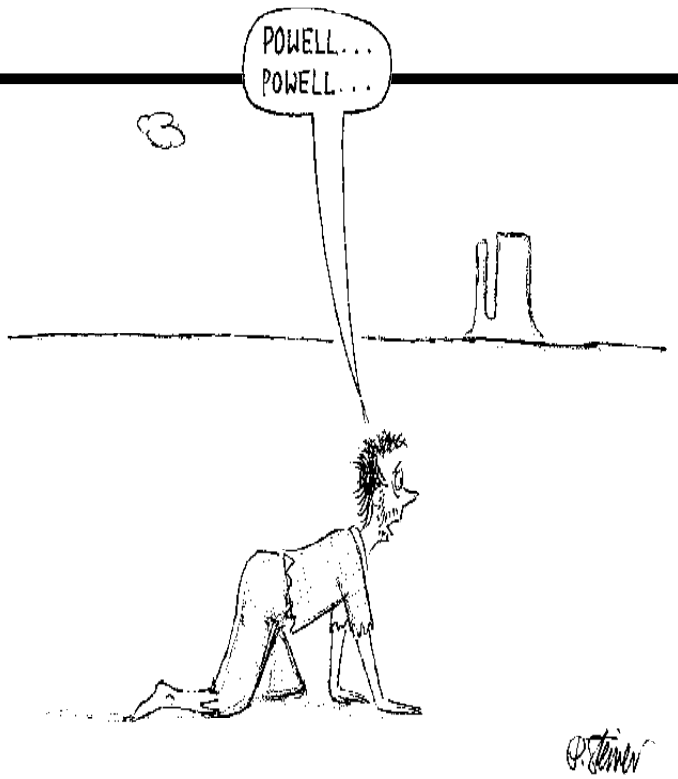
♦

THE POWER AND THE POWER: Colin Powell's memoir is cause for celebration on one point, at least—its title, *An American Journey*. Powell resisted the use the word "power" in his title. Can you match the title of the following Washington books and their authors (okay, the guys whose names appear in big type on the book jacket; the books are, of course, almost always ghostwritten):

1. *The Ends of Power*	a. Zbigniew Brzezinski
2. *The Ordeal of Power*	b. Emmet John Hughes
3. *The Arrogance of Power*	c. John Erlichman
4. *Power and Principle*	d. H.R. Haldeman
5. *Witness to Power*	e. William J. Fulbright

Answers appear at the end of the Scrapbook.

Scrapbook



THE READING LIST: Journalists tend to be the heroes of their own stories, but novelists are more scathing about the popular press. After you've finished Evelyn Waugh's peerless *Scoop*, here are three other memorable novels that savage the fourth estate:

- ***Bel Ami*** by Guy de Maupassant. A bounder discovers that he has the makings of a great journalist: He can't write but he's a big hit with publishers' wives.

- ***Lost Illusions*** by Honore de Balzac. A provincial poet discovers that he can earn money, fame, and romance as a book and theater critic, as long as he is dishonest in his judgments.

- ***New Grub Street*** by George Gissing. About Victorians who take up the pen to avoid the grubby world of commerce—only to find themselves in an ink-stained grubby world of commerce.

A few discerning readers noted with asperity that last week we promised a list of four great novels about money, and published a list of only three. "What was the fourth?" they demanded of us in no uncertain terms. After much thought, we decided not to tell you. Instead, we want you to guess. The first reader that successfully guesses the identity of the fourth book will receive a year's gift subscription to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

Send your entry to: Our Weekly Reader, THE WEEKLY STANDARD, 1150 17th St. NW, Suite 505, Washington DC 20036.

(For the record, the three titles we did publish: *The Titan* and *The Financier*, both by Theodore Dreiser, and Anthony Trollope's *Framley Parsonage*.)

♦

RHODES SCHOLAR CORNER: The Head Start program for the American Establishment, the Rhodes Scholarship and its alumni deserve constant scrutiny. And not just because one of their number is president of the United States, but because 23-year-olds emerge from it with a sense of spiritual entitlement that ought to be beaten out of them.

Therefore, in the interests of full Rhodes disclosure, we offer this introductory piece of thrilling post-Balliol activity, courtesy of the June 18 *Boston Globe*:

"CAVENDISH, Vt. — William A. Hunter was awakened at 3 a.m. June 9 by loud knocking on the door. . . . He stumbled downstairs to find seven agents from the US Drug Enforcement Agency at his door.

"They handed Hunter, a lawyer, a search warrant that said several of his clients had been arrested that night on drug charges and the government was looking for records of their illegal business activities. . . .

"To those who know Hunter well, the charges seem preposterous. A Rhodes scholar with an undergraduate degree from Yale and a Harvard law degree, he turned down job offers from big city firms to go into private practice in Vermont, where his clients are largely indigent. He believes in the barter system, having clients mow his lawn, refinish his furniture or rebuild his fence to pay for legal services."

Hunter has yet to be charged with a crime, but it's not the Drug Enforcement Agency part that amuses us—we're more interested in the yard work and furniture refinishing.

♦

AT LEAST HE CALLED IT PERVERSE: Forget flag burning. Here's a cutting-edge, freedom-of-expression, First Amendment issue, sure to be litigated soon in a courtroom near you. The *Washington Post* this week quoted A. Knighton Stanley, pastor of the Peoples Congregational Church, as follows: Urinating in public "speaks to a state of mind, an assessment of the condition of society. . . . In some ways, I see it as a perverse kind of public speech. . . "

♦

Answers: 1-d; 2-b; 3-e; 4-a; 5-c

Beware Magazinerism: Republicans and Taxes

By Tod Lindberg

The chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee was among friends the evening of June 5, 1995, when he invited a small group of like-minded conservatives to his office in the Cannon building to talk taxes. One of those in attendance at Rep. Bill Archer's soiree might have been more libertarian than the others, another more of a monetarist than a supply-sider, but everyone present agreed on the basics. No one was there to discuss raising taxes to reduce the deficit, thank you very much. Nobody wanted to figure out how government could do more for people, or how to add funds to the enforcement budget of the Internal Revenue Service in order to improve "voluntary compliance" with the tax code. No. What was under discussion was how to change all that—the Big Picture of conservative, Republican tax reform.

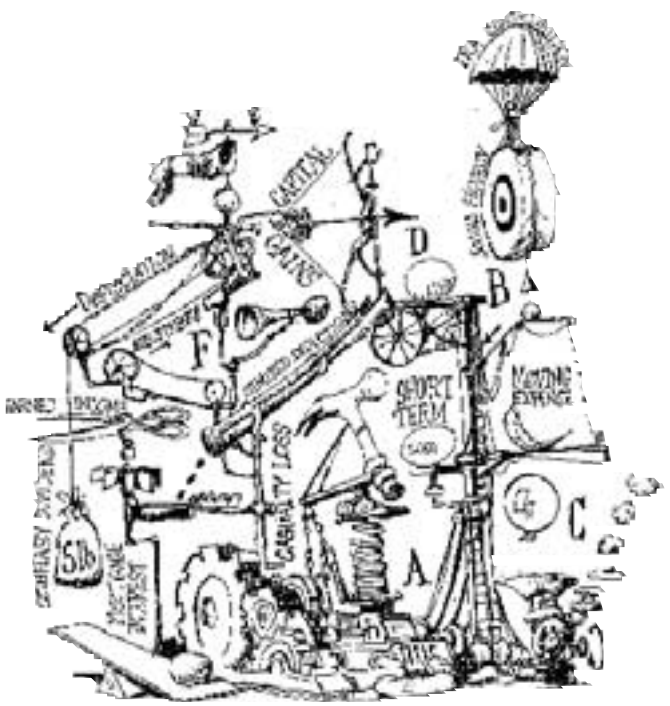
Take the Sixteenth Amendment, which enabled the federal government to levy an income tax directly on Americans. Chairman Archer, you see, would like to get rid of the Sixteenth Amendment.

Well, not just get rid of it. As Archer explained to his guests, many constitutional scholars argue that the Sixteenth Amendment was not necessary—as other scholars thought back in 1913—to establish the constitutionality of some form of income tax. Thus, repealing the Sixteenth Amendment may not be enough. We may want to think about drafting a *new* constitutional amendment that positively *forbids* the imposition of a federal income tax.

That is how conditions are in Washington these days. In a corner office on a bright, late spring evening in June 1995, a conversation unimaginable a year before was taking place: the chairman of the House committee in charge of federal taxation trying to sell his ideological comrades on the way he would like to *get rid of the federal income tax.* Mind-boggling.

The plan Archer outlined in his office calls for getting rid of individual and business income taxes and replacing them with a tax on consumption; you pay when you spend, not when you earn or save. The consumption tax is one of two Big Picture tax overhaul ideas making the Republican rounds. The other is the flat tax—more specifically, a flat-tax plan of House Majority Leader Dick Armey to eliminate all deductions in exchange for a 17 percent tax rate across the board and thereby allow an American taxpayer to submit his return on a postcard.

These ideas are already making their presence felt in the 1996 presidential election cycle. Richard Lugar is in favor of a consumption tax; Arlen Specter has a modified flat-tax proposal that has a higher rate than Armey's to maintain the deductions for home-mortgage interest and charitable contributions. Higher-profile candidates are preparing to enter the fray in the fall. Phil Gramm is close to Armey and has a penchant for Big Picture declarations of his own. And Robert Dole is positioning himself to accept the recommendations of a tax commission headed by Jack Kemp that will surely look fondly on the flat tax.



William Bramhall

It should come as no surprise that this is the year for a wide-ranging debate on taxes, nor that some of the ideas floating around are so far-reaching. They are, after all, based on credos right out of GOP 101.

Credo #1: High tax rates bad, low tax rates good. **Credo #2:** High taxes bad, low taxes good. As a matter of fact, in accordance with Credo #1, high tax rates have an inhibiting effect on economic activity and make us all poorer. As a matter of sentiment, in accordance with Credo #2, the government takes too much out of people's wallets, i.e., Washington is too damn big.

The first thing to understand about the Armey-Archer tax plans is that they are not *tax cut* plans. The government will need $1.88 trillion in revenue in 2002 to pay the bills. That's how much the current tax system is supposed to deliver, and that's what any reform plan must deliver in these anti-deficit days. (Armey's plan does feature a small tax cut, but that's hardly its purpose.) Of course, some people's taxes would go down. But there's a very simple corollary to that: Some people's would go up. This is worth thinking about.

The intellectually honest selling point for each plan is that it is a vast improvement over the current system: better for the economy and easier on the people who have to comply.

The liabilities of the current system are well known. High capital-gains tax rates restrict capital formation and economic growth. Taxes on savings have helped cause a lower savings rate than in most other industrial democracies. High top marginal tax rates discourage additional labor by the most productive sector of society. And the current tax code is a nightmarishly burdensome thing, requiring more than 5 billion man-hours per year in compliance time at a total cost of over $200 billion. The IRS itself can't give consistent answers to taxpayers' questions. Fear of audits drives people to distraction.

What to do, what to do? Well, get rid of it—either altogether (in the case of the Archer plan) or of the system's most noxious features (in the case of the Armey plan). Then watch the economy grow like gangbusters.

Archer has spelled out his criteria for a good tax system. He wants the IRS out of people's lives. He wants the least possible disadvantages for saving. He wants the tax system to reach the now-untaxed underground economy. He wants a way to remove the costs of U.S. taxes from the price of goods leaving the country, and he wants foreign goods entering the country taxed at the same rate as U.S.-made goods.

A consumption tax fits the bill, he thinks. We're talking about a levy of, say, 17 percent on all goods sold. In this scheme, the IRS ceases to exist. It no longer monitors income because there is no longer any tax on income. Save as much as you like; you won't pay any tax on what you save *and* there will no longer be any tax on interest. For those who have grown accustomed to evading their income tax liabilities, the news is this: You can't buy a product without paying your fair share of taxes.

For Dick Armey, the four cardinal virtues of his flat-tax plan are simplicity, honesty, the promotion of economic growth, and fairness. He proposes to achieve it by imposing one single tax rate on all income, individual and corporate, of 17 percent. So, in April, here's what your average American will do: He will write down his total income. He will multiply that number by 0.17, and then he'll mail it in before midnight on the 15th. Under the Armey plan, all the current deductions are gone: no deductions for state and local taxes, no mortgage interest, no charitable contributions, no moving costs, nothing.

Businesses will add up the wages they pay and the costs of purchases they make from other businesses, then subtract the total from gross sales, and multiply the result by the same 0.17. And this will be the last taxation on dividends: Individuals will no longer pay. Nor will they pay on interest income or capital gains.

The flat taxers and consumption taxers alike were both compelled to deal with the question of what happens to poor people if their plans were to become law. If you're only making $10,000 a year, should the government really have a claim on 17 percent of that, whether in the form of a flat income tax or a consumption tax? (After all, if you make only $10,000, it's a good bet that virtually all your income will go toward consumption.)

The answer, obviously, is no. So Armey exempts the first $22,700 of income for a married couple from

taxation altogether, and allows a deduction of $5,300 for every dependent. In other words, a family of four with income of $33,300 pays no federal income taxes, and just 17 cents on the next dollar. In Lugar's plan, there would be an exemption in the consumption tax of $5,000 per individual—in other words, the first $5,000 in consumption would go untaxed. (How to do this? Well, the simplest way would probably be for the government to send everyone a check for $850, which is 17 percent of $5,000—in effect a rebate of the tax on the first $5,000 in consumption.)

Any number of economists support the flat-tax plan, others the consumption-tax replacement. Study after study purports to show the beneficial economic effects of a dramatic overhaul of the tax code along either line. For purposes of argument, let's stipulate those beneficial effects without getting bogged down in their details. It is a fine thing to sit and contemplate the ways in which life would be different under either of these regimes. Sensible policy making requires no less.

But politics must come before policy. Conservatism in Washington no longer resides in the age of the "thought experiment," to adopt the term Charles Murray used in his classic 1984 book *Losing Ground*. Murray conducted a "thought experiment" by imagining a world without welfare, then contrasting the choices facing a pregnant teenager in that imaginary world with the choices facing such a teenager under current welfare policies.

The result was highly illuminating, but we are not seeking illumination here. It is one thing when a then-obscure intellectual proposes that we think about something differently—or when an economist lays out his forecast of the economic effects of this tax reform plan or that. It is something else again when the *chairman* of the *tax-writing committee* of the *House of Representatives* wants to do away with the income tax and replace it with a consumption tax—or when the majority leader of the House wants to switch to a flat tax.

If ideas have consequences, then some ideas have more consequences than others—and certainly, the ideas of more consequential people have more consequences than the ideas of others. In 1984, Charles Murray couldn't end welfare. In 1997, Archer or Armey or both, in conjunction with a Republican president, can make a serious run at bringing fundamental change to U.S. tax policy.

Such an effort will have real-world political consequences, and they will be far more profound than any economist's model can possibly predict. So while there may be all sorts of principled answers to the question of what kind of tax system we should have, they will be incomplete unless they also address how exactly we get there from here. That is, after all, the essential question of practical politics.

There have already been some tough questions raised about each of the two GOP tax overhaul schemes. Here are just a few:

Are we ready for a world in which those—the pejorative term is "idle rich"—who live solely off their interest and dividend income pay no taxes, or pay taxes only on the tiny fraction of their living they must devote to consumption? True, the money they have has already been taxed, and one of the most attractive aspects of the Armey proposal is that it will do away with the current system's appetite for doubly and triply taxing the very same dollar. Still, there's no question that these are the people who will benefit most from the institution of a flat tax. Are Republicans and conservatives really ready to defend the proposition that someone who gets $200,000 of interest and dividend income a year should pay no taxes, while a family of four making $60,000 is ponying up $4,500 a year to the feds?

What will happen to home prices if the mortgage interest deduction is eliminated? According to orthodox economic theory, houses will surely depreciate in value, perhaps as much as 15 or 20 percent. It's a great opportunity for first-time buyers, but those who happen to have substantial equity in homes will be hurt. They are voters. They are voting Republican these days. They have participated in the decades-long American commitment to the idea that home ownership is so desirable, the tax code must reflect its benefits. Can, or should, politicians be involved in a wholesale alteration of this deeply held belief? Should conservatives be rolling the dice like this with the economic fortunes of tens of millions of Americans?

What happens to charitable giving if people can't deduct their contributions? The theory goes that ensuing economic growth will result in more people having more to give, and Americans are traditionally generous. However, virtually all major charitable organizations are convinced this change will cripple them. And, once again, there has been a consensus for decades that there is value in expressing a national commitment to the idea of charity by having its virtue reflected in the tax code. That may be economically impure, but Americans cannot live by macroeconomics alone.

How much difference is there, really, between the current 1040EZ and a return that fits on a postcard? The complications of tax forms themselves will not be enough jus-

tification for a major overhaul of the system, complete with whatever unforeseen complications may ensue.

What happens in that final few months between the end of the income tax and the beginning of the consumption tax? The final quarter before the consumption tax takes effect ought to be a pretty good one for retailers, car dealers, boat salesmen, etc. (The next quarter or two might be a little more difficult.) What about people who crank up their credit cards to the limit to get in as much of next year's consumption in advance as they can? What will front-loaded consumption do to overall revenue, compared with projections?

Should the young and the old bear the burdens of a consumption tax because Americans don't save enough? People's consumption patterns vary with age. When you are just starting in the workplace, you are likely to devote a relatively high proportion of your income to consumption. Similarly, when you are old. These are therefore the people the system will tax most. Even those who don't like the whole concept of "fairness" as a basis of policy might find this unpalatable.

Are we ready for the end of non-cash benefits from business? Under the flat tax, businesses will no longer be able to deduct the cost of non-wage benefits for workers, such as health insurance premiums. Will businesses continue to offer insurance to workers? What will workers think about the possibility they won't?

And, ultimately, how will Republicans offer any sort of affirmative government policy without a politicized tax system? Since Republicans are, generally speaking, averse to spending public money in pursuit of conservative social engineering, they have usually pursued it by encouraging tax breaks to reward behavior of which they approve. Are they prepared to bid farewell to that strategy once and for all?

The visionary quality of the tax reform ideas is a mark of how deeply Republicans and conservatives have thought about these issues. The plans are brilliant, and perhaps they will result in a better system of taxation and government. But it is precisely the visionary aspect of these ideas that should give Archer, Armey, Lugar, and their fellow Republicans some pause.

After all, the first two years of the Clinton administration offer a dramatic cautionary tale of the risks of attempting to bring a policy vision to practical life without considering the politics of it first—the health-care catastrophe.

Bill Clinton campaigned on reforming the health-care system, and in the course of doing so made some rather grand promises about health coverage for all Americans, dramatic savings in both the federal budget and in overall health care expenditures, and so on.

Once elected, Clinton had myriad choices. He might have articulated his core goals and turned the matter over to Congress to work out the details of a plan. He might have submitted various pieces of legislation each aimed at addressing discrete problems. He might have drawn on reform proposals that Congress had already considered to some degree—in some instances, measures that Congress had already voted on—and gathered them into a single reform plan.

Or he might have decided to turn the matter over to his wife, allow her to work in secret for 10 months at the head of a task force with working groups numbering over 1,000 people, and then unveil the One True Plan for fundamental reform—a 1,400-page legislative behemoth outlining a hitherto unprecedented federal role in one-seventh of the U.S. economy.

The One True Clinton Plan was a brilliant and comprehensive overhaul of the health-care system, as well thought-out as the Republican tax reforms that would overhaul the system by which the government collects its revenue. A National Health Board was to establish a national, comprehensive benefits package. All employers were to pay for insurance. The national board was to set a level for total American health spending and enforce it. It would have been a criminal offense to seek care outside the system.

So Bill Clinton, having had success making health care an issue in 1992, proceeded to make his Health Security Act *the* issue in 1993. The result was devastating. The plan's elaborate, quasi-socialist mechanisms ran afoul of mounting popular sentiment against bureaucratic Washington-centered approaches to problems. "Universal coverage"—something Americans supported in the abstract—suddenly paled in importance compared with the loss of certain features of the current system that people had taken for granted (the right to choose their own doctors, for example).

It wasn't long before "Clinton plan" itself became a pejorative—enough even to discredit plans styled "Clinton Lite." At one point, the Democratic leadership of the House unveiled a new proposal that, on inspection, was little more than the Clinton plan with the "Clinton" removed in an attempt to enhance its political palatability. It was too late. If, as some Democrats said, "health insurance for all Americans that can never be taken away" was the final unfulfilled promise of the New Deal, it's lucky for FDR that he didn't have Ira Magaziner, Mrs. Clinton's task-force leader, on hand to assist him with the earlier promises.

The Democratic electoral disaster of 1994 had a number of causes, but it is hard to overestimate the role of the failure of the administration's health-care reform initiative. The Clinton plan brought the ideological premises of the party's agenda—centralized planning and control from a Washington presumed to know best how to meet people's needs—into the sharpest possible relief. And people recoiled from it.

Republican tax overhaul plans also offer an unvarnished view of the party's ideological premises. They are, to be sure, antithetical to those of the Democrats—and Republicans believe public opinion is moving their way. But health care reform à la Clinton and the leading GOP tax reform plans have this in common: They are radical and they are theoretical.

It's by no means clear how the real political world will react if confronted with a conservative effort—to avoid an oxymoron, we had better make that "a right-wing effort"—to implement a radical theory. But for all the talk among Republicans in Washington this year of a Revolution, it is very difficult to sustain the argument that the American people are *ever* very radical, especially when they are being asked to allow themselves to be herded down a path neither they nor anyone else has ever gone down before.

It may be that there are or will be elegant theoretical answers to all of the questions the various tax reforms raise and tidy theoretical solutions to the problems they pose. But if one or another of these plans or some variant becomes The Plan, the centerpiece of a GOP political agenda, the people asking the most pertinent questions—the questions that will determine political success or political failure—will not be theorists. They will be bitterly partisan political opponents. And highly motivated interest groups, many with livelihoods to protect. And ordinary people wondering, with the common-sense skepticism Republicans have long professed to admire, how these bold notions will affect them, their financial security, their families' well-being.

It need not be this way, of course. The tax code *is* too burdensome, the IRS too intrusive, top marginal rates too high, the disincentives to savings and capital formation too great, the marriage penalty a disgrace. And, of course, as Republicans well know, there are ways to address these matters—principally by rolling up the sleeves and legislating.

The Clinton health plan bespoke many, many late-night sessions whose main illumination came from the gleam in the eye of Hillary Rodham Clinton, Ira Magaziner, and their acolytes. They dazzled themselves with the beauty of their health-care machine, not knowing it was a Rube Goldberg contraption and bound to self-destruct. The question that ought to haunt Republicans as their tax-reform notions come to the fore of the national discussion is whether their visionary ideas may result in the same sort of explosive consequences. ♦

People Are Stupid, New Poll Reveals

By Andrew Ferguson

This is a country with Big Problems. But it is also a country with Big Tax-Exempt Foundations, and each year they underwrite the task forces and working groups and advisory committees that in turn produce the conferences and studies that tackle the Big Problems—the same problems, year after year. The mechanism for allocating the problems is mysterious but effective. If Pew Charitable Trust gets **How Negative Ads are Turning off the Voters**, then the Ford Foundation has to take **Alarming Number of Hours Children Will Spend Watching Television Before Age 18**. While the Twentieth Century Fund answers the question, **Low Voter Turnout: What Is To Be Done?**, the Rockefellers do **The Shrinking Soundbite in Network News Political Coverage**, then squeeze in **Troubling Consolidation of Media Outlets in a Handful of Powerful Corporations** if they can find the time.

Every once in a while, however, a foundation wins the Big Problem Lotto. A tip of the hat, then, to the Kettering Foundation of Ohio, which has taken on

The Final Frontier: Space Yes, NASA No

By Martin Sieff

A Saturn V rocket stands outside the Johnson Space Center in Houston. It should be lying at the bottom of the North Atlantic Ocean, its mission honorably accomplished, after propelling three Apollo astronauts to the moon. Instead, its hundreds-of-millions-of-dollars' price tag has served only to produce a towering sculpture testifying to the shortsightedness, confusion, and waste that has plagued America' s space program for the past quarter of a century. It is, says one NASA veteran, "an appalling sight."

Things are better now, we are told. The dark years of failed missions by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration are supposed to be past. NASA's flacks ballyhooed July's link-up of the space shuttle *Atlantis* with the Russian space station Mir as a new "finest hour" for their benighted agency. And NASA has been glowing in the reflected glory of Ron Howard's smash hit movie *Apollo 13*.

NASA Administrator Daniel Goldin, who has held that job since 1992, is supposedly untarnished by the bungles and confusions of the past. Goldin has worked hard to charm House Speaker Newt Gingrich, whose renowned suspicion of big-government bureaucracy is in this case offset by his visionary passion for the New Frontier.

Gingrich should think again. Beneath his fluent sales pitch, Goldin is no different from his predecessor, the hapless Richard Truly (NASA administrator from 1989 to 1992), a former shuttle astronaut who had to preside over the scandal of the shortsighted Hubble space telescope and the $980 million failed 1992-93 Mars Observer mission.

After over three years as a NASA administrator, Goldin has yet to start and complete a single mission. Instead, he has retreated to the soft, politically acceptable B-school buzzwords of "restructuring" and "management reform." You never heard that kind of talk from Chris Kraft, Gene Kranz, and the other great engineer-managers of NASA's glory days. What they wanted to do was build *real* rockets and spaceships.

Goldin continues to protect expensive and futile policies and to mask the NASA bureaucrats who have been working overtime to sabotage any private industrial or alternative government or military programs to their dangerous and immensely costly programs with a budget that has been running at $14 billion a year. He is defending NASA's two sacred cows of the past decade, continued reliance on the space shuttle and a commitment to build space station Alpha in low earth orbit in partnership with Russia and other countries.

The shuttle's defenders argue that since it resumed operations after the *Challenger* disaster, it has enjoyed an accident-free record, propelled more astronauts into space than any other launch system in history whether U.S. or Soviet-Russian, and launched an array of satellites for the scientific community and the military. They also point out that the U.S. shuttle fleet has maintained several manned launches and missions a year, sustaining a frequency of flights far beyond that of any other existing system. The shuttle, its defenders maintain, is a tried and reliable workhorse with a large payload that will be indispensable to carrying astronauts and components to assemble space station Alpha in orbit.

But the shuttle is an extremely dangerous and uneconomic launch program that has dramatically failed to deliver the results NASA promised. NASA said the shuttle fleet would carry out 60 manned space missions a year. It manages seven. NASA said the cost of each mission would drop to $15 million thanks to the reusable ships and boosters. NASA now admits each mission costs $415 million. Critics who factor in additional operating costs say the real price is around $1 billion per mission. NASA boasted that the shuttle was a quantum leap in technology beyond anything other space-faring nations would achieve for a generation. Instead, over the past 15 years, the U.S. share of the global commercial market for launching satellites into space has fallen from a virtual monopoly to a mere 30 percent market share. The main beneficiary of the U.S. slump has been the French Ariane launching system, which relies on simple "Big Dumb Boosters" (BDBs) of the kind that both the U.S. scientific community and the U.S. Air Force far prefer to the shuttle.

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A 1990 report by Congress's Office of Technology Assessment put the risk of another disaster comparable to the 1986 *Challenger* explosion at one in every 34 shuttle flights. And the cost of lifting a pound of payload into earth orbit on the shuttle is $6,000, compared with only $3,800 over 20 years ago using the big Saturn boosters of the Apollo program.

The basic shuttle design is now nearly 20 years old. The shuttle cannot stay in orbit more than a couple of weeks. It can operate only in low-earth orbit, a few hundred miles above the surface. Thus, even when it carries communications or reconnaissance satellites, which have to maintain their position in permanent orbit over the same geographical location on the earth, they must be launched a second time from the shuttle to reach their required geosynchronous orbit 22,000 miles out.

Dave Stevenson

When Norman Thagard became America's latest space hero in July by staying in space for 114 days, longer than any previous American astronaut, he had to do so by living in the Russian space station Mir. Twenty-two years ago, NASA could maintain three U.S. astronauts for a record-breaking 84 days in the Skylab 4 space station, which was nothing more than a converted stage of a Saturn V booster. But today's NASA could not remotely match that achievement, despite the $1 billion tag that goes with every shuttle launch. By contrast, even economically strapped Russia is still capable of routinely maintaining its cosmonauts in space for more than a year at a time, thus building up the crucial experience and data needed to develop the moon or go to Mars.

More than a decade ago, President Reagan launched the plan to build a new U.S. space station. Today, with over $2 billion spent on that project, not a single piece of hardware has been delivered for use in it, and the program has been folded into a joint enterprise with the Russians.

For that, NASA must depend on Russian goodwill. Not exactly the best bet in the coming years, given the uncertainty of Russia's political direction.

But while NASA's bureaucrats have continued to pour their billions of dollars into the endless sinkholes of the space shuttle and the space station Alpha, they have reserved their real energy and genius for shooting down far cheaper programs that would have worked using existing technologies.

In 1989, a NASA report claimed that a return to the moon would take at least 15 years. Lumping in a grandiose manned mission to Mars by 2018, estimates of the price tag ran to $4 billion, a time frame and cost from which Congress understandably fled. But few if any in the mainstream media seem to have bothered to ask why, with the vastly superior technology, precision, and computing power of the mid-1990s, it would take us 15 years to achieve what with the technologies of the 1960s we were able to achieve in a mere eight years, the time that passed from President John F. Kennedy's pledge to land a man on the moon within a decade to the fulfillment of that pledge on July 20, 1969.

There's no reason for it to take so long. It could be done for a fraction of the cost within five years, as the dramatic success of an unheralded lunar mapping program this decade has already demonstrated. But NASA has been actively and successfully seeking to smother applications of the latest technology by companies or government projects outside its control, and it has already frustrated the visionary space programs of the past two Republican presidents to protect its own vested interests.

President Reagan sought to revive the floundering space program with his own initiative that focused on building the highly practical Orbiter Transfer Vehicle , which could ferry payloads from the current generation of Low Earth Orbit space stations to the crucial 22,000-mile orbit where satellites can be placed in virtually eternal orbit over precise geographical locations on earth. But this initiative struggled with two implacable foes: the established bureaucrats of NASA and their close allies in Congress's Office of Technology Assessment. The office was run from 1979 to 1992

by John Gibbons, long an opponent of manned, deep-space flight and the Strategic Defense Initiative. Today, he is President Clinton's scientific adviser, director of the Office of Science and Technology in the White House, and a key Goldin ally. It is, as they say, a small world.

First to go, back during the Reagan administration, was the Orbital Transfer Vehicle. Had it been developed, it could have allowed a return to the moon, the rapid establishment of a lunar base, and the economically promising exploration and use of the moon's natural resources far sooner than the vague future NASA bureaucrats were leisurely dawdling towards. It also removed the vehicle's threat to NASA's status quo, which favored a continuing endless series of risky and prohibitively expensive shuttle missions and incremental progress toward a low-orbit space station in honeymoon with the Russians.

The 1986 *Challenger* disaster ought to have opened the space program to real innovation. But NASA rode out the storm and succeeded in averting any significant loss of clout or change in policy direction. As long as the destruction of the *Challenger* could be blamed on a single faulty O-ring design in one of the boosters, the broader questions of the system's failure to develop any significant space-faring or space manufacturing or lunar industrial capability could be safely smothered.

Challenger was followed by the 1987 Ride commission, headed by astronaut Sally Ride. Once again, NASA's bureaucratic skills were displayed. Ride, while an extremely able astronaut, was out of her depth when it came to drafting policy recommendations. The commission's report concluded that the United States could choose one of several options in space policy or put off the decision until later. And it was the last choice—always the first preference of any status quo bureaucrat with turf to protect—that was therefore followed. The Bush administration made a serious and sustained effort to breathe new life into the U.S. space program, but NASA managed to stymie that too.

On July 20, 1989, the 20th anniversary of the Apollo 11 lunar landing, President Bush announced his Space Exploration Initiative standing on the steps of the Air and Space Museum in Washington. The goals of the Bush initiative were simply stated. The United States would return to the moon and go on to attempt a manned expedition to Mars. It was an attempt to restore to NASA what sympathetic critics believed it had lacked since the glory days of Apollo: the inspiration and discipline of a simple, clear goal to be worked toward over a decade or more.

But the NASA of 1989 did not respond to President Bush's vision the ways the NASA of 1961 had responded to JFK's. Instead, it responded with the notorious "Ninety Day Report," which put the price tag of the Bush initiative at $400 billion. That effectively killed the whole project stone dead, which was just what NASA bureaucrats wanted. Congress zeroed out funding for the initiative two years in a row, in the 1991 and 1992 budgets.

The key architect of its scuttling was NASA administrator Truly, who saw the program as a threat to his beloved shuttle and Low Earth Orbit space platform (also known as Space Station Freedom, whose costs were already spiraling out of control).

Truly's empty bureaucratic victory should be contrasted with a brilliant achievement in space exploration NASA had almost nothing to do with. It involved a small, unheralded program that, with a total lack of fanfare, produced America's most significant space success since the *Voyager* and *Viking* missions of the 1970s. It was called *Clementine*, and was conceived of and run by the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization. The spacecraft was made and operated by personnel of the Naval Research Laboratory, and the mission was primarily a joint project of the Departments of Defense and Energy.

Clementine exploded the carefully nurtured myth that space exploration must be immensely costly, must be planned a decade or more in advance, and must be done through NASA or some other giant bureaucracy. NASA's contribution was limited to providing the Science Team some tracking from its deep space network and support for mission operations from the Goddard Flight Center. Nor did it require some dramatic new breakthrough in engineering or technological capability. The hardware used was almost all off-the-shelf stuff. "NASA likes to pretend that their Jet Propulsion Laboratory is the only place that can do inter-planetary exploration. We gave the lie to that," one *Clementine* engineer says.

The *Clementine* project was a program to map the surface of the moon in much more detail, including analysis of the geological composition of the lunar surface crust, than had ever been done before. It was masterminded not by any NASA or JPL veterans, but by a small group from President Reagan's much derided Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (later the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization).

The formal go-ahead for the program was given in January 1992. The Preliminary Design Review took place in May 1992. The Critical Design Review took place in November 1992. The mission was launched in

January 1994. The whole thing took a mere two years after formal conception, with a surplus Air Force Titan II decommissioned intercontinental ballistic missile serving as its booster. (There are plenty to spare. The Air Force has 40 of them.) The total cost, including the Titan II, was $80 million, 8 percent of the cost of a single shuttle mission. The mission was a success. In two months, it mapped the entire surface of the moon in greater detail than had ever before been achieved. It was completed on schedule and under budget.

The cheap, cost-effective achievement of *Clementine* was a devastating indictment of NASA. The contrast between the harvest of real scientific achievement gathered by *Clementine* and the empty promotionalism of the spin doctors was stark. And that was why NASA tried to bury it. NASA canceled a major press conference in which the *Clementine* team was to announce its initial findings.

But we have now entered an era when the downsizing and ruthless cost cutting long demanded of private industry is being demanded of big government. Congress must not exempt NASA—the agency with perhaps the longest sustained record of incompetence in the federal government. NASA must not be allowed to continue its shameful manipulation of popular opinion and public purse strings. It has long been an albatross around the necks of the U.S. scientific and defense communities alike. It is time for Congress to stop zeroing out visionary programs like the Space Exploration Initiative or systems like the Orbital Transfer Vehicle. It is time, instead, to zero out the bureaucratic monster that strangled them at birth. It is time for Congress to zero out NASA. ♦

The Christian Coalition Nobody Knows

By Stephen Bates

In his 1925 book *The Man Nobody Knows*, ad man Bruce Barton repositioned that timeworn product, Jesus of Nazareth. Decrying the "sissified" paintings of a "pale young man with flabby forearms," Barton depicted a Savior who was strapping and suave, a public relations master and a sagacious executive, a riveting storyteller and "the most popular dinner guest in Jerusalem." The book became a bestseller, and hundreds of businessmen wrote to thank the author for having dispelled the alien, irrelevant figure of Sunday sermons. Barton had succeeded in crafting a Jesus capable of inspiring that other preeminent figure of 1920s literature, George Follansbee Babbitt.

Seventy years later, we're witnessing a transformation no less audacious than Barton's—and potentially as problematic. The major architects are, like Barton, members of the Christian laity with a firm grasp on the tastes of their times. Just as Barton sought to introduce Jesus to mainstream corporate culture, these 1990s impresarios are working to bring the Christian right into mainstream political culture. And, as last weekend's Christian Coalition convention demonstrated, they seem to be succeeding. Their accomplishments may well transfigure American politics in 1996 and beyond.

Yet this repositioning is risky. The effort may fail, conceivably leaving the Christian right in tatters. Or, perhaps worse, the effort may succeed in cleansing the movement's public image, but only by wiping away every trace of its scriptural authority. A moderate, poll-driven religious right may prove no more Christian than Bruce Barton's executive-suite Jesus.

Much has changed since the modern Christian right emerged in 1980. Back then, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and other leaders injected jarringly religious and often exclusionary concepts into public life. Even when Falwell et al. did couch their policy positions in secular language, the opposition often tripped them up by publicizing their nonsecular pulpit exhortations. Robertson tried to run for president as a media mogul who just happened to be a Christian, but People

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for the American Way wouldn't let voters forget his boast of having redirected a hurricane with prayer. While unremarkable on *The 700 Club*, this was the sort of assertion that raised eyebrows on *Meet the Press*.

The Christian right of the 1990s bears little resemblance to the force that spooked so many people (especially journalists) in the 1980s. Today's high-profile Christian activists have mastered the grammar of secular politics. Now they complain about "political correctness" instead of "secular humanism"—a crossover target instead of a Christians-only one. (Christian Coalition executive director Ralph Reed titled his book *Politically Incorrect*.) They say they want "a place at the table," not a Christian takeover. (*A Place at the Table* was reportedly the working title of Reed's book, but gay critic Bruce Bawer used it first.) Instead of condemning failed surgeon general nominee Henry Foster as a godless baby killer, they speak of him as "outside the mainstream of American culture." They talk more about the First Amendment than the First Commandment, more about anti-Christian bigotry than anti-Christian conspiracies, more about immoral taxation than immoral sexuality, more about the ecumenical-sounding "people of faith" than God-fearing Christians.

Instead of lugging Scripture into the political sphere, today's activists cart polling data. After the 1992 elections, the Christian Coalition sponsored a survey to help it sculpt a more moderate image. The Coalition's Contract with the American Family, unveiled in May, was market-tested by Frank Luntz, the same pollster who had pre-tested Newt Gingrich's Contract with America. Both contracts included only items with at least 60 percent popular support. "We don't have to pretend to be mainstream," Reed told *USA Today* earlier this month. "We are mainstream."

The Christian right has also appropriated buzzwords of the left: empowerment, tolerance, equality, community, choice. ("Our words," a former People for the American Way official told me, half-seriously.) James Dobson of Focus on the Family uses the feminist slogan "pornography is the theory; rape is the practice." The Family Research Council lifted another feminist phrase when it said the Henry Foster nomination proves that the Clinton administration "just doesn't get it." Addressing the Christian Coalition conference, former Pennsylvania Gov. Robert Casey called abortion "the most chauvinistic exploitation of women in the history of the United States."

Movement leaders routinely liken their effort to the civil rights struggle. "We will ride in the back of the bus no longer!" Reed declared as he opened the Coalition's conference on Sept. 8. Attendees later received wallet-sized copies of a faith pledge originally used by Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference. "If we make this pledge our pledge, we can change America," said Reed.

Though the Christian right sometimes condemns identity politics, victimization, and multiculturalism, it simultaneously tries to use them as footholds toward enhanced legitimacy, as when it portrays conservative Christians as yet another downtrodden, underappreciated American tribe. That's why movement leaders cherish those "taunts and insults" (in Reed's words) that periodically seep into mainstream media outlets, like the *Washington Post*'s 1993 observation that people who follow televangelists tend to be "poor, uneducated and easy to command"—a favorite at the conference.

As an example of the rhetorical shifts of the nineties, consider school prayer. Whereas conservative Christians once argued that classroom prayer quite properly reflects the nation's religious heritage, now they argue that it advances students' freedom of speech. They no longer want state-written or -selected prayers. Instead, they seek an amendment guaranteeing freedom of religious speech in public schools and other official settings—a way to keep schoolchildren and others from being "discriminated against just for expressing their religious belief in a public place," Reed has said.

In making the case for this amendment, activists no longer condemn the Supreme Court's prayer cases of the early 1960s. Instead, curiously, they laud the Court's 1969 free-speech case *Tinker* v. *Des Moines School District*. In *Tinker*, the justices ruled that high school officials must have a particularly strong justification before abridging students' free speech, which included the right to wear a black armband in protest of the Vietnam War.

Tinker represents a melange of ingredients that conservatives ordinarily abhor: judicial meddling with local decisions; interference with order and discipline in public schools; the raucous antiwar movement; children's autonomous rights (the topic of articles that dogged Hillary Rodham Clinton in 1992); and symbolic speech (in declaring a First Amendment right to burn the American flag in 1989, the Court cited *Tinker* as precedent). But for all that, *Tinker* offers a way to shift the debate from whether prayer coerces nonbelievers to whether limits on prayer coerce *believers*—thereby, advocates hope, forcing liberal opponents of school prayer to fess up to censorship.

Style as well as rhetoric has changed. Today's activists ooze the aw-shucks humility of Jefferson Smith

from *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, not the hectoring hellfire of Elmer Gantry. The Christian Coalition's Contract represents ten suggestions, Reed amiably assured reporters, not—shudder!—any sort of Ten Commandments. Movement leaders of the 1990s rarely resort to the coarse Christian-nation talk of the 80s (though some 80s leaders, including Falwell, still use it).

The new diffidence results partly from the fact that clergy no longer dominate the public face of the movement. Falwell, Tim LaHaye, and other 80s figures have left center stage. Donald Wildmon, the preacher who heads the American Family Association, has opted against courting national publicity (the fact that he's based in Tupelo, Miss., also helps keep TV crews away from his door). Most significantly, Robertson has lowered his profile in the secular press. When the Christian Coalition unveiled its Contract, he was in Zaire. With reason: According to a 1993 poll of Republican voters, Robertson has the highest negatives of any prominent Republican. Another survey found that white southern Republicans, though they feel warmly toward "Christian fundamentalists," virtually loathe Robertson; he scores below unions, civil rights leaders, and "women's liberation," and only slightly ahead of liberals.

But Robertson himself has hardly stood still over the years; in fact, he may be the leading indicator of the Christian right's evolution, as two of his books illustrate. The Old Robertson opens 1991's *The New World Order* by announcing that the just-completed coup against Gorbachev was a sham to make the West drop its guard. "We want so desperately to live in a peaceful world that we will accept virtually any fraud which offers that hope," he fumes. The book's index is chockablock with far-right bogeymen: Illuminati, Freemasonry, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Humanist Manifestos, and an assortment of Rockefellers (including "President Rockefeller," namely Senator Jay of West Virginia, who, the text reveals, "has been tapped by the elite to bring us that much closer to world government in 1996"). These topics make no appearance in the New Robertson's *The Turning Tide*, published in 1993. Instead, it features index entries for intolerance, political correctness, culture wars, and "victimism," as well as a positively serene opening sentence: "This is a book about common sense and hope."

In American public life, one cannot overstate the importance of maintaining at least a facade of religious tolerance. "The rule is," syndicated columnist Miss Manners advises, "that one does not denigrate others' faith by declaring that what they believe is not true." In his 1978 book *No Offense*, sociologist John Murray Cuddihy asks why Protestants abandoned their mission to convert Jews to Christianity. "Not because Christ and Paul had not commanded it (they had); not because it was false to Christianity (it was of its essence); but because of appearances: It was in bad taste."

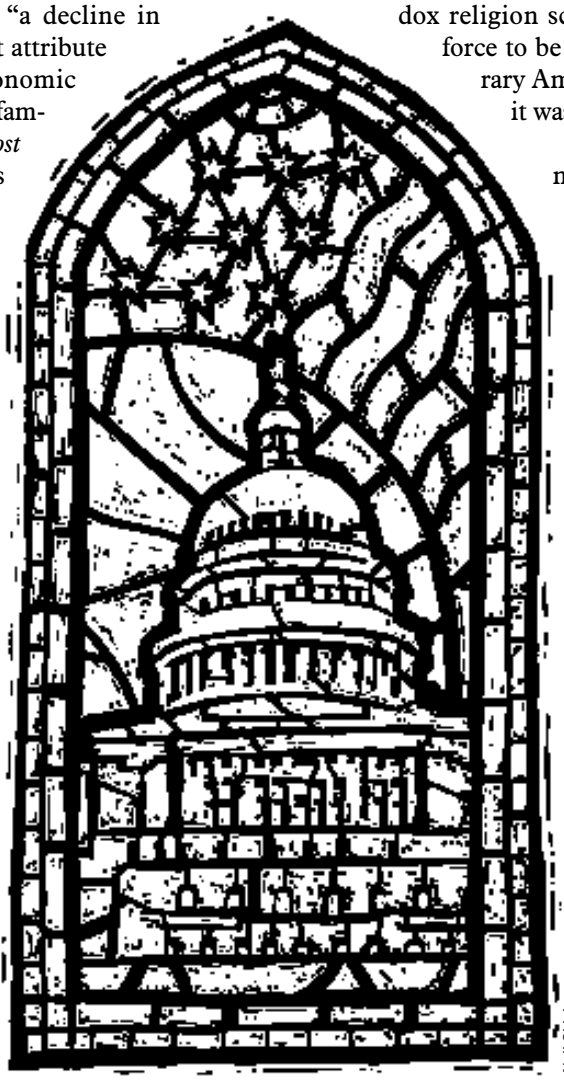
This code of religious civility—Cuddihy terms it the Protestant etiquette—eluded the Christian right of the 1980s. Declaring that Jews are bound for hell may seem "unkind, unfair, unloving," evangelist James Robison said in 1980, but "it's still God's truth." In a 1994 essay, Clyde Wilcox argues that the Moral Majority failed because its Baptist Bible Fellowship leaders distrusted potential allies of other faiths. One midwestern chapter, he notes, asked candidates for office whether they believed salvation was assured by works, faith, or some other means. In Wilcox's words, "the Moral Majority impaled itself on its own religious particularism."

To a remarkable degree, the Christian right of the 1990s has eliminated at least the public manifestations of boorish bigotry and other uncivil religion. The leaders these days quickly and noisily disavow the excesses of extremists who claim to be on their side, such as the murderers of abortion providers. Addressing the Anti-Defamation League earlier this year, Reed insisted that the Christian Coalition seeks goals no rational person could fear: "A nation where the separation of church and state is complete and inviolable. Where any person may run for elective office without where they attend church or synagogue ever becoming an issue. A nation where no child of any faith is forced by government to recite a prayer with which they disagree." *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich said of this peroration: "Add five words ('Today I am a man'), and Mr. Reed's oration would be a credit to any bar mitzvah."

Reed is not alone in displaying a domesticated demeanor. In his 1994 book *Healing America's Wounds*, the popular evangelical author John Dawson emphasizes, "Absolute truth about God can be communicated by very tolerant people. Jesus is the supreme example of this." Earlier this year, National Association of Evangelicals president Don Argue chided some Christian activists for "violat[ing] Jesus's command to love their enemies and do good to those who persecute them." In a recent pamphlet, Rutherford Institute president John Whitehead offers a temporal, even therapeutic reason for treating one's enemies civilly: "A Christian who appears angry and belligerent loses

the political cover that comes from being a genuinely caring person."

Along with the leaders' own adeptness, other factors are enabling the movement, in Reed's words, to put "a friendlier face on who we are." Though they may disagree about the solutions, Christian right activists are addressing concerns shared by many Americans. A 1994 Peter Hart poll found that 51 percent of Americans believe that the nation's most serious problems stem mainly from "a decline in moral values"; only 34 percent attribute the problems mainly to "economic and financial pressures on the family." In his new book, *The Lost City*, Alan Ehrenhalt writes wistfully about some of the changes in American life since the 1950s: "The suspicion of authority has meant the erosion of standards of conduct and civility. . . . The repudiation of sin has given us a collection of wrongdoers who insist that they are not responsible for their actions because they have been dealt bad cards in life. When we declare that there are no sinners, we are a step away from deciding that there is no such thing as right and wrong."



Neil Shigley

Though no particular fan of the Christian right or its policies (he blames unfettered capitalism for much of the dissolution of community), Ehrenhalt echoes the movement's diagnosis of the nation's ills. Similar themes run through two other new books by scholars outside the Christian right, David Gelernter's elegiac *1939: The Lost World of the Fair* ("authority has all but vanished," he writes) and Francis Fukuyama's paean to churches and other "mediating institutions" between individual and state, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*.

No longer are fundamentalist Christians alone in mourning religion's disappearance from the foreground of American life. Yale Law Professor Stephen Carter's *The Culture of Disbelief*, which Reed frequently quotes, contends that our mass media treat religion as little more than "a troubling curiosity." In *The Revolt of the Elites*, the late Christopher Lasch derides the "new elites" who perceive fundamentalist Christians (and other denizens of Middle America) as "at once absurd and vaguely menacing—not because they wish to overthrow the old order but precisely because their defense of it appears so deeply irrational." In a 1994 essay, John Updike observes with surprise that "orthodox religion scarcely figures at all, even as a force to be reacted against," in contemporary American fiction; as Updike notes, it was not always so.

The Christian right's opponents have simultaneously grown more temperate. In a memo last year, Arthur Kropp, the late president of People for the American Way, urged leaders of other liberal organizations to swear off such terms as " 'flat-earthers,''fire-breathers,' 'witch-doctors,' or any of a host of epithets that belittle the religious faith of the movement's leaders or followers." Further, Kropp noted, "We have to be careful never to suggest that they're not welcome to participate in the process. . . . It's the rest of us who are at fault on this score for not rallying our own constituency." It was a big step for the organization that a few years earlier had railed about "Ayatollahs" of the religious right.

On a limited but noteworthy scale, too, Christian right activists and their opponents are participating in cordial dialogues. For more than a year, Ron Brandt, editor of the magazine *Educational Leadership* and a self-described Stevenson liberal, has been quietly bringing together representatives of education groups and representatives of Christian right groups. The meetings seek both to find points of agreement and to adopt civil language for airing the disagreements that endure. (The effort has its critics: Some Christian activists fear that their representatives are selling out to the enemy; on the other side, educa-

tion writer George Kaplan likens Brandt to Neville Chamberlain.)

In all these respects, a savvier Christian right is exploiting a more auspicious political environment. Its considerable success is reflected in the early maneuvering for the 1996 Republican nomination. Pat Buchanan, Bob Dornan, and Alan Keyes identify wholeheartedly with the movement; Buchanan goes so far as to needle the Christian Coalition's Contract with the American Family for unbecoming moderation ("they've lowered the hurdle so that everyone this side of Arlen Specter can jump over it"). Phil Gramm stumbled at first, brushing off Christian right leaders who wanted him to address cultural concerns ("I ain't running for preacher"), but then delivered a moralistic anti-government speech at Falwell's Liberty University. While Gramm declaimed on the righteousness of the free market, Bob Dole achieved greater success by condemning the depravity of particular marketplace decisions—those of Time Warner executives. Dole and his wife also left their Methodist church after syndicated columnist Cal Thomas chided them for belonging to the same liberal parish as the Clintons; the Doles began visiting evangelical churches. And Arlen Specter has positioned himself as the candidate courageous enough to stand up to the Christian right. "My brand of gutsiness is a little special," he preens.

On the other side, President Clinton has repeatedly tried to reach out to conservative Christians. His 1995 State of the Union address included both a salute to "our religious leaders" and a Dole-like reference to "the damage that comes from the incessant, repetitive, mindless violence and irresponsible conduct that permeate our media all the time." In July, the president endorsed the V-chip and, in the same week, instructed the Department of Education to clarify the legitimate role of religion in public schools. His remarks about classroom religion, in fact, could have come from Ralph Reed: "Wherever and whenever the religious rights of children are threatened or suppressed, we must move quickly to correct it. We want to make it easier and more acceptable for people to express and to celebrate their faith." In an interview early this year, Clinton suggested that truly discerning Christians ought to stand with him because, compared with leaders of the religious right, he is "much more humble in his Christian faith."

For now, the Christian right seems to have secured its place at the table, but it may end up banished to the kitchen before election day 1996. Three related risks seem particularly acute. A la Richard Nixon's 1952 campaign themes (communism, corruption, and Korea), they are Christianity, coalitions, and kooks.

Christianity: It takes more than divergent faith traditions to explain the gulf between Martin Luther's "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise" and Reed's poll-driven Contract with the American Family. In a 1993 *Policy Review* article, Reed wrote that he was emulating the Apostle Paul, who spoke of becoming "all things to all people that I may by all means win some." To some in the movement, however, Reed's politesse is a sellout, even an unscriptural one (Paul notwithstanding). They believe that while the Christian right of the 1980s may have brought too much religious absolutism into politics, the movement of the 1990s is bringing too little. Many of these critics would agree with Cuddihy, who also cites Paul: "In the end, then, there may be faith, hope, and charity, but if—as the apostle says—the greatest of these is charity, charity will end by devouring truth."

Perhaps the Christian right will ultimately transcend the transcendent and settle in the secular realm. Some indications are already apparent, such as activists' increasing self-description as part of the "pro-family movement" (Reed has even argued that "religious right" is a pejorative). The "Christian" in Christian Coalition may become as empty as it already is in YMCA. Reportedly, though, Robertson vetoed "pro-family" and such phrases when choosing a name for his organization. "I am a Christian," he said, according to a 1993 *Playboy* article. "I am not ashamed of Jesus. And we will call this the Christian Coalition. If other people don't like it, that's just tough luck." The organization may end up with the worst of both worlds, a secular agenda that's off-putting to some fellow believers and a religious name that's off-putting to some outsiders.

Coalitions: This dispute over Christianity's role in the movement has exacerbated existing fault lines, particularly over abortion. Reed, though he has threatened that conservative Christians may abandon the Republican Party if the '96 ticket includes a pro-choice candidate, has also worked to find an alternative to the GOP platform's support for a Human Life Amendment. John Whitehead of the Rutherford Institute told me he considers Reed's dance around abortion "a little bit unethical."

If the Republican presidential nominee picks a pro-choice running mate, the Christian right could fragment. Moderates like Reed would be inclined to back the ticket anyway, especially if the platform remains pro-life and the running mate keeps his (or her) peace. Others would bolt to a pro-life third party, a possibility that Pat Buchanan, Howard Phillips of the

U.S. Taxpayers Party, and others have spoken of. Still others would stay home on election day, exasperated.

In addition to retarding the Christian right's efforts to join the mainstream, such a development could only help the Democrats retain the White House.

Kooks: Michael Fortier, charged as a co-conspirator in the Oklahoma City bombing, broods about the New World Order that's paving the way for a United Nations takeover of the United States. Imagine the hoopla if it turns out that Fortier's bookshelf includes, alongside the terrorism handbook *The Turner Diaries*, a well-thumbed copy of Robertson's febrile *New World Order*.

The conspiratorial mindset evident in the Old Robertson's writings flows in part from theology. Scriptural literalists like Robertson detect conspiracy-oriented prophecies in the Book of Revelations; in addition, of course, they believe that a conspiracy led to their Savior's crucifixion. One could advance a multiculturalist argument for tolerating such beliefs in public life, but it probably wouldn't fly. Psychiatrist Thomas Szasz once observed that if you talk to God, you are called "religious," whereas if God talks to you, you are called "schizophrenic." In the same way, we respect, or at least disregard, asserted beliefs in private, churchly, and ancient matters—the power of prayer, the transubstantiation of wine into the blood of Jesus, 2,000-year-old miracles. But we look askance at religious beliefs that spill out into the public, contemporary, empirical world, including conspiracy theories.

The conspiracy notions and other beyond-the-fringe beliefs may get plenty of play in the 1996 campaign. Democrats will try to make the Republican nominee renounce conservative extremists, including the militia activists who echo Christian right rhetoric. Rep. Charles E. Schumer offered an alliterative preview a few weeks ago: "Many in the Republican Party have become mealy-mouthed mollifiers of militias." Such efforts may forestall the Christian right's efforts to win a permanent place at the table, especially if militia types spill any more blood.

Whatever missteps and misfortunes may bedevil the movement during the '96 campaign, though, don't count it out over the long run. "With the demise of Robertson's campaign came the death of the Christian right's political hopes," Michael D'Antonio wrote in his otherwise-fine 1989 book *Fall from Grace*. Five years later, the movement's political hopes are stronger than ever. "For Christians," as Ralph Reed said after Clinton's victory in 1992, "without a crucifixion there is no resurrection." ♦

The Horror of R.L. Stine

By Diana West

Here's an unlikely front in the culture war: a land where divorce is unusual, lawns are meticulously tended, and children go to schools that are impervious to drugs, condoms, and multiculturalism. In this homogenous suburbia, nobody cusses and rec rooms abound. Homosexuality is non-existent, incest unthinkable. This is the literary universe of juvenile horror writer R.L. Stine, the best-selling writer in America—and it may be the most dangerous place in America.

Every month, 1.25 million children buy into Stine's world, the peaceful neighborhoods where youngsters live in jeopardy, helpless against an assortment of evils. Stine's older readers (9-14) thrill to the homicidal houses and jealous teenagers of the Fear Street collections. For the very young (ages 8-12), there are the malicious puppets and robotic camp counselors of the Goosebumps series. Each slim, large-print Goosebumps release predictably surges to the top of the bestseller lists, outselling the John Grishams and Anne Rices of the moment. On a given week this summer, Stine had as many as seven of the nation's 50 top-selling books, and as many as 15 of the top 150. At this rate, it's no wonder he has 90 million books in print.

And no wonder the 52-year-old author has transformed the world of publishing. The children's department in any bookstore tells the story. Under the broad "young adult" banner, scattered copies of *Kidnapped*, *The Yearling*, or *White Fang* may suggest familiar territory, but the section is otherwise unrecognizable, dominated by shelf upon tightly packed shelf of horror books, their covers reminiscent of the lurid slasher-movie posters of the late 1970s to mid 1980s—novels, trilogies, and series without end. The popularity of Stine has inspired a host of competitors and imitators—Diane Hoh (of the Nightmare Hall series), Richie Tankersley Cusick and Nicholas Pine (Terror Academy) among them. It has also propelled a once-seedy sideline of children's publishing into the market's mainstream.

This phenomenon is more than a matter of bringing new tricks to old pulp. From the boundless word-processing capacities of Stine and Co. comes a new genre: shock fiction for the young. In this literary landscape, narrative exists solely to support a series of shocks occurring at absurdly frequent intervals. Push-button characters serve as disposable inserts to advance the narrative, shock to shock.

For example, three pages after "Corky let out a horrified wail when she saw the bright red gush of blood spurting up from Rochelle's neck," we find that "Bobbi had been trapped in the shower room. Somehow, the doors had shut and she'd been locked inside. Then scalding hot water shot out of the showers. Unable to escape, Bobbi had suffocated in the boiling steam. Murdered. Murdered by the evil."

In this particular Stine, a Fear Street Super Chiller titled *Cheerleaders: The New Evil* (not to be confused with *The First Evil*, *The Second Evil*, and *The Third Evil*), shocks abound at intervals of no more than 12 pages, as lithe, teenage girls are incapacitated, variously, by confetti-cannon backfire, immolation, drowning, a bus crash, and, most memorably, a backflipping fit requiring hospitalization ("Lena tossed her head back—her eyes rolling around frantically—and uttered scream after scream"). The convulsing coed is barely strapped to a gurney when Stine comes through with this (incidentally, far from climactic) bit of carnage:

> The Tigers coach lay with his arms stretched out. The neck of an enormous green water bottle from a cooler had been shoved into his mouth.
>
> The huge bottle rested on his face. Empty.
>
> The water had all drained out into his body, Corky saw.
>
> The coach had drowned. His belly and chest were bloated. Like a big water balloon.
>
> What have we done? Corky thought, turning her head away.

Good question. Shock fiction launches a beginning reader, pinball style, into a vapid quest for actual physical gratification, a bodily experience of accelerated pulse rates and queasy stomachs. The desired effect is something scientists call the "fight-or-flight" response, in which hormones surge and the blood pressure rises as a stress-induced panic takes over the autonomic nervous system.

The sensation, of course, can be strangely pleasurable. As one 10-year-old girl, a veteran of 40 Stine titles, put it to a Canadian newspaper, "I like how the creepy feelings and shivers go through your body." And so, reading becomes a crude tool of physical stimulation, wholly devoid of mental, emotional, or spiritual engagement.

Does that sound like a working definition of pornography? This certainly is a disquieting thought. But after immersing myself in this

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murky genre (30 books in all), I could not help but perceive an unmistakably pornographic pattern of means and ends. As graphic, horrific, and exciting as Edgar Allan Poe's stories may be, for example, the act of reading them requires a mental engagement with language, with character, with the author's interpretation of events that transforms the action and elevates it above the cheap thrills of a rap sheet. But in shock fiction, a raw catalogue of horrors and grotesqueries is used—not interpreted, not stylized, not in any way transformed by a writer for good or bad—to charge the nerve endings of young readers. In less than deathless (indeed, less than grammatical) prose, shock writers deliver fix after blunt fix to shock (in other words, satisfy) their audience.

It doesn't always take much; after all, a lot of blood goes a long way, as in this excerpt from *Broken Hearts* from the series Fear Street Super Chiller:

> He stared at the bloody wound in her side. Stared at the puddle of blood at his feet.
> *Erica*.
> The girl was Erica.
> He huddled over Erica, staring at the stab wound.
> The blood red swirls floated angrily in Dave's eyes. Blinding him.
> Suffocating him.
> So much blood.
> Poor Erica.
> Such a big, red wound. And so much blood.
> Puddles and pools.
> Such an angry, angry red . . .

Of course, shock readers can't live by blood alone, even puddles and pools of it. Subsequent Stine narratives combine hot tar, boiling grease, and chunky vomit to great effect. Note that Stine refrains from sexual stimulation. Not only that but, as Stine has told the *New York Times*, "I don't do drugs. I don't do child abuse. I don't really ever do divorce." Stine says he prefers to traffic in what he calls "safe scares." This is true enough of his books for younger readers, with their false alarms and improbable monsters. As for his fare for older readers, maybe jealous teens with homicidal tendencies, supernaturally-stalked babysitters, and spirit-murdered younger brothers are, by some strange measure, safer, more wholesome subject matter than child abuse. Then again, so what? (Thankfully, no shock fiction writer is, as yet, telling tales of child abuse.) If Stine's pledge of restraint would seem to lift him a cut above his smuttier and more lurid competitors, such as Christopher Pike and Eric Weiner, the distinction is ultimately academic. Whether sexual, deviant, or just plain violent, the aim of all shock fiction is the same: to set off a bodily response which debases the act of reading—and, more important, the reader himself.

Most parents (who are, after all, the financial power behind the phenomenon) react with a myopic joy that their children are reading anything at all. "I'm thrilled," 11-year-old Bill's mother told the now-defunct *New York Newsday*. "He's literally reading a book a day. He always says, 'Just a few more pages,' when it's time to go to bed. He devours [them]."

Other mothers, perplexed by the repellent nature of the books, go along with them anyway. "They just weren't my choice of subject matter," 9-year-old Tommy's mother told the same *Newsday* reporter. "But I'm happy he's reading. If he wasn't reading this, he wouldn't be reading anything at all. Now he's at the point where he's constantly reading. He's fixated on horror."

Poor ladies. There they are, clinging to the hope that their children's enthusiasm for Stine will spread to, say, Henry James and his foray into horror fiction, *The Turn of the Screw*. Not likely. Even where such non-literate pursuits as baseball card statistics and comic books may lead to more literary endeavors, shock fiction would seem to be a retarding, pre-literate experience. Will Bill and Tommy's demands for sensational incident bar them from the great literary voyages of growth and discovery? Will they graduate from shock schlock to the best that's been thought and said? Are you kidding? It's doubtful that they will be able to go cover-to-cover with Dick Francis.

The Stine craze has its roots in 1986, when the erstwhile editor and humor writer at Scholastic Books (which now publishes Goosebumps) took a tip from a former colleague and produced his first work of shock fiction, *The Blind Date*. His initial, if unexpected, success led to the 1989 launch of Fear Street, the seminal shock series for 9-year-olds-and-up about the gruesome things that befall Fear Street's hapless residents. Five more Stine lines have followed onto Simon and Schuster's Archway Books list, all set in the town of Shadyside, through which the eponymous Fear Street runs. Including a smattering of uncollected shock novels, the Stine oeuvre now edges close to 60 books. And that doesn't include the 35 slim installments of Goosebumps.

Where Fear Street brought Stine to an already viable youth horror market, the 1992 debut of Goosebumps marked the first time a writer had ventured to define such literary deviancy down to the level of 8-year-olds—persons still considered, so they say, to be of a tender age. Granted, in Goosebumps Stine truncates the voluminous detail of the Fear Street books, and the body count is actually negligible. Of the two deaths I came across in my Stine sampling, one occurs in *Say Cheese and Die* (#4 in the series), in which an evil scientist dies of fright after his picture is taken with an equally evil camera. Here's the description: "Eyes bulged out, the mouth in a twisted O of terror,

the face stared up at them. Frozen. Dead."

To meet the thrill-per-chapter quota in Goosebumps, Stine tends to ring false alarms, early and often: Someone plays dead at the end of one chapter, for example, only to rise again in the next. Hysterics are common, if often unwarranted. A character will strike a pose of terror at what a turn of the page reveals to be . . . nothing, which may be uproarious to youngsters still tickled by knock-knock jokes. One of Stine's more effective tricks is the dream sequence, featuring some of the most menacing Goosebumps passages, as in the following excerpt from *The Scarecrow Walks at Midnight* (# 20):

> "Grandpa—*please*—*no*!" I shrieked as he lowered his straw arms toward me.
>
> He bared his teeth like an angry dog and let out a sharp, frightening growl.
>
> The straw hands reached down for me.
>
> Grandpa Kurt's face was the same. The face I had always known. Except that his eyes were so cold, so cold and dead. . . .
>
> His cold eyes narrowed in fury as he reached for me again.
>
> "Noooo!"

Wonder what happens? Let's just say Grandma Miriam is no bargain either. By the following chapter, the little dreamer has awakened, having successfully boosted the pulses of wee readers. In this way, Goosebumps is able to produce the same result as Fear Street: reading as a glandular activity.

No wonder 12-year-old Lucy Dark, heroine of *The Girl Who Cried Monster* (#8), can't get through *Huckleberry Finn*. "I thought I'd read some of the scary mystery novels that all my friends are reading," she laments. "But no way. Mr. Mortman insists on everyone reading 'classics.' He means old books." When asked what she liked best about the book, she answers: "the description." (This is a joke.)

William Bramhall

R.L. Stine

Although *Frankenstein* is more to her liking, she can't finish it either: "I kind of expected more action," she says.

More is on the way, as shocks-for-tots teeters on the brink of a boom beyond Stine. A slew of copycat series will debut this fall, among them Spooksville by Christopher Pike. (Pike actually begat the genre in its new form, and must have watched in some horror as his star was eclipsed.) In the meantime, Stine's brand-name fame has already launched a companion series to Goosebumps, called R.L. Stine's Ghosts of Fear Street. (Stine is now such an institution that he isn't actually writing these books at all.) Noticeably more horrifying than Goosebumps, particularly the more recent numbers, this baby Fear Street competes by—what else?—intensifying the horror experience.

The result is anything but the growth and personal discovery of the young reader, which have ever been the markers of the best young adult fare, whether they be stories of horror, adventure, or romance. To be fair, Stine makes no claim to such greatness—or even goodness, for that matter. But because his brand of literary junk food has become a bookshelf staple to millions of young readers, some comparison with the books of the past is inevitable, not in terms of art or craft (which would be unfair) but rather in terms of theme and purpose.

In works ranging from *Grimm's Fairy Tales* to *Huckleberry Finn* to Booth Tarkington's seminal coming-of-age novel *Seventeen*, childhood and adolescence have been seen as a journey, a passage to adulthood. Moments of truth, phases of growth, discoveries of a wider world all transform the characters and enrich the readers, young and, in the best works, old. Not so in

shock fiction, where there is no journey, and there certainly is no adulthood. Instead, immature characters flail in a stultifying realm of perpetual adolescence where hormonally fraught concerns exist forever out of context. Boyfriends frustrate girlfriends, brothers are unpleasant to their sisters, parents are props, voices scream, blood flows. And nothing ever changes. That is perhaps the biggest and saddest change of all. Ironically, as shock fiction has come to dominate the young adult genre, it has neutered it.

But, hey; relax. Kids need some beach junk of no value to read, don't they? Emphatically, no, children need no such thing. There are too many treasured books out there—deep and satisfying entertainments, from *The Wind in the Willows* to *Charlotte's Web*, from *The Call of the Wild* to *Ramona* to *The Once and Future King*, whose enduring value and appeal are unquestionable for the simple fact that they *do* endure. Instead, Stine's audience is being encouraged at a critical age to engage in literary pursuits devoid of content, crammed with shock.

Ours is, after all, a shock culture, all sensation and no feeling. A numbness paralyzes the arts, high and low, pretentious and proletarian, from the work of the supplicating grantees of government largesse to that of the plutocrats of rock and rap. Is it any surprise to see this trend reflected in children's books? Just as crimes against children still wound a numbed populace, so too should shock fiction, for its role in desensitizing the very young, stunting the life of the mind before it has even begun.

A cruel turn of the screw, indeed. ♦

Books

The End of Relativism

By Glenn C. Loury

Dinesh D'Souza is sure to generate controversy with his new book, *The End of Racism: Principles for a Multiracial Society* (Free Press, 724 pages, $30). His dismissive attack on "liberal antiracism" will drive civil rights advocates and their political sympathizers to apoplexy. It will be denounced as a dangerously racist tract by every Afrocentrist demagogue still able to draw a crowd.

The publisher's publicity calls *The End of Racism* a "sweeping" and "bold" book that "challenges the last taboo" about racism. And the book is laced with incendiary sentences, like this one: "If America as a nation owes blacks as a group reparations for slavery, what do blacks as a group owe America for the abolition of slavery?" And this: "It is hard not to hear the triumphant roar of the white supremacist: 'Forget about the legacy of racism and discrimination: these people are naturally stupid.'" Chapter titles, too. One section on behavioral problems among poor blacks is entitled "Uncle Tom's Dilemma: Pathologies of Black Culture." Another discusses race and IQ under the heading "The Content of Our Chromosomes."

The controversy will not be limited to turns of phrase; the ideas, too, are explosive. D'Souza claims that most middle class blacks owe their prosperity to affirmative action, and then speculates they must suffer "intense feelings of guilt" because "they have abandoned their poor brothers and sisters, and realize that their present circumstances became possible solely because of the heart-wrenching sufferings of the underclass." And in a pithy turn of phrase that really ought not to have got past his editors, he ridicules those who are afraid that Nazi-like crimes could result if belief in the biological inferiority of blacks were to become widespread: such people, he writes, "employ the *reductio ad Hitlerum*—an argument is necessarily false if Hitler happened to share the same view."

If one were to adopt the voice used by D'Souza throughout the book, one might speculate that he actually longs to hear those "triumphant roars," from black and white racists alike, because such vitriolic discussion sells books. But *ad hominem* (or is it *ad Hitlerum*?) rhetoric like that is unbecoming. Suffice it to say that, by examining this book's reception—how it is attacked and by whom it is defended—one will learn a great deal about the true, and unbearably sad, nature of race relations in our society. More, perhaps, than can be learned from a careful study of its pages.

Which is not to say the book has no argument. But much that is compelling in it has been said before, more carefully, and with greater dignity. D'Souza restates the devastating critique of civil rights orthodoxy developed by Thomas Sowell in a number of books starting two decades ago. Sowell noted that, because ethnic groups are endowed with unequal cultures, histories, and temperaments, group disparities per se do

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not prove the existence of discrimination. He argued that racism need not lead to discrimination; that segregation did not necessarily connote a belief in racial inferiority or redound to the detriment of blacks; and that in any case, belief in the innate inferiority of a group is neither necessary nor sufficient for the existence of inter-group conflict. Sowell observed that the use of group stereotypes is a universal, rational, human behavior, and refuted a host of assertions about the relevance to contemporary moral debates of American slavery. He emphasized the self-serving character of much civil rights advocacy. And, most important, he exposed, and rejected as incoherent, the implicit assumptions—what he called "the vision"—underlying the legal and policy claims of civil rights proponents.

What is best in *The End of Racism* updates and embellishes these Sowellian themes. But D'Souza aspires to be a social thinker in his own right; indeed, his title recalls the Hegelian tone of Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man,* the acclaimed volume on the deeper meaning of the collapse of communism. D'Souza, also looking for broad historical forces, reasons that if we can understand how racism came into the modern world, then perhaps, as with communism, we can envision its end.

He finds that racism originated five centuries ago, when Europe emerged as the world's dominant economic and technological civilization. At the same time, Europeans encountered the more backward peoples of Asia, the Americas, and especially sub-Saharan Africa. The obvious disparity of accomplishment between different peoples led many Europeans to explain their dominance as the result of their biological superiority. Thus was racism born, a product of Western reason, the result of a rational effort to account for certain conspicuous facts. As historian Winthrop Jordan has put it, "racism developed in conjunction with Enlightenment, not in resistance to it."

So much the worse for Enlightenment, one might say, but D'Souza does not think so. He really believes this obvious historical point is relevant to contemporary racial debates. How? Because it gives the lie to the liberal claim that racism must be the result of ignorance, fear, or superstition. Quoting Hume ("I . . . suspect the Negroes . . . to be naturally inferior to the whites"), Kant ("The Negroes . . . have received from nature no intelligence that rises above the foolish"), and Hegel ("The Negro race has perfect contempt for humanity"), D'Souza declares: "These views pose a problem to mainstream scholars today . . . because they call the widely shared premises of modern antiracism into question." Unlike those liberals, D'Souza sees nobility in historic racism: "[It] reflected the highest ethical ideals of the most enlightened sectors of society. It was a progressive view. Opposition to it was considered to be a sign of ignorance or religious dogmatism." This would make the old liberal epithet, "ignorant racist," an oxymoron.

Never mind that one after another of these "enlightened" racial claims proved to be wrong, and that, across the globe and over the centuries, great crimes against humanity were perpetrated because of these claims, crimes denounced by "religious dogmatists" even as they were being carried out. The Enlightenment was not an unqualified success for humanism, as John Paul II never tires of saying, and as the torturous history of scientific racism makes clear. But D'Souza is too concerned with the shortcomings of "liberal antiracism" to dwell on a simple ethical truth: the intellectual, military, or economic

achievements of a civilization do not confer moral worth, or moral wisdom, on its constituents.

Curiously, given its subject, this book is devoid of serious moral argument. D'Souza has discovered that slavery was not a racist institution, as today's liberals charge. Why? Because there were black slaveholders (a fact he finds "morally disturbing"); because only the West made the ethics of slavery an issue; and because the belief in black inferiority arose, in part, to justify a practice inconsistent with cherished American ideals. Though these points are not without interest, stating them only begins an argument; many issues remain unresolved,

If a tiny fraction of all slaveholders, but every one of the millions of slaves, were black, how is the notion that slavery was a system of racial domination thereby refuted? Which is more compelling—that Western ideals existed, or that they went unrealized? After all, the issue is not whether America is morally superior to Saudi Arabia, but whether America is all it can and should be. If belief in black inferiority arose for complex reasons, it is nonetheless a pernicious doctrine that has never been strictly scientific in character. Moreover, it is a doctrine with far-reaching and genuinely disturbing moral implications. What, pray tell, is wrong with a strong presumption against it?

It is inarguably the case that absent the deeply committed, religiously motivated protests of abolitionists, slavery might well have survived into the 20th century. It is also inarguable that without the moralistic efforts of the liberal antiracists who founded the NAACP, fought the Ku Klux Klan, and laid the foundation for the modern civil rights movement, the caste-like subordination of blacks might still be a fact of life in America. D'Souza knows all of this, but he is not moved by it. What excites him is the chance to score points against his political enemies, the contemporary civil rights establishment.

To this end, he advances a peculiar (and weak) anthropological argument. According to D'Souza, the dual racial scourges of our day—affirmative action and black social pathology—share a common intellectual heritage with the ideology of antiracism. This heritage is rooted in the idea of "cultural relativism," made popular by the anthropologist Franz Boas and his students in the early decades of this century. Mr. D'Souza refers to this purportedly bankrupt perspective as "Boasian relativism." Because of its attachment to these ideas, the civil rights movement and its liberal allies have failed their black constituents and, D'Souza fears, now threaten to ruin American civilization. If ever we are to see the end of racism, we must first abandon the doctrine of Boasian relativism.

D'Souza's reasoning goes like this: Boasian relativism is the idea that all cultures are inherently equal, and in particular, that Western culture is neither better nor worse than any other. Hence, a true relativist expects people from different groups to succeed equally in American society, unless they are artificially held back. Since blacks have not succeeded to the same extent as whites and Asians, the relativist simply must conclude that blacks are the victims of racism, and that American society must be reformed, by coercion if necessary, to secure the just outcome. And the relativist cannot believe that pathological social behavior among blacks reflects their lack of culture and civilization, since it is axiomatic to him that all cultures are equal. Hence, the relativist cannot condemn such behavior as uncivilized; he can only view it as the result of failures in American society.

Complaining about Boasian relativism, D'Souza writes: "Other cultures are automatically viewed on the same plane as the West; minority groups are entitled to a presumption of moral and intellectual equality with whites; no group, whether blacks in America or aborigines in Australia, can be considered inferior."

D'Souza makes a horrific error by suggesting that blacks in an urban ghetto are part of a culture separate from the rest of America. By likening them to aborigines in the outback of Australia, he denies the truth and tragedy of their existence: Inner-city blacks are intimately connected to the culture of American society, influencing it and being influenced by it in turn.

But D'Souza is utterly determined to place poor urban blacks outside the orbit of American civilization. Their lives are governed by barbarism; they are the enemy within. This is wrongheaded. The sociologist Elijah Anderson, reporting on the moral life of poor urban blacks, has stressed again and again that these communities are full of decent people, with values no different from D'Souza's or my own, who struggle against long odds to live in dignity. Of course pathology lurks there—and it is a uniquely *American* pathology.

The youth movement of the 1960s, with its celebration of drugs and sex, and its cult of irresponsibility, was no invention of black culture. For example, the huge demand for cocaine in this country can hardly be taken as an expression of the uncivilized tastes of the ghetto poor. With suburban whites buying more rap music than ghetto blacks, with the purveyors of jeans and sneakers betting billions on their ability to move the urban market this way or that, with radical feminists, gay activists, and liberal jurists exerting their influence

for better or worse on the context in which all American families now function, how would the question even arise in our society as to whether "minority groups are entitled to moral equality with whites"?

Lest the reader misunderstand, I share D'Souza's rejection of the political program of the civil rights leadership. I agree that affirmative action must go, that behavioral problems in the ghetto must be confronted, that discrimination is no longer the primary obstacle to black progress, and that the idealism and moral authority of the historic crusade against racism have been squandered by liberal activists over the past three decades. But I reject, wholeheartedly and with intense fervor, his effort to draw a moral line down through the heart of my country, placing those he deems civilized on one side, and leaving the barbaric to the other. Is it not a measure of the quality of *American* civilization that so many of our "brothers and sisters," of all colors, live amidst squalor, in hopelessness and despair? D'Souza has not one useful word to say about how this problem will be remedied beyond urging blacks in the middle class to get busy raising the "civilizational standards" of their brethren.

As someone who has spent a decade calling for moral leadership within the black community, I find it now an even more important task to urge that responsible moral leadership come forth in the "conservative community." This book is not even close to what is required. Racial discourse in America has too often been a kind of public theater—sometimes tragedy, sometimes farce. Far from deriving the principles by means of which progress might be sought, *The End of Racism* turns out to be only the latest tragicomic performance in a seemingly endless repertory. ♦

Movies

Mel Gibson, One of Us

By Stephanie Gutmann

Jewish newspapers in the 1930s and 1940s featured a column called "Our Film Folk," revealing to the delight of the readership that many of the Hollywood glitterati they loved were, in fact, fellow members of the Hebrew faith. A new version of "Our Film Folk" circulates these days in conversation, if not in print, among Americans of the conservative faith. The starboard leanings of Bruce Willis and Arnold Schwarzenegger are long-established fact. But not until this summer did the doyens of the right discover they had a friend in Mel Gibson.

Mel Gibson! Once the Sexiest Man Alive, now among the five actors who can command $20 million a picture, he is that oxymoron in Hollywood, if nowhere else—a limousine conservative. This 39-year-old producer/director—a father of six with his wife of 15 years—has opposed gun control, called President Clinton a "low level opportunist," got involved in a public campaign against the regulatory powers of the Food and Drug Administration, railed about the weakening of his beloved Catholic Church, and uttered heresies like "feminists don't like me and I don't like them. I don't get their point."

Gibson has kept himself out of politics for the most part. He's a little shy, famous for his desire for privacy, his general detestation of joinerism, and his loathing of the press.

He seems practically phobic about podiums, balloon-filled amphitheaters, and anything resembling a pigeonhole or a label. Rumors fly like Elvis sightings about his imminent entry into the fray, but his last foray into organized politics was in a 1987 campaign for an underdog, right/populist, Catholic candidate named Robert Taylor, and Gibson stomped away from that, calling the political process (everywhere) "really corrupt and horrible."

He briefly dragged himself out of political seclusion last year when it looked like the vitamin and food supplements he had been using might be scared off the market by new regulations from the always itchy-fingered FDA. A health nut whose movie-set trailers sometimes resemble intensive-care units for all their bottles of multi-colored capsules, Gibson starred in a nationally televised public service announcement in which he played an innocent citizen, in a scary, over-regulated future, whose house is invaded by a SWAT team seeking "contraband" vitamin C. The 60-second spot helped spark one of the most vigorous grass-roots mail and phone campaigns the Senate has ever seen, and eventually the FDA backed off.

Now Gibson has chosen to emerge from the ideological shadows in a surprising and impressive way—by directing and starring in a deeply felt epic about the 13th century Scottish revolutionary William Wallace and his rebellion

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against the English occupation of the Highlands. *Braveheart*, which is being rereleased this week, is a thoughtful disquisition on the nature and meaning of freedom. It comes as a particular shock, after 22 movies ranging from silly to pretty good, to see Gibson spring to life as a substantial film director on just his second venture behind the camera—a director comfortable with the interplay of such uncinematic subjects as politics, ideas, and justice.

Braveheart did not (fortunately for it) get the Pat Buchanan *Forrest Gump* Stamp of Approval for Promulgating Traditional Values, but it could have. Whatever one thinks of the movie as a whole—and one could take issue with the breath-mint commercial look of the love scenes, or those backlit night shots with fog machines, featuring the Scotsmen striding to battle against the English in rock-video slo-mo—its treatment of politically risky subjects like male war lust and male-female sex differences is daring by Hollywood standards.

The film has many long, horrifying, but also what the *New Yorker*'s Anthony Lane rightly called "ebullient" scenes of the "13th century slugfest" mode of battle. Gibson and writer Randall Wallace do not feel they have to reinforce modern gender role rules by balancing troop sex ratios or providing equal opportunities for head-hacking. (Compare this with *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, another recent medieval epic. When Robin first meets Maid Marian, she is in chain mail drag, and they attempt to kill each other until she incapacitates him with a roundhouse knee to the groin.)

Women in *Braveheart* are at least as strong and admirable as the men, but they exercise their considerable powers in historically plausible ways: by causing men to fall in love with them, by cuckolding an evil husband and carrying the child of his enemy, by letting love-addled officers prattle on about military secrets in bed.

The movie is also a paean to the powerful father. The father may be good (like Campbell, who fights alongside his son Hamish even after he loses his hand and takes an arrow in the chest) or detestable (like British king Edward I), but he is always a force to be reckoned with.

One would expect such a raw brew to shake things up, and it did. The arrows this time did not come from the feminists whom Gibson doesn't like, but from a long-standing enemy: the radical gays. Or, more specifically, a group named GLAAD, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, which organized fervent pickets and leafleting in many cities to coincide with the *Braveheart* opening.

It's not the first go-round for Gibson, GLAAD, and other gay groups. In 1991 GLAAD gave Gibson their GAG award for playing a swishy bartender in the movie *Bird on a Wire*. In 1992 he was named "Sissy of the Year" by the *Advocate* magazine, primarily for comments he had made the year before in an interview with Spain's biggest newspaper, *El Pais*. "I became an actor despite" the possibility that people might think he was homosexual, he said then. "But with this look, who's going to think I'm gay? Do I look like a homosexual? Do I talk like them? Do I move like them?"

Perhaps, after a lifetime of salacious and slightly condescending comments from reviewers about his adorable calves and eyelashes and eyes and rump and his general "prettiness," Gibson is a little touchy about the suggestion that he has invited the attention. Nevertheless, contemporary etiquette dictates that upon making clear that one is not gay, one add hurriedly, à la Seinfeld, the disclaimer, "Though there's nothing wrong with that."

But when asked, the next morning, on national TV, in another interview, whether he would apologize, Gibson refused. Then, he later told *Playboy*'s Lawrence Grobel, "the war started. Since then it's made me totally paranoid. I've got to learn to keep my mouth shut." He went on to talk darkly about organizations that "breathe down my neck," about being chased on the highway, and the time he was booed, heckled, and spat upon outside Mann's Chinese Theater during the ceremony in which he laid his palm print in the historic concrete of Hollywood Boulevard.

The war rumbles on. The latest exhibit in the gay case against Gibson is the portrayal of Edward II in *Braveheart*. GLAAD says that the film's Edward II, the homosexual son of a warlike English king, is a "nightmarish stereotype," "used as comic relief," "an offensive character whose weaknesses are used to counterpoint Mel's machismo." The din has been loud enough to fix the legend of Gibson's "homophobia" in entertainment-industry conventional wisdom. In a guide to the city intended for visitors to New York's Gay Pride Week celebrations, *Newsday*, for example, recommended *Braveheart* "for the self-loathing set who feel that no price is too great for a gander at Mel Gibson's calves."

Is Edward II actually used for "comic relief"? Historians and readers of Christopher Marlowe know that the young man was homosexual, and his sexuality has important plot ramifications in the movie. Given all that—given that we need to know quickly, via visual cues—the look, the lines, the direction of the character all seem relatively subtle. Yokels who find homosexuality and delicately featured

men *ipso facto* a laff riot will titter when they watch Edward II; others with some sophistication who do not find homosexuality prima facie hilarious will understand that the character is supposed to be gay and then think no more about.

No, the obsessive quality of GLAAD's rage may come from somewhere deeper—perhaps Gibson's unreconstructed *hetero*sexuality, augmented by his lifelong allegiance to traditional Catholicism, has thrown up red flags for GLAAD. Gibson has a pre-60s aura of fecundity about him—he's been married to Robyn, a former nurse's aide, for 15 years, they oppose both birth control and abortion, and they have had six children. Gibson has said that he and his wife are happy to take "as many [children] as God wants to send." Recent magazine profiles pick up on this angle with titles like "The Sexiest Daddy Alive."

Bill Russell

Surveying this chance collision of genes, character, and movie stardom, one has to wonder how it all came about. The answer starts, of course, with Gibson's own father—one Hutton "Red" Gibson. Red seems to have leaped out of the pages of Paul Theroux's novel *The Mosquito Coast*—the story of a brilliant, energetic, crazed iconoclast who picks up stakes and hauls his little clan into the bush.

Gibson has called his father "just a regular guy who worked long hours," but Gibson Senior seems more colorful than that. "He lived through the Depression with a father who was dying and a brother who was a f—up," Gibson told *Playboy*. "Goes off to Guadalcanal in World War Two, gets the Purple Heart for something—he doesn't talk about it much. In the meantime he goes to a seminary because he's very spiritual."

After a return to the States, there were many jobs, from plumber to computer programmer. Red married Anne when she was 21, and Mel was born in a little town near Peekskill, New York, in 1956, the sixth of 11 children. (He has always been an American citizen, and thus, unlike Schwarzenegger, *could* run for President.) When Gibson Senior, by then a brakeman for the New York Central Railroad, suffered a job-ending back injury, he "kept his family in shoes and food" by getting himself on the game show *Jeopardy* in the mid 1960s, on which he won the then-enormous sum of $21,000.

By 1968, Red realized his injury prevented him from going back to the railroad, so he took his wife, his kids, and his *Jeopardy* winnings, and moved to Sydney, Australia, the home of his mother. He has lived in Australia ever since, founding an organization called Alliance for Catholic Tradition that opposes the reforms of Vatican II and writing books that Gibson Junior says try to correct "an institution [the Catholic Church] that has become unrecognizable to him." The books have gone unpublished.

In Australia Gibson attended all-boy Catholic schools through high school, where, he told Grobel, he was "not much of a conformist" and "got whacked around for smoking, fighting, not following their stupid rules." At home there was plenty of brawling as well. "You don't grow up in a crowd like that and not punch one another out all the time. . . . We'd just about kill each other. Very satisfying." His parents "ran a pretty tight ship. They didn't let us get away with anything. But it wasn't like we had to shut up at mealtime. It was just kind of nutty."

"Spank kids?" Gibson has said. "You can't raise a decent human being without it. I don't butcher them. It's not fun, is it?" You can also see the tough-love style in his direction of *Braveheart*'s battle scenes, filmed on sodden Irish moors, where he ran up and down lines of heavily armed young men with a bullhorn yelling out, "If any of you hurts anybody I'll kill you."

There's a certain look about Gibson; you can see it off-camera and in many of his characters, like the loner Mad Max or the battered but triumphant Wallace. Janet Maslin of the *New York Times* calls that quality "a stately worldweariness," while her colleague Vincent Canby describes it as "the cool, infinitely pragmatic manner with which he deals with his existential situation." His affect was evidently shaped by the Catholic ethos of worldly detachment, by a strong belief in God's will above man's—"My father told me very early on that it was a sin to worry too much"—and by being raised in a big family where "you realize that it doesn't all get handed to you."

"You always got what you needed," Gibson says, "but you didn't always get what you wanted."

Until now, perhaps. Conventional wisdom said that a $60 million movie of nearly three hours set in grotty Scotland in the grotty 13th

century featuring some obscure historical guy who wears a skirt, talks in a nearly indecipherable accent, and is covered with mud most of the time, would be a box-office disaster. This summer, before the rerelease, *Braveheart* took in about $60 million in the United States and about $20 million abroad.

The movie is a hit—not a blockbuster, but a hit. And since Gibson was able to pull it off, he has acquired the kind of clout which will give him the enviable freedom to direct movies he does not have to star in. There are three specific works in his sights, all literary adaptations. One is *Fahrenheit 451*, science-fiction novelist Ray Bradbury's vision of a future PC world in which offensive books are burned. The second is *Thank You For Smoking,* Christopher Buckley's satirical portrait of the tobacco lobby. Third is *Anna Karenina*, and perhaps only Hollywood's most committed Catholic could do justice to the Tolstoy novel about love, death, and adultery—the novel with the epigram that reads, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." ♦

Books

BARONEAL SPLENDOR

By Christopher Caldwell

The good news for Senator William Roth (R-Del.) is that his place in history is secure: There's a big entry on him in the most thumbed-through reference book in Washington. The bad news is that it begins as follows: "With his trademark toupee, he does not cut a social figure nor is he dazzlingly articulate."

This tidbit helps to explain why the *Almanac of American Politics*—an encyclopedia with an attitude—is so beloved in Washington. Michael Barone and Grant Ujifusa have been putting out their half-million-word *Almanac* every two years since 1972. The two met as left-liberal Harvard undergraduates working on the student newspaper, the *Crimson*, in the mid-1960s. It was Ujifusa who hit upon the idea of an almanac in 1969—he saw it as a way to focus the outrage of their fellow Vietnam war protesters on the unfeeling Congress—and who found the original publisher, Gambit. But by Ujifusa's own account, Barone now does virtually all of the writing.

It's no longer left-leaning—in fact, it has taken on much of the conservative coloring of the electorate it covers. But ideology is not the important thing about the *Almanac*. A bold love for politics is. Like James Bryce's gargantuan 1888 classic *The American Commonwealth*—which one opens looking for dry detail on caucuses and parliamentary protocol and closes having read sentiments like "the European reader [will be] surprised when he learns that most of the corrupt leaders in Philadelphia are not Irishmen"—the *Almanac* is a long march through America's political culture.

Where Lord Bryce focused on institutions, Barone focuses on personalities—thousand-word essays followed by voting records, biographical information, and financial reports, and including photos, maps, and other paraphernalia. He covers every elected national political official, from President Clinton to Eni F.H. Faleomavaega (delegate of American Samoa, where, Barone notes, the 1988 Democratic presidential primary drew 36 voters).

Much of the information in the *Almanac* is surely available elsewhere: that Howell Heflin is the nephew of the pre-New Deal segregationist senator "Cotton Tom" Heflin; that Nancy Kassebaum is the daughter of presidential candidate Alf Landon; that Nancy Pelosi's father was mayor of Baltimore.

In an age in which people count such things, it's not a secret that Anna Eshoo is the only member of Congress of Assyrian descent, or that John Conyers has the worst attendance record (71 percent in 1993) of any House member not under indictment.

But Barone is interested in politics as a repository for all of the human passions, not just power—and his *Almanac* is full of vital (or idly fascinating) information that is not only unavailable anywhere else, but so trivial you can't quite believe he dug it up in the first place.

Barone cares deeply that Gary Auerbach, the Democrat who got thrashed by Jim Kolbe in the Arizona 5th last year, used to be Morris Udall's chiropractor. And that second-term Rep. Blanche Lambert Lincoln of the Arkansas 1st, once the receptionist for her predecessor Bill Alexander, also worked for Billy Broadhurst, who was Gary Hart and Donna Rice's host on the *Monkey Business* cruise that ended Hart's political career. And that Alabama Rep. Sonny Callahan lives on a houseboat. And that Hermosa Beach city councilman Robert "Burgie" Benz hosts a "beer drinking and vomiting fest" every July 4. And that Vic Fazio

was first elected in 1978 when it was revealed that incumbent Robert Leggett had two wives. And that the Mexican who murdered Mexican presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio is a registered Democrat in Long Beach.

Like any genuinely serious discussion of the intersection of politics and human nature, the *Almanac* is a repository of mishaps, insults, and gaffes. Bill Baker of the California 10th is still vocally anti-abortion, but he's probably not proud to be reminded that he once introduced a group of high-school award winners as "17 abortion survivors."

Idaho Sen. Larry Craig's inadvertently memorable quip that "the only endangered species in New York is probably a free white human being" is recorded for posterity, as is Michigan Republican State Chairman Susy Heintz's description of David Bonior: a "whiny, wacky, wimpy, wasteful, worn-out, washed-up, windbag wimp."

The national legislature is revealed in all its Brobdignagian, bizarre splendor. Jay Dickey of the Arkansas 4th sponsored a bill to restore flogging. His 1992 opponent, Arkansas secretary of state Bill McCuen, accused Dickey—against abortion in all cases, including rape and incest—of being "pro-incest." California state senator Phil Wyman, the only Republican legislator west of the Mississippi River to be defeated in November 1994, once authored "a bill to ban the allegedly satanic practice of recording certain words into songs backwards."

Barone writes as a historian—in fact, as one of the very few Americans to make the Paul Johnson crossover from journalist to Gibbon-in-training. His 1990 *Our Country: The Shaping of America from Roosevelt to Reagan* (which Ujifusa edited at the Free Press) was a remarkably ambitious effort at popular history, and the *Almanac* itself is a work of history in perpetual progress. Barone accompanies each version with a long historical essay, and in this edition he looks back at the elections of 1994: "A clearer repudiation of the party in power," he writes, "cannot be imagined."

The evidence: Of the governors' races in the eight biggest states, the Democrats won just Florida, where the only age group Lawton Chiles took was the over-65s. There are now only two educational groups that support the Democrats: high-school dropouts and those with graduate degrees. All of the metropolitan areas in the Great Lakes Basin, the union stronghold that stretches from Buffalo to Detroit, now vote Republican.

Barone views the old Democratic order as an elite being swept away, much as the New England Federalists were in the first half of the 19th century, to be replaced with . . . what? Barone envisions a democracy of small associations, of the type that prevailed when Tocqueville visited the country in the aftermath of the Federalist collapse.

But this Tocquevilleanism, this belief that Americans continue to make policy through small groups, has always been a preoccupation of Barone's and an animating idea of his *Almanac*s even before the electorate rallied to it last November.

Is it warranted? In an otherwise glowing essay on *Our Country*, the historian Fred Siegel took Barone to task for overestimating the individualism and independence of the contemporary American citizen. It's a criticism with some merit, and it goes to the heart of the book's animating conceit—that the different congressional districts carry a lot of historical baggage that shapes whom they elect and how they act, election year after election year. Barone is right to note that the "Hispanic" 2nd district of Arizona is not historically Hispanic. It is important that self-rule for the District of Columbia is not a new failure: When radical Republicans gave D.C. autonomy during Reconstruction, "Boss" Shepherd drove the city into bankruptcy.

But do history and local character matter anymore, or have they been obliterated for the time being by the half-century of politics Barone has chronicled? Barone's own account of the nationalization of local politics under Democratic rule—redistricting in particular—is shocking. Bush White House liaison Doug Wead, interested in running for Congress, had to move four times between 1990 and 1992 to stay in the Arizona 6th. Ron Dellums's tenure in the House was saved by redistricting in 1992, when suburbs over the ridge from Oakland were removed from his body politic.

There are classic gerrymanders famous from the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page: Florida's centipede-shaped 3rd and 17th districts; Louisiana's mark-of-Zorro 4th; and the saxophone-shaped Massachusetts 4th, which elects Barney Frank.

Then there are the preposterous vote counts that come out of our new "rotten boroughs." In the New York 15th, also known as Harlem, which has 580,354 residents, only 2,812 cast votes against Charles Rangel; in the slightly larger 16th (Bronx), only 2,257 voted against José Serrano.

Not surprisingly, the denizens of these rotten boroughs all over the country—particularly occupants of "black seats"—have voting records that are not only similar but even identical, by Barone's tally. Nor are Republicans showing a great deal of geographical or cultural distinctiveness. Why is youngblood Steve Buyer of the Indiana 5th legisla-

tively indistinguishable from old war-horse Pat Roberts of the Kansas 1st? One hundred forty-eight of 230 Republicans had perfect voting records on the Contract with America. Is it reasonable to see in this conformity a return to the politics of small groups?

The worry that arises naturally from the *Almanac* is that the new right will become Tocquevillean in exactly the same way that the old left is multi-cultural: able to tell the difference between *pad thai* and *bami goreng* without knowing the capital of Thailand. In the same way, Americans may wind up uttering paeans to small government while holding on to big government for dear life.

Arizona, whose citizenry loves to badmouth federal handouts, is profoundly dependent on federal highway and water money. Alaska, with the largest body of libertarian voters in the country, has "never had a self-sustaining private sector economy."

Idaho, the current mecca of anti-government protesters, has an economy that relies on one single water-greedy crop—potatoes—and needs massive federal infusions to keep the spuds growing. These sobering examples lead one to think that Barone's faith in the desire of his countrymen to live the Tocquevillean life may be unduly optimistic.

Still, one must admit that his vision inspires hope, which is not the sort of feeling generally inspired by a reference book. Barone views politics as a "noble calling" (the phrase is the late F. Clifton White's), if not always a neat or moral one.

His *Almanac* is as big and baggy and various as the good, the bad, and the ugly who make up the political class in all eras—a book about politics whose only fault is that it is more interesting than politics itself. ♦

Television

My Unsought Award

By Eric Burns

In 1985, the *Washington Journalism Review* published its first "Best in the Business" issue, after soliciting the opinions of readers and experts on the leading purveyors of broadcast and print information.

In an article titled "Battle Hymns and Autumn Wonders: The Poetry of the Best in Broadcast Prose," former CBS producer Edward Bliss, Jr. chose some "examples of truly good writing" from more than four decades of radio and TV newscasts.

Save one, Bliss's choices were conventional ones: Edward R. Murrow for his coverage of the London blitz and Eric Sevareid for his coverage of Murrow's death. Winston Burdett made the list for his report on the shooting of Pope John Paul, Bruce Morton for the funeral of Robert Kennedy, and Charles Kuralt for feeding an apple and some cheese to a pair of chipmunks in Wyoming.

Not to mention Andy Rooney, Morley Safer, Walter Cronkite, David Brinkley, Charles Osgood, Harry Reasoner, Edwin Newman, John Hart, and—unexpectedly—me.

I had been a network correspondent for seven years, the others for eons. I had covered stories of middling importance, the others history in the raw. I had achieved little renown, the others enough to be pin-ups in the hearts of journalism students from one end of America to the other. Nonetheless, Bliss saw fit to propose me for his pantheon with the following words:

Eric Burns is the author of Broadcast Blues

Tennessee Williams once said that, for him, happiness was a morning of good writing. When Williams died NBC's obituary of him was written by Eric Burns. "His mornings," Burns wrote, "led to some of the best evenings in the history of the American theater."

Shortly before he died, the great ragtime pianist and composer Eubie Blake celebrated his 100th birthday. He received many tributes. In reporting them, Burns said, "They celebrated the long life of the man and the even longer life of the music."

My first reaction to the article was pride, but that passed as quickly as a sound bite. I could immodestly accept the idea that the writing samples he had chosen were above average by the standards of television news. But as published, set in type, and laid down on the page, these passages seemed lifeless and superficial, a parlor-game variety of wordplay. And this was true not only of the words I had fashioned myself. Cronkite and Sevareid, Rooney and Newman, Burdett and Hart—all of us found ourselves unwittingly exposed by the page's cold white glow.

Or was I being unfair to myself and my fellow glittering "best"s? After all, the lines singled out by Bliss had never been intended for the silent contemplation of a reader. Rather, they were to be spoken aloud at viewers who had only one chance to grasp them as they sailed through the air, and who might be distracted at the moment by other occurrences of the household: a microwave beeping or a phone ringing, a baby crying or a mate demanding sympathy for the day's labors.

Someone clears his throat and misses a word, rubs his eyes and loses a scene.

Alas, I was not being unfair. Broadcast prose is a form of communication no less than print, employing the same tools, aspiring to the same ends. It means to judge what events are important and to present them as clearly and as thoroughly as possible. A TV viewer expects no less of his newscast than does a newspaper reader of his morning edition. Should both media, then, not be subject to roughly the same standards? Should the tube be excused its shortcomings simply because they are inherent?

If the page reveals the television script's inadequacies, it proves itself the more demanding forum of the two. It demonstrates that TV news too often sacrifices precision to generality, comprehensiveness to artifice, and sense to tempo. The latter seems to me the most serious offense, and is commonly the cause of the other two.

Take, as an example, the way I eulogized Eubie Blake on the air. I heard the formalized tones, the clipped enunciation, the dips and doodles of my professional broadcaster's delivery. "They celebrated the long life of the *man*," I had said, and then, approaching the point at which the phrase turned cutely, I angled my head as the camera zoomed in for a closeup, "and the even *longer* life"—pause to establish downbeat—"of the *music*." Rimshot. "Eric Burns, NBC News, New York." A little coda.

Musicologists tell us that rhythm is an important organizing principle, giving structure to all that it accompanies. This is fine if it accompanies sound or movement, but is far too limiting in function, even destructive, if it is providing the boundaries for thought, the ease of keeping the beat notwithstanding. "Strange how potent cheap music is," Noel Coward once said, and if he could only see the ratings for Eyewitness News or Action News or News Center 4 or 6 or 8, he would know how right he was.

The cadences of broadcast journalism are the result not just of its oral presentation, but of an exaggerated concern for brevity. According to *The Elements of Style*, "A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts." Undeniable. But who is to define unnecessary? Under what pressures is the definition made? Is a deadline approaching? Are the viewers growing restive? Are the commercial breaks getting longer? Are the consultants urging an even lower common denominator?

In recent years, television news has begun to take brevity to the point of self-defeat; its drawings are stick figures and its machines too stripped-down to operate as they should. The virtue of concision has, through excess, become a vice.

George Orwell was among the first to realize that this could happen. In *1984*, Winston Smith is warned about Big Brother's assault on the language, and the reason behind it: "Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? . . . Every year fewer and fewer words, and the range of consciousness always a little smaller."

In television news, the range of consciousness has been shrinking at an alarming rate, having now diminished so much that a reporter is occasionally able to speak without conveying any meaning whatsoever—to produce sound only, pure rhythm. What follows is an example of news speak that is as senseless as it is succinct. It came from the mouth of a reporter at WABC-TV in New York. Her subject was delays along bus routes, her logic unassailable:

> If you're among *millions* who spend a *lot* of *time* waiting for *buses,* you're not *alone*.

Dean Acheson, who served as Secretary of State under President Truman, was greatly unimpressed with a fellow named Chester Bowles, formerly an ambassador to India who, in 1958, was contemplating a run for the United States House of Representatives from Connecticut. The problem, in Acheson's view, was that Bowles had at one time been an advertising executive, even conspiring to found his own agency. Acheson did not think such a background could be overcome. In a letter to his friend Eugene Rostow, he explained why. "Time spent in the advertising business," Acheson wrote, "seems to create a permanent deformity, like the Chinese habit of foot-binding."

The same can be true, I fear, of time spent in television news. The field is hostile to topics that outlast the quotidian, to the notion of solitary deliberation, to the very existence of complexity and nuance. Mind-binding, let us call it, and the longer that one works in the business, subjecting himself to its ruthless strictures, the smaller his personal range of consciousness becomes.

While employed at NBC News, I was a victim of this process at the same time that I caught Edward Bliss's eye by my deftness in perpetrating it.

More than a decade after the fact, I look back on Bliss's article in the February 1985 issue of the old *Washington Journalism Review* and find his reference to me more of a warning than an honor. Cheap music may be potent; it is by no means enriching. ♦