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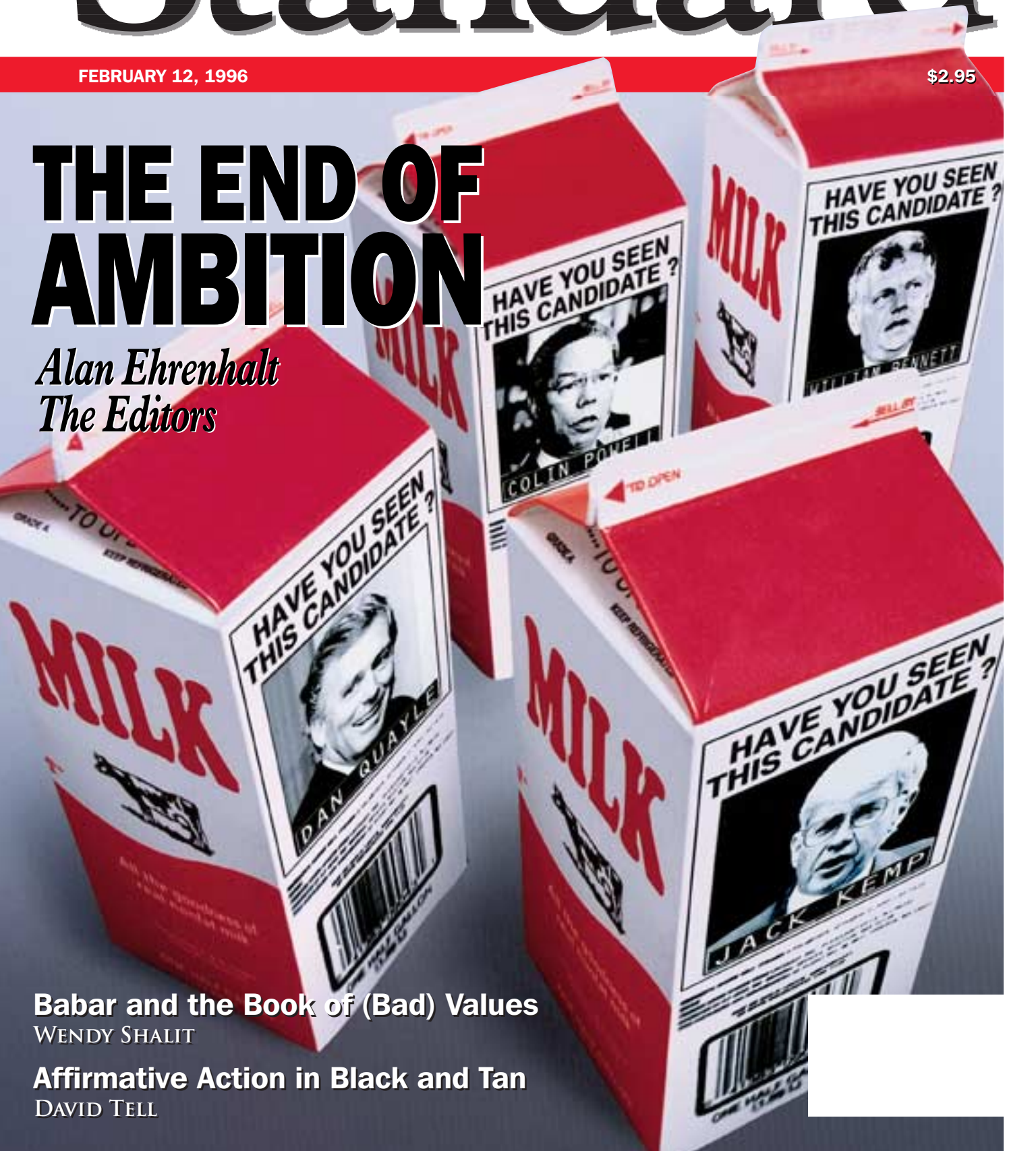

THE END OF AMBITION

Alan Ehrenhalt
The Editors

Babar and the Book of (Bad) Values
WENDY SHALIT

Affirmative Action in Black and Tan
DAVID TELL

the weekly Standard

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Cover art
by Barry Blackman

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A New Welfare Strategy

With congressional Republicans unsure if they will ever be able to declare a clear victory over the White House in the budget battle, they're now hoping to use welfare reform as a means of highlighting President Clinton's govern-left, run-right strategy. On February 1, the House Republican freshmen agreed that the House should pass the Senate welfare bill, which Clinton has praised and which passed the Senate 87-12 in September.

The thinking among many Republicans is that if the White House supports the bill, the GOP will gain credit for overhauling one of the nation's least popular programs. And if Clinton signs, that might also "disintegrate his base in the Democratic party," says Republican Rep. Jimmy Hayes (who speaks from experience, having been a Democrat until switching parties two months ago). The bigger political gain could come from a presidential veto, which Republicans say would undermine Clinton's claim that the "the era of big government is over" and remind voters who the president really is. But House and Senate Republican leaders remain undecided, and some congressional conservatives feel the Senate bill is not tough enough on work and illegitimacy. Sheila Burke, chief of staff to Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole and a highly influential voice in welfare policy, remains undecided. Dole's presidential campaign and the Republican National Committee have been lobbying against any new moves on welfare, preferring to use the two previous vetoes as an issue against Clinton.

We're Guilty of Prejudism

Now we know why O.J. never took the stand. It seems Ron and Nicole weren't his only victims. As evidenced in Simpson's hour-long interview with BET the other week, he is free to maul the English language as well. A partial guide:

Malapropisms	Nearest resemblance to actual English
Negatism	**Negativism**
Prejudism	**Prejudice**
Akyoolades	**Accolades**
Bone to Ax	**"Bone to pick" or "Ax to grind"**

In the Line of Campaigning

Many second-tier GOP presidential campaigns have been waiting desperately for the United States Secret Service to ride to their rescue—not for protection for their candidate, but because the Secret Service actually helps pay for campaign charter planes. The campaigns were hoping that the Secret Service would come on board no later than January 15. But there won't be a sign of them until after the Iowa caucuses. It seems that a committee has to meet in order to decide who deserves protection and when that protection should start. This committee has not yet convened because of the very busy schedule of one of the six members—Majority Leader Bob Dole. The senator doesn't really need the help since he has the biggest staff and doesn't need to do as many events as, say, Dick Lugar—and he can't mind that the absence of the Secret Service is costing his rivals money they might spend on negative ads against him. The rumor du jour is that the meeting will finally take place next

Scrapbook

week where, of course, the senator will graciously excuse himself from the decision. Who said being majority leader would hurt Dole's campaign?

United Colors of Bull

It has always been difficult to determine if the people at United Colors of Benetton are incredibly naive or incredibly cynical. Do they think they are making brave statements with their advertisements—gays wearing tattoos, black men in chains, a company director standing naked to protest NATO inaction over Bosnia—or do they just want to make a splash? Now comes evidence of their calculation and cynicism. Benetton has launched an art school called Fabrica. And who did they ask to run it? Fidel Castro. "I think a school like this is based on revolutionary thinking. So we thought, 'Let's ask Castro,'" the Benetton rep told *Lingua Franca* magazine. Nobody could actually think Castro is right for this job—unless you want to torture and jail a few thousand students for expressing an independent thought or two. But then, the Benetton people aren't the first to sell their souls for the sake of a few publicity stunts.

The Reading List

So sorry, but the big contest is over, and nobody won. In the January 29 Reading List, you were asked to uncover an error in a list of books featuring ghosts (in honor of Hillary Clinton's unindicted co-author of *It Takes a Village*). In the plot description of *Wuthering Heights*, we said that "Cathy and Heathcliff meet again only as ghosts on the moors." Wrong! That's from the 1939 *movie* version, featuring an absurd happy ending with Laurence Olivier and Merle Oberon walking around together after death—and you could see right through them!

In honor of this week's cover, we feature a few works about political ambition:

Medea, by Aeschylus. People forget just why Medea ends up killing her own sons; it's because Jason, whose consort she has become, decides to make a strategic marriage with Creusa to enhance his own political ambitions. And so Medea takes her revenge.

Jennie Gerhardt, by Theodore Dreiser. How a senator's rising star is quashed because he can't keep his hands off the beautiful title character.

Julius Caesar, by Shakespeare. This high political drama features the greatest portrait of back-door ambition in literature: the character of Cassius, with the "lean and hungry" look, who manages to stir up Brutus into assassination by bemoaning the inability of anyone but Caesar to cast a shadow in Rome—perhaps because he does not have the guts to kill the emperor himself.

Casual

Books Do Furnish a Party

This week I received in the mail an invitation to a book party. I hesitate to go, for, you see, I was a book partygoer in the glory days, back when going to a book party meant something—namely that you were going to have to squeeze by Norman Mailer if you were going to make it to the bar.

This was in the 1980s, when publishing houses were still serving shrimp cocktails as an hors d'oeuvre, not crummy cheese pastries like today. In my day, New York book parties were held at glamorous nightclubs like Nell's or MK or at specially rented rooms in the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Frick. If you were a book reviewer, you could go to four a week. The locations changed. Only Fran Leibowitz's wardrobe remained the same.

I was at the Donald Trump book party, on the same escalator with Ruth Westheimer, Phyllis George, and Leon Spinks—all at the same time! That was the famous dessert party with waiters shoving chocolate confections at you all night. It didn't start till 10, and thousands were in attendance, the crowd studded with second-tier celebrities. Trump's buddies in the construction business could be seen hugging the walls and looking nervous, as if the Park Avenue Gestapo might swoop in suddenly and deport anybody found having too much hair on his back. Leon Spinks danced without his teeth.

I was at a book party at the Hard Rock Cafe and was nearly beaten up by one of Patrick Swayze's female bodyguards. That one was for a book by Roy Orbison, and they had an impersonator standing in for Roy (not only was the book ghostwritten, the party was ghosthosted). I was at a party in the East Village with a roomful of people involved in various scandals that had been featured in the *New York Post*. "Not indicted, not invited," the *Post*'s Eric Breindel noted. I was at a book party given by Armand Hammer in the Armor Room at the Metropolitan. They handed out his massive memoirs for free. As my wife and I walked away down Fifth Avenue, we noticed that some of the other guests had given up lugging their copies home and had simply abandoned them on fire hydrants or windowsills.

We learned to find the choke points that hors d'oeuvre-carrying waiters would have to traverse between the kitchen and the room. We were newlyweds then, so these parties were like dates and the food was dinner. I learned how to grab a napkin off a waiter's tray, select a toothpick, stab a chicken shard, dip it in mustard sauce, and bring it to my mouth all without spilling my drink or getting mustard on my tie. The worst parties had buffet tables, which inevitably drew huge crowds. There were a lot of short people present; Darwinian selection meant that tall people, who couldn't worm their way up to the buffet table, starved and so could not reproduce.

We rarely knew anybody, so we'd just look out over the room. Most of the people were drawn from New York's ranks of Tame Young Bohemians. These were editorial assistants at magazines and publishing houses, carrying invitations passed down by their more famous bosses. If a bomb had gone off at any of these parties, glossy magazines across the continent would have been riven with typos for months, and Condé Nast bigwigs would have gone to their favorite restaurants without lunch reservations.

The men from the fashion magazines wore army boots and Italian suits. If they were from *Spy* or *Esquire* or *Vanity Fair*, they sported the latest in Ironic Wear. One fellow wore a wacky day-glo bow tie, another a kilt, another red canvas high-tops with a tuxedo. Many wore rat-tails, the string-like four-inch ponytails that were fashionable at the time. It was enough to make a statement, but not so much as to endanger your employment prospects at an advertising agency. The women could not afford ritualistic mockery since they were in such surplus. They wore black miniskirts, black stockings, and expressions of chilly anxiety. These people were the backbone of the American contraception industry.

Their conversation consisted mostly of ambition anxiety; though making it themselves, they were terrified that vulgar people would end up beating them to the top. An entire magazine, *Spy*, was based on the idea that people more successful than you are hopelessly vulgar.

Toward the end of the era, we noticed that the parties were drawing an older crowd. Health clubs were coming into vogue so it was no longer fashionable to get sick and die. One of the nicer parties was held in the Washington Square townhouse that was once Edith Wharton's. We actually knew people, and chatted with, among others, the fabled editor Erwin Glikes. As we were walking home, we noticed Glikes sitting in a restaurant at a window-side table. He was eating alone, some pasta dish. He was reading a book, and he looked perfectly content.

David Brooks

Revolution in Military Affairs

Charles J. Dunlap, Jr. ("How We Lost the High-Tech War of 2007," Jan. 29) sets up a familiar image of the future enemy not just as stranger, but as the evil, alien other—tougher, crueler, all the more remorseless for being closer to nature. It is the nightmare of being attacked in our beds, on the bloody edge of the Indian frontier. This image is embedded in the American imagination.

But Dunlap wants it both ways. He wants to set up our defeat at the hands of the warrior-savage ethos, and at the same time have us believe that same ethos encouraged such an intimate assimilation of technology that its capacity to put it to use surpasses our own. Primitive warrior societies have indeed driven out bigger, more sophisticated invaders. Afghanistan did it to Britain in 1841 and Russia in 1989. And of course they used high technology to victorious advantage. But Afghan high-technology weapons were imported, grafted onto their own cultural orbit, and *did not emanate from it*.

Dunlap recounts the failure of high technology on the battlefield, but his outcome relies on our loss of will. Dunlap's story ends up, not as a ringing indictment of technology, but as a recurring melodrama, with plot turns familiar to the first Americans. It is a motivational, cautionary tale tied to a hereditary, and intensely romantic, read of the American ethos. It speaks to persistent fears for ourselves, rather than the future's fears for us.

Dunlap believes we have lost our martial ardor, and certainly our civic ardor. Americans like this kind of lamentation. It's like a historical pep-talk. Dunlap invokes a foreign Great Satan: to motivate us, to get our blood up. It used to be Britain, Spain, and their savage Indian allies; then it was the slave power; then Prussian militarism.

Perhaps our insistent celebration of the tyrant-out-to-get-us shores up confidence in ourselves: that as we are marked by tyrants, and so threaten them, so we must remain true to liberty.

Michael Vlahos
Washington, DC

Charles J. Dunlap, Jr.'s futuristic account offered a chilling glimpse into one possible outcome of the current "revolution in military affairs." While the U.S. military focuses on acquiring high-tech weapons systems, it neglects the possibility that a future adversary will set the terms of conflict.

In the 1991 Gulf war, Iraq's crushing defeat was attributable to the fact that it chose to fight the United States on our own terms. In a conventional war in which the U.S. reigned supreme in the air, on the ground, at sea, and in space, America was able to score a quick and decisive victory. Unfortunately, U.S. leaders have failed to recognize and prepare for a war in which our adversary does not grant us the luxury of fighting with our strengths.

Michael P. Croissant
Springfield, MO

Charles J. Dunlap, Jr.'s view that the "revolution in military affairs" (RMA, for short) revolves around bloodless "cyber-war," called information warfare in the Defense Department, is incomplete.

The RMA is a potentially new way of conducting warfare, brought about not just by technological advancements, but also by changes in military doctrine and organizations. Information warfare seeks to control the information battlespace, denying the enemy critical information. There are other new warfare areas as well. Precision strike, conducted with stealth aircraft, will not target troops so much as an enemy's center of gravity (national leadership, key industrial nodes, and power grids). Current RMA thinking holds that the revolutionary effect derives from the integration of information warfare and precision strike.

Future wars will not be bloodless. We will, of course, seek favorable loss ratios in future operations. To do otherwise would be irresponsible. But we should not expect to replicate the ratios of Desert Storm, in part because victory in future wars, as in past wars, may require more than attrition.

Dunlap is right to caution against mirror-imaging of adversaries. They will almost certainly seek to employ asymmetric and highly leveraged operations against us. But the notional adversary he created in his article is so capable of coordinating and conducting global military and paramilitary operations as to be incredible.

Jeff McKitrick
Seth Weinberger
McLean, VA

In Defense of Buchanan

Matthew Rees is shocked to discover that liberal journalists are taking seriously Pat Buchanan's ideas ("Buchanan's Unlikely Fans," Jan. 22). Most appalling, in Rees's analysis, is that these writers are paying respectful attention to *a candidate whose poll numbers are not high enough*—even before the very first caucus or primary has taken place. What a long way we have come, when "conservative" magazines must take liberal journalists to task for paying too much mind to political philosophy, and not enough to the raw numbers of ephemeral polls. George Santayana, call your office.

What interests liberal journalists about Buchanan is the deep inner consistency of his ideas. He represents both the economic interests and the cultural values of the working and lower middle classes.

Individuals from these classes, long scorned by both multiculturalist leftists and fiscal conservatives, are the patriotic rubes who sign up to fight wars to advance liberal and internationalist utopias. Their ethnic enclaves and low-priced suburbs have been the victims of

Correspondence

urban renewal, Section 8 housing, and massive influxes of impoverished immigrants—all of which combine to deprive these citizens of any vestige of continuity, community, or safety.

Buchanan is an intellectual with convictions derived from principles—from pre-Vatican II Catholic social teaching, in case you were wondering. Because of those principles, Buchanan believes that the American worker's family is every bit as important as the American investor's portfolio.

The unbounded, corrosive scorn which semi-demi-neo-pluto-conservatives of THE WEEKLY STANDARD school heap upon Buchanan is cheap and unfair.

You have set yourselves up as arbiters of conservative principle and identity. I'll say one thing: You people may not have grit, but you certainly have gall.

JOHN ZMIRAK
BATON ROUGE, LA

State, Expensive Bookie

Just when I thought things were changing, just when steaks and big fat cigars are no longer socially unacceptable, you pencil-necks come out against gambling ("The State as Bookie," Jan. 29).

As usual, if someone gets shot, the do-gooders want to ban handguns. Just because some people can't control themselves, my grandmother should be barred from dropping quarters into the slot machines on the riverboats in Vicksburg, Mississippi.

The state is selling false dreams. Boo-hoo. Your gripe seems to be that it's the state selling the snake oil instead of some other hustler. But inevitably some fool will win the state lottery. So what upsets you is that some poor people feel disappointed (sniffle) when they lose the game.

God forbid we should blame the sucker for his mistake, or our schools for failing to explain what "odds of winning 7.1 million to one" really means.

MIKE MASON
ALEXANDRIA, VA

Your editorial points out that state sponsorship gives gambling a sanction it does not deserve, but it neglects the most significant difference between public and private betting: Casinos give the gambler a much better deal.

In casino games, the house edge is typically less than 5 percent. In some (e.g., blackjack, played well), the customer actually has a slight advantage. In state lotteries, the house usually keeps 50 or 60 percent of each dollar. The money raised may be spent on good causes, but that cannot justify vigorish at a rate that would embarrass a bagman for the numbers racket. The capos of the mob look after their people too, but that doesn't give them legitimacy.

Gambling is another area where government delivers a service at exorbitant cost compared with the private sector.

PHILIP CHAPMAN
SCOTTSDALE, AZ

Keep Philosophy Pure

David Brooks argues that concrete policy proposals keep conservative intellectuals grounded in reality ("Culture Equals Politics," Jan. 22). Policy debates don't just tether philosophy to the earth. They drag it down into the dirt. Conservatives should be saddened when our intellectuals pour their energies into government, that bureaucratic sinkhole of human hopes.

The virtues and the codes of civility that conservatives cherish, that civilization relies upon, do not flow from government. Getting people to stop thinking that they do issue from government should be conservatives' long-term goal.

Just as we should cringe when a lofty speech about renewing charity and generosity ends with a call for the creation of AmeriCorps, so too should we cringe when a subtle debate about character formation, ethics, or aesthetics terminates in a call for legislation.

Government can barely deliver mail. It shouldn't be the locus of our intellectual efforts. This decade has seen a growing awareness of how subtle and chaotic life is. It is to be believed that the next century will turn this awareness into a new interest in wrestling with deep, complicated problems of sociology, and civility. The more irrelevant government is to such cultural debates the better.

TODD SEAVEY
NEW YORK, NY

Free Speech on the Right

Adam Wolfson's review ("Speaking Too Freely," Dec. 25) is uninformed and wrongheaded. It is, for instance, flatly incorrect to suggest that it "takes a strong central government to enforce a broad right to freedom of speech." Just the opposite. It takes a strong and intrusive government, plus a deferential judiciary, to undermine freedom of speech.

Wolfson's interest in slaying the libertarian dragon could probably find more relevant expression in a review of some other book. *Speaking Freely* was commissioned by the Media Institute to promote an expansive view of free speech among all conservatives—not as a showcase for libertarians.

The reviewer is right about one thing, though. The "electoral triumph" of conservatism means that what conservatives think about free speech is of great importance—for them, and for the country as a whole.

It is important for conservatives because if they choose to protect speech, both content and provider, they will become the leaders of a new media age, marked by news, information, and entertainment of a much wider and finer sort than any of us has known.

It is important for the country because, if conservatives will not champion free speech, who will? Surely not liberals, for whom free speech seems to lose a little more luster with every passing day.

PATRICK D. MAINES
PRESIDENT, THE MEDIA INSTITUTE
WASHINGTON, DC

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the weekly Standard

The End of Ambition

The extraordinary rise of Steve Forbes was entirely predictable. We know this to be true, because almost everyone predicted it over the past year—even though none of us knew we were doing so.

For months, people interested in politics surveyed the Republican presidential field and asked each other the same questions: "Is this it? Are these the choices we're going to have? Can these really be the only realistic presidential possibilities—Dole, Gramm, Alexander, and Wilson?" Say what you will about all of them—and there is a great deal to be said in their praise—there is little that is exciting about these men. Little that is inspiring. Little that would lead anyone but the master of ceremonies at a Lincoln Day dinner to describe any of them as "the next president of the United States." These politicians deserve credit for their dedication, their energy, their fortitude . . . but what about their ideas? What about their vision? What about their leadership? What about their (excuse the tired word) charisma?

> FOR MONTHS, PEOPLE INTERESTED IN PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS SURVEYED THE GOP FIELD AND ASKED EACH OTHER THE SAME QUESTION: "IS THIS IT?"

"Is this it?" we asked, and every week it seemed that yes, this *was* it. Over and over, to the disappointment, dismay, and (at times) disgust of many, other Republicans who seemed to have some of the qualities the declared candidates do not possess took themselves out of the game. First Bill Bennett, then Dick Cheney, then Dan Quayle, then Jack Kemp all decided to opt out of the presidential race.

And so it seemed increasingly difficult to imagine anyone but Bob Dole as the Republican nominee, what with Wilson dropping out and Gramm and Alexander both failing to catch on. But at the same time it also seemed difficult to imagine Dole standing on January 20, 1997 with his right hand on the Bible and Chief Justice William Rehnquist asking him to swear solemnly to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.

In the fall of 1995, Republicans across the country lighted upon two possible Dole substitutes—Newt Gingrich and Colin Powell. Political types understood why Gingrich might not go for it: too unpopular, too polarizing. But Powell was the most popular man in America, a proven leader, an interesting solution to an intractable problem. And so, for two months, the political world froze in place waiting for Powell to make up his mind.

In retrospect, we should have known that Powell would never run. One thing recent political history tells us is that people who run for president *don't* mull it over. They just do it. Anyone who does spend time publicly considering his choices decides against a presidential bid—most notoriously, Mario Cuomo, who would probably be living in the White House today if he had just boarded the plane that stood on the tarmac at the Albany airport waiting to take him to New Hampshire, and glory, in December 1991.

Why? Why don't we get the candidates we want? After all, isn't every American child supposed to want to grow up to become president of the United States? Don't people who have a lot to say about the direction of the country feel an obligation—as they used to—to try and get their hands on the reins of executive authority in Washington?

Or, to put it in a purely negative fashion: Don't they want the power? Don't they want to reward their friends and punish their enemies? Is there not a single politician in America worthy of being written about by a modern-day Shakespeare?

What has happened to political ambition?

Well, for one thing, life has become very comfortable for people who make it big in Washington. They appear frequently on television, and reporters call them to ask their opinion on the issues of the day. They write books that sell millions of copies and make them millions of dollars. They spend a few hours on a plane, get off the plane, give a speech, get back on the

plane, and collect between $25,000 and $75,000. They have all the trappings of power and glory with none of the responsibility.

Alan Ehrenhalt informs us elsewhere in this issue that the great men of the past did not have to jump through the hoops the modern candidate must navigate. Eisenhower did not have to spend 100 days in New Hampshire. Taft did not have to spend five hours a day on the phone making fundraising calls. Stevenson did not have to release his tax returns, run the risk of exposing his peccadillos, or subject himself to the 24-hour-a-day insta-analysis of pollsters and pundits.

As Ehrenhalt says, our 20-year-old presidential nominating system has required a new kind of candidate—someone who is not inherently cautious, who does not hoard his reputation, but seeks to invest his personal capital in a high-risk venture. Maybe this is a good thing; maybe it is an important test of character. John Dryden said that "none but the brave deserves the fair." The candidate willing to take the risk of presenting himself for judgment to the voters is telling them, in effect, that he is "brave" and that America is "fair." For this reason, those who choose to run deserve our admiration and respect.

Is it possible that, watching the rise and rise of Steve Forbes, those who didn't run are spending sleepless nights wondering what might have been? Because any of them might have been where Forbes is right now. Forbes is the unlikeliest of Gary Harts: neophyte, Quixote-with-a-magazine, willing to spend a lot of his own money to advance the interesting but problematic policy-wonk's dream of a flat tax. Forbes was not the alternative to Dole we expected. But we all somehow knew that there *would* be an alternative to Dole. There simply had to be.

Front-runners don't just become nominees because they want to. Front-runners, even strong ones, have to prove themselves. They must undergo a time of testing, usually in New Hampshire—and it must be a test with an uncertain result. Muskie collapsed in 1972. Reagan lost Iowa to Bush in 1980, and Bush lost Iowa to Dole in 1988. Mondale lost to Gary Hart in New Hampshire in 1984. In 1992, Bush had Buchanan dogging him, and Clinton had Gennifer Flowers. It's quite possible Dole will rise to the occasion Forbes is creating; if he does, he can go the way of Reagan in 1980 and Bush in 1988. If he does not, he will go the way of Muskie.

Steve Forbes is an impressive man, and grows more impressive by the day. He has proved himself the most eloquent candidate in the Republican field, the one with the most to say and the most fluent way of saying it. He is a friend to many who work on this magazine, and we could pay him no higher compliment than to say that he has surprised and dazzled us with his talents as a candidate. If he were running for governor of New Jersey, or for senator to fill Bill Bradley's seat, we would think the Garden State very fortunate indeed.

But should a man who has never served in public office, never held a full-time executive position in government, take as his first political job the presidency of the United States? Whatever weaknesses the current field has, every candidate in it but Forbes has submitted himself time and again to the approval of an electorate. Every candidate but Forbes has had to negotiate with unfriendly legislators and learn how to bend them to his will or elude their grasp. Some of them—Dole, Gramm, Lugar, and Dornan—have had to cast votes in which they agreed to send American soldiers to their deaths. This is the kind of experience that makes a candidate fit to serve as president. And though the public remains disgusted with politics as usual, with elected officials in general, and with Washington in particular—and though they are right to be so—we suspect they will not, at the end of the day, turn over the reins of power so precipitously to someone so untested.

FORBES DESERVES PRAISE FOR HIS CONVICTION THAT THE PRESIDENCY IS WORTH THE RISK OF RUNNING. BUT THERE IS REASON TO DOUBT HE IS READY FOR THE OFFICE.

Can Forbes actually win the Republican nomination? America is a conservative country, and the Republican party represents its most conservative face. One feature of conservatism is an unwillingness to take gambles with the nation's future. A vote for Steve Forbes is a gamble—a gamble on the highest office in the land. Steve Forbes deserves praise for his conviction that the presidency is worth the risk of putting himself (and his money) forward, and we do not begrudge him the enthusiasm he has generated. But there is reason to doubt he is fully prepared to shoulder the burdens of the presidency.

Perhaps Dole will rebound and win. Perhaps Gramm or Alexander will emerge against a weakened Dole and a Forbes whose fortunes begin to flag. But what a pity that so many qualified, capable men—ones whose lives ought to have prepared them for this endeavor—chose to leave the field to those now running. A healthy democracy requires grand political ambition among those who would be its leaders. We may not be at the end of history, but we do seem perilously close to the end of such ambition. ♦

Their True Colors

by Christopher Caldwell

Primary Colors has obsessed Washington, especially its Democrats, for the last week or two. Not only because it's a *roman à clef* of the 1992 Clinton campaign, or because its author's identity is unknown—but because the very people it's supposed to be about are vouching for its verisimilitude. George Stephanopoulos, clearly the model for the book's African-American narrator Henry Burton, called the book "a great read" in the New York *Daily News*. According to *Newsweek*, "Stephanopoulos is particularly obsessed with the book. The president's aide is startled by how his character's thoughts—from wonderment at his boss's skill to disgust with his pandering—mirror his own." Mandy Grunwald, the Clinton '92 ad wizard who appears in the novel as Daisy Green, is also obsessed. Responding to an allegation in the *Washington Post* that *Primary Colors* was actually the work of her novelist-sister Lisa, Grunwald replied, "Feel free to spread the rumor."

Which leads to a mystery even bigger than the identity of the book's anonymous author: Why are Bill Clinton's friends hyping *Primary Colors* in the first place? For this is a relentlessly negative book that portrays a presidential candidate even more prone to satyriasis than we know his nonfiction counterpart to be.

The subject of *Primary Colors* is not politics but one politician's lechery, and the efforts of a dedicated campaign staff to keep that lechery from public view. Jack Stanton is a sweet-talking southern governor and presidential candidate who has an irrepressible sexual appetite, a wife who's a ruthless bitch, and a desire to move the Democratic party in a new direction (in that order). The action starts on page 61:

> "Well, we sure as hell planned the shit out of the next few months," Richard [James Carville] muttered. "Except for the woman thing."
>
> "WHAT woman thing?" Lucille Kauffman [Susan Thomases] asked, too loud, too sharp; the entire table went quiet.

This woman thing: When Henry first meets the governor, Stanton is speaking at an adult-literacy event and charming a young librarian with tales of new initiatives from the southern states. At their next meeting, some hours later, the governor is coming out of the shower with the same librarian. As the candidate emerges in the early campaigning, so does news of his various adulteries, first with Cashmere McLeod (Gennifer Flowers), the governor's wife's hairdresser. Next, a black barbecue owner named Fat Willie tells Henry his 15-year-old daughter is pregnant and that Stanton is the father. Libby Holden (Arkansas fixer Betsey Wright, except that here she's a crazed lesbian) comes in to do "dustbuster" work—keeping a lid on Fat Willie's daughter and rooting out other potential bimbo eruptions. Libby makes a failed attempt to get the governor and his wife to concentrate more on their political ethics (they are dirty campaigners, too, and are using opposition research to "out" Stanton's most formidable opponent). She winds up committing Vince Foster-esque suicide-by-gunshot, driven to distraction by having to lie for the Stantons.

Nor is that all. Sexual predation apart, this is a book that consistently derides the president's liberal supporters. The consultant Arlen Sporken (Frank Greer) has the "un-ironic liberal fervor common to Southern Baptists who'd had conversion experiences during the civil rights years." Lucille Kauffman is "dowdy and awful." Most embarrassing of all, however, is Daisy's mother, a New Deal-era socialist from the Outer Boroughs, who cringingly apologizes for her race to Henry by quoting from Langston Hughes, "'*I'm so ashamed of being white*.' . . . This is such a racist country."

Henry thinks, "I have stumbled into Negro Poetry Month."

However much of this book is based on fact, it's all plausible and therefore harmful to the president. Why, then, has it met with such gaga public approval from the handful of younger people who feature in it?

Take Grunwald, who likes the book so much she won't even deny that her sister wrote it. One could cite vanity—Daisy is the book's best-drawn and most likable character. Even so, you'd expect Mandy to shut down the rumor of her sister's authorship as quickly as possible, if not on privacy grounds, then on political ones. For Grunwald, who once told a profile writer, "I have to feel I'm working for the good guys," is portrayed in *Primary Colors* as working for a decidedly *bad* guy, even as roping credulous zeroes into believing the guy is good. Grunwald's saying "feel free to spread the rumor" about her sister's potential authorship is tantamount to her saying: I urge you to believe that *I am the only conceivable source of information* for a novel that portrays the man I helped elect president as having statutorily raped a 15-year-old girl.

Now take Stephanopoulos. Twice, the character based on him has the revelation that, well, yes, the presidential candidate probably did sleep with the 15-year-old:

> I never really thought it through . . . sitting there, beginning to freeze a little in the Bronco, I suddenly realized why: I could not allow myself to believe that Jack Stanton would take advantage of Fat Willie's teenage daughter; and yet I couldn't believe he hadn't.

"Never really thinking it through" means the kind of doublethink by which the entire campaign staff adopts a see-no-evil attitude towards the boss and an attitude of imperious omniscience towards the public. "The campaign would proceed under the assumption that the story was trash," says Burton/Stephanopoulos. "The official posture would be outrage: who could take such garbage, sold to a supermarket sheet for money, seriously?"

Is this one of the places where Stephanopoulos's thinking supposedly mirrored his fictional counterpart's? If so, it's particularly damaging because this is where the book is most plausible—even unmistakable—as thinly veiled nonfiction. It tracks real life almost word for word and gesture for gesture. When news of the candidate's philandering comes out, the first response of the governor's wife, Susan (she of the big hairbands and bad moods), is to slap her husband's face. Her second is to assemble the campaign staff, blame these untruths on his political foes, and demand a show of loyalty: "Is there anyone here who thinks these attacks on us haven't been orchestrated, part of a plan to wipe out the strongest Democrat before he took off?" The governor's wife agrees to appear with Stanton after the Super Bowl on *60 Minutes*. On the air, the two admit that their marriage has had "tough times," and touchingly she takes his hand. When the lights go off, she drops his hand "as if it were a dead rat."

There's something in this whole affair that reminds one not of *All the King's Men* or *The Last Hurrah*—the books to which *Primary Colors* is being compared—but of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. For *Primary Colors* is a not-too-well-written potboiler-cum-exposé that gets all the facts slightly wrong yet conveys the meat of the matter tellingly. The chorus of applause from actual veterans of the Clinton campaign is shocking. Silence on their part would be the least one could ask of loyalty: Why aren't they *denouncing* this thing?

Perhaps they haven't read it. Or perhaps Clinton is not wearing well with them—there's a school of thought, after all, that the Clintons are now in the trouble they're in because neither of them knows how to repay a favor or honor a promise, and the president has gone through speechwriters the way Jack Stanton goes through women.

A more likely reason is that these staffers have fallen prey to the Clintonite worldview: Appearance and reality have merged for them, and spin has become a conditioned reflex.

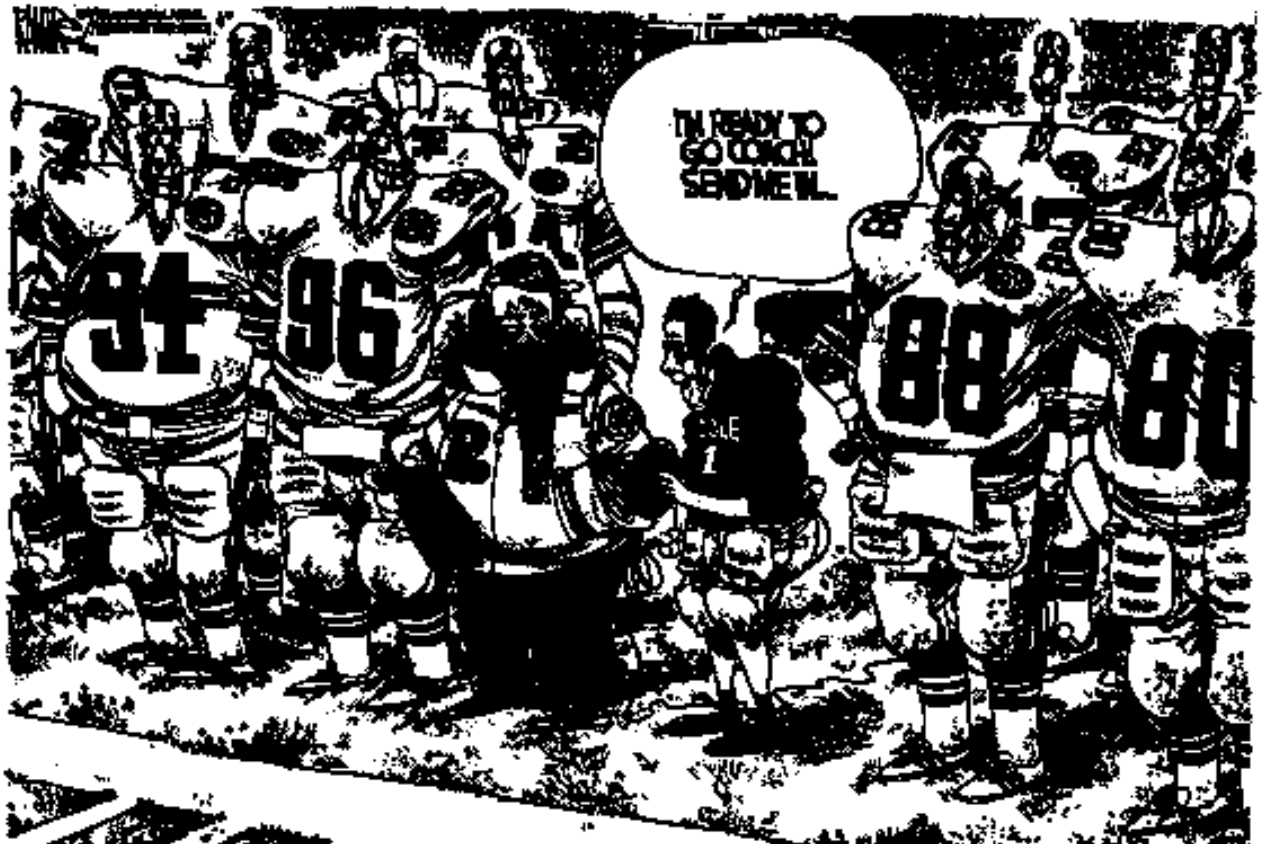
After four years of saying the president is up when he's down, or that he's strong when he's weak, or that he's telling the truth when he's lying, they now look at a demeaning portrait of their boss and call it a flattering one: Because Governor Stanton is recognizable as Clinton, he's good. Because we're recognizable as his loyal retainers, so are we. Because the book is about us, it's a good book. ♦

A Little Help from His Friends

by Fred Barnes

Merrimack, New Hampshire

Bob Dole needs a friend. Threatened by the insurgent presidential campaign of Steve Forbes, Dole can no longer rely on his Washington clout and personal political resources to win the Republican presidential nomination. He requires outside aid, and he's getting it from Steve Merrill, the mega-popular and very conservative governor of New Hampshire. The result: Dole still has the best chance to be the GOP nominee.



Merrill's endorsement of Dole last November was overshadowed by the announcement by Colin Powell the same day that he wouldn't run for president. But Merrill, who earlier leaned toward Sen. Phil Gramm, turns out to be critical to Dole's future. He's now the most influential strategist in the Dole camp, participating in the campaign's morning conference call and talking four or five times a day to Scott Reed, the campaign manager. Moreover, he helped shape Dole's two-track strategy in which the candidate mingles with voters and talks about values while others pound away at Forbes.

In New Hampshire, Merrill appears everywhere with Dole, the young sidekick (49) to the older Dole (72). What's striking is Merrill's ability to stir enthusiasm where Dole doesn't. The two are an odd couple. Merrill is ebullient, grinning, optimistic, voluble. Dole strains to keep a smile on his face, and his speeches are never barnburners. When he addressed the Merrimack Chamber of Commerce here on January 31, Dole spoke for 30 minutes without being interrupted by applause. Merrill, who'd been gabbing with journalists, showed up late, then provoked a half-dozen ovations in a 5-minute talk touting Dole.

Better yet, Merrill has gone on TV with attacks on Forbes. In one, Merrill is standing outside, in casual clothes, in a residential neighborhood. He insists the Forbes flat tax will bloat the deficit and drive up taxes. As a consequence, "the typical New Hampshire household will pay $2,000 more in taxes and we lose our property tax deduction and our mortgage interest deduction." This argument is dynamite, Merrill told me, because New Hampshire "is not a renter or condo state." It has a disproportionately high percentage of homeowners.

Without Merrill, Dole would be doomed in the New Hampshire primary on February 20. And this circumstance—the need to rely on the Republican party establishment—is also true for Dole nationally. As a candidate, he's bland. His rhetorical style is unusual, with cryptic asides sprinkled throughout his speeches, and he's never compelling. His status as Senate majority leader doesn't seem to impress many. And he won't outspend Forbes. But he does have the backing of most party leaders—21 of 31 governors, 28 of 53 senators, and so on—and that is crucial.

In 1976, Gerald Ford defeated Ronald Reagan and won the GOP nomination solely because the party brass supported him. While Forbes may not measure up to Reagan, Dole clearly is playing the Ford role. There's another precedent that should encourage Dole. The early front-runner normally grabs the prize in the Republican party. Ford did. So did Reagan in 1980, Bush in 1992.

But there's one more characteristic of GOP presidential races, a less favorable one: The frontrunner invariably suffers an embarrassment along the way, maybe two or three. Dole is already up to two. Last August, he was tied by Gramm in a well-publicized straw poll in Iowa, whose caucuses on February 12 are the first major battleground this year. Then came Dole's lackluster response on January 23 to President Clinton's State of the Union address. Dole, by the way, at first thought he'd done well. When criticism from the press and various Republicans mounted, Dole blamed himself. He lamented privately that his delivery of the response had been poor.

DOLE THOUGHT HE HAD DONE WELL IN HIS RESPONSE TO THE STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS. WHEN CRITICISM MOUNTED, HE BLAMED HIMSELF.

The aftermath of this debacle amounts to a defining moment for the Dole campaign. "The question is whether he is going to slip into a deep, dark melancholy or say something that reflects that dark side," an adviser said. That has happened to Dole before when he's been under pressure. But this time, no gloom or self-pity, at least so far. Nor has Dole second-guessed his campaign staff, which drafted the response to Clinton. His Senate aides, notably Sheila Burke, were sharply critical of the speech, however, calling it too conservative and partisan and insufficiently conciliatory to Clinton. But Dole has stuck to the game plan.

It requires him to talk about three things: old-fashioned values, himself, and his differences with Clinton. In his stump speech, Dole says growing up in a small town "isn't always easy, but the values are durable." Merrill has persuaded him to talk more about himself, arguing that Republicans respect him for having thwarted Clinton but don't know him personally. His best personal statement came in his closing comment, ad-libbed, at a televised debate in Des Moines, Iowa, on January 13. "I'm from Kansas. I'm a neighbor. . . . Neither of my parents finished high school. We grew up living in a basement apartment. . . . I sacrificed for America. That doesn't entitle me to anything. But it does help me understand what a great and glorious future we have." Merrill and other Dole advisers loved it.

Dole had hoped for an early knockout of his rivals, but now he figures Forbes may contest the nomination all the way to the convention in San Diego in August. He's angry about Forbes's campaign spending, regarding it as a perversion of democracy. But his aides see one upside. The Forbes wave, like Reagan's rise in 1976, came early enough for Dole to fight back before the primaries begin. Ford won in New Hampshire by branding Reagan a threat to American life as we know it. Dole, or his allies anyway, is now saying the same about Forbes.

And the sudden rise of Forbes has also given Dole time to organize his institutional Republican backers for battle. Merrill is fully girded, slashing away at the Forbes version of the flat tax. "There's no tax silver bullet," he says. "And Steve Forbes sold this tax as a silver bullet. When the race turns, it'll turn significantly, 10 points just like that." He snaps his fingers and smiles. ♦

Campbell in the Soup

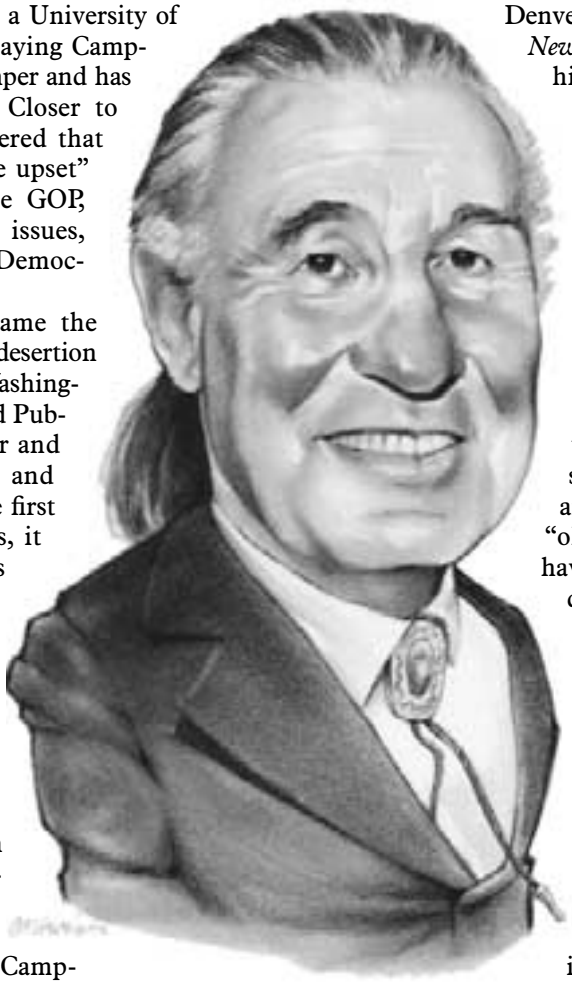
by Matthew Rees

When Ben Nighthorse Campbell of Colorado was elected to the Senate in 1992, he quickly became a darling of the national Democratic party. As the first person of Native American descent to serve as a senator, and someone who had spent part of his youth in an orphanage, he seemed to embody the American Dream. The media lapped it up: *People* magazine ran a fawning profile, describing Campbell as "a strong mix of style, substance and complexity," while the *Washington Post* anointed him a "national representative for American Indians everywhere." The *Boston Globe* magazine touted his "bootstrap tale," saying Campbell "approximates the Jeffersonian vision of the American legislator," dividing his time between his farm and the capital. A piece by Campbell himself, about gambling on Indian reservations, ran on the opinion page of the *New York Times*.

But beginning last March, press coverage of Campbell became decidedly more critical. Frustrated with the Democratic party's opposition to the balanced budget amendment and support for increased ranching and mining fees on public lands, Campbell switched to the Republican party. "I have not been able to live up to the expectations of the Democratic

party, so it is best to go our separate ways," he said at a March 3 press conference, where he was flanked by Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole and 20 other GOP senators (some wearing bolo ties in Campbell's honor).

The reporting of Campbell's announcement was a sign of things to come. In its first six paragraphs, the *New York Times*'s 24-paragraph story called Campbell's statement "typically ambiguous," characterized him as a "sartorial maverick," incorrectly cited a dispute Campbell had with his former chief of staff as a reason for his switch, and quoted a University of Colorado political analyst as saying Campbell "has a very, very sharp temper and has a hard time controlling it." Closer to home, the *Denver Post* thundered that "conservationists shouldn't be upset" by the senator's jump to the GOP, because "on environmental issues, Campbell votes like a lousy Democrat—but a great Republican."



Comments like these became the rule in coverage of Campbell's desertion of the Democrats. When the Washington-based Center for Media and Public Affairs analyzed newspaper and television coverage of House and Senate Republicans during the first 100 days of the new Congress, it scored 81 percent of the stories about Campbell "negative." The only person with a higher negative rating (85 percent) was Alfonse D'Amato of New York. Even the *Denver Post* conceded in a highly critical news story in October that, while the senator "always took some knocks," criticism had "sharpened since Campbell's switch from Democrat to Republican." The *Post* story went on to characterize Campbell's Senate performance as "lackluster" and called him an "uninspired follower, not a leader." It backed up this claim by quoting former Colorado senator Gary Hart, hardly an impartial observer of Republicans.

While Campbell has faded from the national spotlight since switching parties, what national press coverage he's received has focused on his opposition to GOP plans for reforming Medicaid and welfare and has ignored his membership in the Northern Cheyenne tribe. "When I was a Democrat," says Campbell, "there always seemed to be something in there about my ethnic background." Now, stories stress personal idiosyncrasies (his taste for motorcycles, his appearing in a Banana Republic ad), his nonconformist positions on social issues, and the fact that he switched parties. In other words, ethnic diversity among Republicans isn't newsworthy, but ideological diversity is.

Campbell claims the most convincing evidence of the shift in press coverage comes from Colorado newspapers. His office had maintained what it calls "a professional relationship" with the two Denver dailies, the *Rocky Mountain News* and the *Denver Post*, prior to his party switch. But Campbell saw a "marked change" once he became a Republican. At one point, a reporter from one of these papers screamed at his state press secretary, James Doyle, and his Washington chief of staff, Ginnie Kontnik, demanding to speak to the senator. Both papers wrote a number of stories about staff turnover related to the party switch. One melodramatic article in the *Denver Post* said "old friendships and loyalties have been ripped apart" and quoted a former scheduler for Campbell as saying, "The hardest part for me has been missing the people who I worked with. We had an extremely close office. We really were each other's family." The story pointed out the staff were so close they "used to rent a beach house together."

John Brinkley, a Washington-based reporter for the *Rocky Mountain News*, has been a source of particular ire for Campbell. Brinkley has covered Campbell for six years, and his coverage was without incident until about six months ago. Then Brinkley wrote a series of stories focusing on turmoil among former staffers, as well as plans for Campbell's Washington office to go on a taxpayer-funded retreat. In August, Brinkley wrote a critical article describing Campbell as "withdrawn and reluctant to meet with constituents," adding, "Campbell's actions are leading some to wonder whether he has lost interest in being a senator." The criticism included references to Campbell's reading during the con-

gressional recess ("the 1995 Custom Chrome Guide and the 1995 Harley-Davidson Catalogue") and his refusal to fight for $15 million in federal spending on a Denver-area transportation project. Campbell's response to this story was to refuse to answer Brinkley's questions unless they were submitted in writing (unacceptable to Brinkley) and to charge that the reporter has "drinking buddies" among former Campbell staffers. Brinkley says that he has no personal relationship with any of Campbell's past or present staffers and that his coverage has not been affected by the senator's jump to the GOP.

But the tensions didn't end there. In October, one of Brinkley's Denver-based colleagues, Peter Blake, slammed Campbell for his "adolescent response" to the August piece on Campbell's performance as a senator: "[I]f the story motivated [Campbell] to change his ways, and he can manage to stay enthusiastic throughout the next three years, and no skeletons emerge from his closet, and he doesn't suddenly decide to ride off to South Dakota forever on his Harley-Davidson, and he gets elected governor (or re-elected senator), then he owes Brinkley a debt of gratitude, an apology and maybe even a turquoise and silver belt buckle he fashioned himself." Most senators would not dignify such insolence with a comment. But the salty Campbell says of Blake, "I avoid him like the plague."

Campbell's new distance from reporters may be one reason criticism of him has leveled off. And with a presidential election looming, as well as a contest to fill the seat of Colorado's retiring GOP senator Hank Brown, Campbell should be out of the limelight for a while.

Nonetheless, having been a member of both parties, Campbell is convinced "Republicans tend to get worse press across the board" than Democrats. He says he won't be surprised if the same media that, in the words of House Speaker Newt Gingrich, once portrayed him as a "Native American silversmith who is really interesting and artistic and creative," write about him with a little less sympathy once he comes up for reelection. ♦

A Happy Warrior, R.I.P.

by Carl M. Cannon

THE DAY AFTER his State of the Union address, President Clinton rose early to attend a memorial service at St. John's Church across Lafayette Square from the White House. Clinton gave one of the eulogies to a loyal friend, former House member Mike Synar of Oklahoma. Cancer—the same kind that struck his ideological antithesis, Lee Atwater—took him just a year after he left Congress. And like Atwater, he died too young, at 45.

Synar's defeat in a Democratic primary two years ago foreshadowed the huge Republican victories across the nation in the midterm election. He lost to an underfunded amateur who had no chance in the fall against the Republican juggernaut.

> THERE ARE LESSONS REPUBLICANS CAN LEARN FROM MIKE SYNAR'S TENURE, WHETHER THEY KEEP THEIR POWER FOR TWO YEARS OR 40.

"When he was defeated in 1994, there was probably no person in America more responsible for it than me," Clinton told the mourners at St. John's. Clinton noted that Synar, resisting tremendous pressure from back home, voted for Clinton's 1993 budget bill, the one with the Oklahoma-hostile gasoline tax increase. The one that passed by one vote.

"If I hadn't been elected president, he probably wouldn't have had to worry about whether the Brady bill became law or not," Clinton said. "He wouldn't have had to take that tough vote."

This was genuine on Clinton's part, not grandstanding, for the event was closed to the press. It also happened to be true. Synar not only voted for the 1993 budget bill and the Brady bill, but also the assault-weapons ban, probably the toughest vote of his time in his mostly rural northeast Oklahoma district. It was refreshing for the president to accept the burden of accountability for Synar's loss, but he may have been too hard on himself: Long before Bill Clinton came to Washington, Mike Synar was casting unpopular votes.

"He runs some breathtaking political risks," Michael Barone wrote in the 1994 *Almanac of American Politics*. "Synar has a liberal voting record, by far the most liberal of any white member from the South, more liberal than most Democrats from the North." Nor was this self-proclaimed "Okie from Muskogee" a

flag-waving hawk. He voted against the flag-burning amendment and against the Persian Gulf War resolution to boot.

It can be argued that Democrats are elitist and arrogant and that they lost in 1994 because they were out of touch with ordinary Americans. Fair enough. But winning elections brings obligations. One is to be responsive to the people, certainly. Another is to take the heat sometimes—the very kind being exerted now on House freshmen. There's no way to know if Republicans are going to keep their power for two years or 40, but there are lessons they can learn from Synar's tenure.


Neil Shigley

The House Republicans are being called "extremists" on a daily basis by no less a light than the president of the United States. To be sure, if Synar were alive, he'd be calling them that, too. But when he was attacked, he always hung tough and kept his good humor. The next time liberals in their districts accuse them of wanting to wreck Medicare and starve the poor, they can pause and consider what it was like for Mike when he flew home to his district one day to find a billboard that read: "Stalin, Hitler, Castro, Synar"—placed by a disgruntled constituent.

"At least he cared," Synar quipped.

He wore his maverick tag—and his ability to stir up passions—as an advertisement of his independence. Rep. Dick Durbin recalled at the memorial service how on some foreign trip, a local dignitary had somehow induced a crowd of peasants to chant "Synar! Synar!" when he arose to address them. Synar turned to Durbin, flashed his Huck Finn grin and said facetiously, "Just like home."

If Synar learned to laugh at himself, he never learned to temper the fervor of his crusades. "Mike would never forgive me," Durbin said in his eulogy, "if I didn't use this opportunity to take one last swing at the tobacco companies." In the 1980s, the Democratic party, following Tony Coelho's lead, raised millions in PAC money from corporate interests. Mike Synar spent the decade battling cigarette makers, mining interests, logging companies, and western ranchers, whom he derided as "whiny, millionaire, welfare cowboys."He didn't always win, and he wasn't always right. I covered a 1993 hearing on mining law at which Synar and Sen. Pete Domenici hurled statistics, data, and anecdotes at each other—none of which was true. That day, and many others, Synar got on the nerves of his Republican adversaries. But even when they thought he was misguided, they didn't question his motives.

At the memorial service, Sandra Zeune Harris, a longtime aide, told this amazing story. Seems a contributor from back home asked Mike for a favor. After hearing the man out, Synar told him he didn't think he agreed with him, but even if he did, he couldn't help him. "Why not?" asked the perplexed constituent. "Because," Synar replied, "you've given me too much money."

Carl M. Cannon is the White House correspondent for the **Baltimore Sun.**

Potemkin Diplomas

by Robert Weissberg

Not long ago, a university's graduation rate was interesting only to professional educators. It was rarely discussed. It was a bit of information neither trivial nor profound; it was simply a statistic.

Today, however, this figure is a public concern, fraught with political significance. The quest for equality of opportunity has been transformed into a demand for desirable outcomes, and the graduation rate now serves as a critical measure of an institution's success. A quick "in and out" pattern—matriculation and withdrawal—may still be the rule for unqualified students, particularly minorities, who are most harmed; but it could become a time bomb for the dirty little secret of preferential admissions.

Should college presidents worry that the scandal of revolving-door education will be exposed? They have one thing going for them: Unlike learning, graduation rates are easily manipulated. To educate barely literate, unmotivated students is a difficult, awe-inspiring accomplishment; to graduate them, by comparison, is a snap. So long as nobody asks what the graduates know, the political fallout from educational failure is minimal. Fortunately for the pressured university, many poor souls still equate holding a diploma with knowing something.

What can a university do to improve its graduation rate, short of outright transcript falsification? Let us count a few of the ways. Each of the steps described below has the advantage of relative obscurity, consistent with traditional administrative discretion. Most of them, taken separately, are defensible—even commendable. But together, they make for a gross fraud, perpetrated in the name of educational progress.

The modern university takes care to offer "special" courses. These are remedial courses, really, whose dumbed-down character is unrevealed in catalogue descriptions. Many people, including future employers, are unaware of their existence. They are not traditional "gut" courses open to anyone; rather, they are available only to "at-risk" students who would otherwise be unable to graduate. At the University of Illinois, where I teach, over a dozen such "transition" courses are offered every semester to a select clientele. This technique of "social progress" is a carry-over from the days of "athletes-only" classes. Indeed, it is still a bread-and-butter means of ensuring that academically troubled athletes are eligible.

> SO LONG AS NOBODY ASKS WHAT UNIVERSITY GRADUATES KNOW, THE POLITICAL FALLOUT FROM EDUCATIONAL FAILURE IS MINIMAL.

Then there is easy transfer credit. A student may hold a school's degree, but that does not certify that he completed all of his coursework there. The acceptance of transfer credit, even from schools with plebeian standards, is a nicely invisible way of keeping marginal students afloat. Students on the verge of failure can summer at a nearby community college for a fix of As in no-brainer subjects. At Illinois, one-quarter of the 120 credits necessary to graduate may be obtained at outside institutions. As long as (roughly) equivalent courses exist at the home university, and someone is willing to accept that formal course descriptions reflect actual content, grades earned elsewhere count fully toward graduation. Hence, an adulterated degree may be issued and received—a Cadillac with Chevy parts.

Next, there is the phenomenon of "official rescues." A student facing failure can petition a sympathetic dean to drop a course just before the ax falls. Usually, this extrication is equally welcomed by the instructor. A legacy of irresponsibility—skipped classes, forgotten assignments, missed exams, horrible performances—vanishes completely. Moreover, a well-meaning dean can rescue a panicked student from an upcoming final by granting an official excuse for some never-described "personal problem." Even medical exemptions can be wangled, as current interpretation of privacy law makes it nearly impossible for professors to distinguish between genuine illness and well-timed hypochondria.

"Steering," too, has become a more frequent occurrence on campus: the practice of encouraging young people to follow the path of least resistance. An endangered student today receives more than sage advice from an experienced counselor. There is a new variety of counselor, who deals exclusively with marginal students. Unlike the advisers of old, whose performance was not measured by how well their advisees did, these modern experts have a vested economic interest in getting their charges through. After all, too many flunk-outs could invite a program's abolition. No sense suggesting a tough math or science class.

Also to consider is a professor's ideological embrace—the shielding of disadvantaged students by professors who fancy themselves humanitarian. Every university has its share of this type of professor, typically concentrated in the social sciences. One former colleague, a world-famous scholar, routinely dispensed B minuses to undeserving minority students, not quite willing to grant an A or even a level B, but definitely unwilling to go as low as C. Such professors, predictably, become well-known to harried guidance counselors who are charged with meeting the numbers. A steady diet of this type of prof can do wonders for ailing grade point averages.

Another useful tool is the curve adjustment. Professors, not universities or accrediting bodies, freely define letter grades. A teacher sympathetic to the plight of struggling, semi-literate students—or, likelier, one who fears trouble—may easily bend the tail of the curve to convert failures into just-barely passes. Unlike the more notorious grade inflation or the policy of dubbing every student an "honors graduate," this corruption remains obscure. Converting five Fs into Cs is no big deal in a class of 60. Complaints are inconceivable.

Sadly, tolerance for cheating is rampant on cam-

pus. In principle, rules against cheating remain as severe as ever. In practice, less and less is being done about it. Technology makes plagiarism easier to execute, more difficult to uncover. Some college writing centers come close to functioning as officially sanctioned ghostwriters. Likewise, paid tutors may have an incentive to cross the line when assisting their clients.

And administrative "due process" has become a tacit conspiracy to make prosecution too costly to consider. An ex-colleague found *himself* on trial as a result of his pursuit of a cheating case. To accuse a minority student of cheating is to make oneself vulnerable to charges of racism. Deans do not welcome law-and-order crusaders on the faculty. Cheating, unsurprisingly, has become a tempting, low-risk option for desperate students.

Special curriculums? Universities can create these and even whole departments to provide safe havens for students daunted by traditional academic requirements. These programs are usually staffed with faculty committed to dispensing as many degrees as possible. Let the traditionalists smirk at volleyball, art appreciation, leisure studies, and the like: A graduate is a graduate, a booster of the rate. If all else fails, a scheme can be devised to give full academic credit for "life experiences" through internships and independent projects. Unlike containers of food, college diplomas do not list ingredients.

Last, there is what might be described as Marshall Plan-level intensive care. For generations, a college degree was taken to reflect a capacity for perseverance, ingenuity, organization, and other survival skills. Many employers, no doubt, viewed this competence as more important than any specialized knowledge. But "at-risk" students today encounter an environment very different from survival training.

A small army exists to prod them towards a diploma. Along with the ample resources available to all students, Illinois students who are "at-risk" receive special help in everything from computer literacy to study skills. A summer "bridge" program offers instruction in math, reading, and writing. Not only is the program free, enrollees receive weekly living allowances and a cash bonus at summer's end. More important, bureaucrats, counselors, facilitators, mentors, coordinators, and tutors intensively monitor students' performance, consulting with faculty as problems arise. Needless to say, the motives underlying this intervention are beyond reproach. But this handholding *in loco parentis* hardly builds self-sufficiency and independence.

The techniques described above are far from *causes célèbres*. To those engaged in the great political-correctness wars, they are merely a sideshow. Professors have little incentive to resist perpetual toying with grades and diplomas. Special courses and steering remove from regular classrooms students whose sorry performance would inflict moral anguish on believers in traditional standards.

Few professors like to flunk students or read terrible papers. An "out of sight, out of mind" policy helps to preserve innocence as regards the failure of contemporary social engineering. Easy transfer credit also lessens the pain. And, with a breezy "See a dean," professors are relieved of the burden of personally addressing student problems.

ACADEMIC FUDGING IS NEITHER HARMLESS NOR PURELY COSMETIC. THE PROMISE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IS NOT KEPT FOR THE "BENEFICIARIES."

It deserves to be stressed that academic fudging is neither harmless nor purely cosmetic. Many of the "beneficiaries" are oblivious to what has been done for them (or to them). In their minds, honorific Cs in ersatz courses are as real as Cs in engineering or biology. When the supposed rewards of a college degree are not forthcoming, frustration and anger boil up. The promise of higher education is not kept.

And disturbing though it may be, the manufacture of diplomas from Potemkin Village State College should not come as a shock. Highly politicized, pressurized environments virtually require it. Government and private organizations also have learned to manipulate data to satisfy sudden, often unrealistic, political demands. The misrepresentation of facts about job-training, drug rehabilitation, economic assistance, and housing has become an accepted way of life.

So, an era of political cosmetology is upon the university. Few are inspired to ask the awkward questions. After all, if people insist on degrees, what harm is there in granting them? It is likely that, over time, dishonest and dubious practices will gain ever wider respectability. Administrators will come up with additional "innovations" to produce, or maintain, acceptable rates of graduation. For just as governments may believe that printing up currency will solve financial strains, universities, too, may imagine that printing up diplomas will make a country educated.

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There Are No Conservatives Here

By Alan Ehrenhalt

Simple logic made a Republican presidential victory look almost inescapable. The incumbent Democrat, elected with a minority of the vote, had never come close to pleasing most of the electorate. His poll numbers were terrible. His domestic program, built around a cumbersome health-care scheme, had gone nowhere. The newspapers were filled with the tedious details of one petty administration scandal after another. The country seemed tired of the president, tired of the Democrats, tired of government.

It looked like an election that no presentable Republican nominee could possibly lose. And yet, as the campaign began, Republicans all over the country seemed not only fearful that it would slip away, but somehow prepared to lose it. The leading Republican contender for president was the party's leader in the Senate, an aging veteran of undeniable intelligence and legislative skill. For the past decade he had dominated the Republican side of the aisle, alternating between caustic partisan warfare and sustained efforts at compromise.

In private conversation, the senator nearly always demonstrated an appealing modesty and self-deprecating charm. In public, however, his manner seemed brittle, his sarcasm unsettling, his partisanship mean-spirited, his clipped midwestern accent grating to listen to. Three times he had been a candidate for national office, and each time he had demonstrated his singular lack of popular appeal. If it was difficult to imagine the Republican party losing at a time like this, it was easy enough to imagine this particular candidate being rejected.

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That was why, a few months earlier, so many Republicans had been so infatuated with another possibility—a general and recent war hero with no political experience who had never even established clearly which party he belonged to. This general was everything the Senate leader was not—avuncular, soft-spoken, reassuring. He conveyed easy authority with very few words and scarcely a breath of effort. Nobody was sure just what he thought about most of the issues of the day, but one thing seemed all but certain: If he were the Republican nominee, the Democrats would be turned out of office.

> OUR PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS ARE NO LONGER CONSERVATIVE WHEN IT COMES TO TEMPERAMENT, TO VIRTUES LIKE RESPECT FOR ORDER AND GRAVITAS.

By now you probably have figured this one out, in case you did not get it immediately. This is the script for 1952, not 1996, and the flawed front-runner was not Robert Dole but Robert Taft. The president was Harry Truman. You know who the general was. You also know what the ending was. Dwight Eisenhower was no Colin Powell.

To keep the analogy going, you have to ignore some inconvenient distinctions between that year and the present one. The Republicans didn't control Congress in 1952, and the Democratic president didn't run for reelection (Truman chose to retire). So I'm not presenting the comparison between 1952 and 1996 as some sort of uncanny historical coincidence. It isn't that at all. What it does is offer us a way to begin thinking about how presidential politics—and American political life—have changed in the 44 years since Eisenhower and Taft contested the Republican nomination.

The system we currently use is not a very dignified or effective way of picking a president. That point is made countless times every election year, and it is correct. But there is another point to be made, one that we

rarely bother to state explicitly. It is that the presidential politics of the 1990s serves up a different sort of human being than the politics of the 1950s—different in style, different in temperament, different in the most fundamental attitudes toward life.

In the 1990s, far more than in the 1950s, presidential campaigns are crowded with aspirants eager to proclaim their loyalty to conservative principles of one sort or another. They are crusaders for the free market, or for personal responsibility, or devolution, or some image of a better America that existed at one time but does not seem to exist anymore. But when it comes to *temperament*—when it comes to virtues like prudence, reticence, respect for order, and gravitas—then I think it is only fair to say that there are no conservatives in the race.

That was not the case in 1952. Indeed, the presidential election of 1952 offered the country a choice among three people who were conservatives in the innermost compartments of the soul. That this description applies to Taft will surprise no one who remembers him. But Eisenhower, fabled moderate? And Adlai Stevenson, lion of liberalism? Let me explain.

WHEN EISENHOWER ACCEPTED THE NOMINATION, HE COULD PLAUSIBLY CLAIM THAT HE HAD PROMISED NO ONE ANYTHING AND HAD COMMITTED TO NOTHING.

For 15 years on the Senate floor, Robert Taft was the implacable enemy of Roosevelt, Truman, the New Deal, and the Fair Deal. Taft was the prophet warning that liberal government was the road to economic and moral ruin. But he was no reflexive opponent of government action—he was a supporter of public housing to the end of his life, for one thing. No, what angered Taft so much about the New Deal was its aura of reckless experiment—its seeming willingness to indulge in poorly thought-out reform ventures that flew in the face of order, precedent, and decent respect for the lessons of 150 years of American history. The essence of Taft's conservatism wasn't hatred of Democrats, but a reverence for history. The idea of any conservative calling himself a "revolutionary" would immediately have struck him as absurd.

Dwight Eisenhower possessed no such reverence, and no particular animosity to the New Deal. What he did possess, and in huge quantity, was innate caution—a stubborn refusal to proceed with any enterprise unless consensus had formed, maximum strength had been gathered, and the likelihood of success was overwhelming. This is not everybody's idea of statesmanship, but it was Eisenhower's approach to a) fighting World War II, b) running for president, and c) governing America in the 1950s. It explains his reluctance to pounce on Joseph McCarthy until McCarthy had engineered his own downfall in 1954; it explains his repeated distaste for committing U.S. troops and weapons to the tropical skirmishes his foreign-policy advisers kept urging upon him in the White House. Eisenhower believed in his heart that the best policy was very often no policy. He felt more problems solved themselves than submitted to activist solution of any sort. That should make him a conservative in anybody's book.

Including Adlai Stevenson in this triumvirate may seem odd. After all, there is no doubt that he believed in the New Deal. As president he would have maintained it, perhaps even expanded it in a few places. But it is impossible to read Stevenson's speeches or study his career without absorbing his sense of the tragedy of life, the constant of human suffering, and the futility of expecting to end that suffering by purposive public action. From the earliest years of his childhood, in which he accidentally killed a playmate with a shotgun, to the disaster of his marriage, to a woman who went slowly and inevitably mad, Stevenson was a man with an acute appreciation for the cruelties of fate. There were no Humphreyesque speeches from Stevenson proclaiming that the promised land was in sight; his idea of liberalism had more to do with the simple amelioration of misery. Perhaps he wasn't a conservative in Robert Taft's or Barry Goldwater's sense of the word; I think he qualifies nevertheless.

We are living in a different era. This is a difficult time to be a conservative in temperament. For a brief time last fall, it seemed as if Colin Powell might test that proposition. Whatever he may believe on the public policy questions of the moment, he scores pretty well on at least the first two elements of the Eisenhower-Taft-Stevenson conservatism scale—he is clearly driven by respect for order and governed by instinctive caution. His absence tells us as much about the current contest as does the presence of those who chose to enter it.

When Powell removed himself from the campaign, the conventional wisdom soon held that he had been unwilling to endure the sheer physical and emotional burden of running for president—unwilling to spend a year in the field, raise $20 million, subject every

detail of his personal and financial life to the most demeaning form of scrutiny. And this needs little justification. Few normal people wish to experience such an ordeal. Presidential politics is now a natural-selection process that seeks out campaigners, not presidents.

Not so in 1952. That year, Dwight Eisenhower spent the entire spring in Paris, where he was serving as commander of NATO. He sent back a letter declaring that "under no circumstances" would he "seek nomination to political office or participate in the preconvention activities of others." That was as expected. It was Eisenhower's following sentence that mattered. "Of course," he conceded, "there is no question of the right of American citizens to organize in pursuit of their common convictions." That was all it took. By

tector of entitlements for the middle-class elderly. It is also to reflect on Steve Forbes and the panacea of the flat tax, Phil Gramm and the blind worship of the free market, Lamar Alexander and the joy of devolution, Pat Buchanan and the medicine of protectionism. If these people are conservatives, it is not in the Eisenhower-Taft-Stevenson sense of the word. Like Bill Clinton, they are more properly described as Solutionists. If it is hard to imagine Colin Powell competing with them, it is because he does not belong in their company. He is a candidate for another system and another time.

Forty-four years ago, there was no bidding war for the Republican nomination. When Eisenhower

Sean Delonas

uttering those few words of code, the general was signaling that he would accept the Republican nomination if it could be offered on a silver platter, and the Republicans produced one.

Whether Colin Powell would have entered politics in 1996 on terms like those once available to Eisenhower is a question I cannot answer, and I'm not sure Powell could answer it either. What is impossible to challenge is this: Eisenhower wouldn't have given five minutes of thought to seeking the presidency in the way that anybody—even a war hero—must seek it in the 1990s.

But there is a point to be made about conservatives and presidential politics that goes beyond the familiar questions of money, privacy, and stamina. The point is that the modern campaign is a bidding war. True conservatives abhor bidding wars. They cannot win them; they cannot even engage in them without doing violence to the things they feel and believe.

To call the current campaign a bidding war is not merely to reflect on President Clinton, whose minicomeback in the polls in recent weeks was based more than anything else on his reinforced reputation as pro-

flew to Chicago to accept it, he could plausibly claim—and did claim—that he had promised no one anything and had committed himself to nothing. That was possible because presidential nominating campaigns were still not full-fledged exercises in retail salesmanship. The primaries were sideshows. The important decision-makers were the convention delegates, and the one thing they all cared about was the ability to win in November. Eisenhower was assumed to possess that quality, and so it was unnecessary for him to campaign in primaries or to engage in a bidding war for the sympathies of the electorate at large.

The same was true, more or less, on the Democratic side of the aisle. Much has been written over the years about whether Stevenson was really the reluctant dragon he professed to be, or whether he was in fact conducting an elegant cat-and-mouse game directed at winning the nomination. I think the evidence is pretty clear that he really did want to be president. But it is also indisputable that he was nominated with very little effort in his own behalf.

Say what you want about old-time conventions and smoke-filled rooms: They were elitist, they were secre-

tive, they were cynical, they were populated to a large extent by arrogant men comfortable with venality and corruption. But they made it possible for people to run for president who cannot run for it now—people whose appreciation for the natural limits of human possibility does not permit them to barnstorm the country promising painless solutions they know (or at least ought to know) will not work.

When it came to campaigning and promising, Robert Taft was not quite the virgin that Eisenhower and Stevenson were. He wanted the presidency badly, he had wanted it for years, and he was willing to work to obtain it. In the stretch of eight months he traveled 50,000 miles and gave more than 500 speeches. Nor was he above telling audiences a few things he thought they wished to hear. He promised southerners that he would name a southern Democrat to the cabinet.

But there were limits. Taft, for all his ambition, was not a man free to re-create himself to please an audience. He conducted the 1952 campaign clearly marked as a standard-bearer: the vehicle of an entire wing of the Republican party, of people who continued to resist the New Deal at home and an internationalist American policy abroad. He was the candidate of those who still wanted to fight the battles of 1933. This was his identity, and his constituency, and he could not change it. All he could do was hope that his faction was strong enough to overcome its opponents—the eastern internationalists whose champion was Eisenhower. As things turned out, it was not.

It is in this way that Robert Taft differs dramatically from Robert Dole, the senator and candidate he sometimes seems to resemble. After 36 years in Congress and a decade as Senate Republican leader, Dole is still not a standard-bearer in any meaningful way. There are no Dole Republicans, in the way that there once were Taft Republicans. Dole's campaign is not an effort to mobilize an existing constituency; it is an attempt to create one, at the age of 72, on the basis of title and seniority.

One can speculate there may be a traditional conservative underneath the armor of sarcasm and sheer competitiveness that Dole wears for protective purposes. It is hard to say. Clearly he has shown a preference for caution at critical moments in the legislative process, the recent budget showdown among them. But somehow it looks more plausible, reflecting on Dole's political life and long Senate career, to say that he betrays little evidence of any larger vision or governing philosophy. He is an ad hoc political leader who operates in the present and advances from one situation to the next. If there are any underlying themes to the 40 years that have taken him from the Russell County courthouse to the 1996 campaign, they would seem to be pragmatism and hard-nosed partisanship, not ideology.

NO SYSTEM IS GUARANTEED TO PRODUCE GOOD PRESIDENTS. THE PROCESS THAT GAVE US ROOSEVELT AND EISENHOWER ALSO PRODUCED WARREN HARDING.

There are worse qualifications for president. No ideology is clearly preferable to many of the existing ones. But the fact remains that, after all these years of prominence, Dole is out there campaigning as the representative of no one and nothing in particular, a vehicle above all of his own individual ambition and desire to succeed. In this he is the most modern of candidates, one who has very little in common with Robert Taft or any of the cast of characters of 1952.

This is not precisely Dole's fault. The fact is we no longer have a presidential politics of groups, factions, and stable loyalties as we did 44 years ago. We no longer have standard-bearers. We have a politics of individuals. We go to the polls in the spring and choose among people who woke up one morning (or many mornings), looked in the mirror, and saw statesmanship, even if no one else had seen it in them before. It is a politics that is dependent almost entirely on self-propulsion.

Of course, to say this of the presidential nominating process is to say nothing that cannot be said of the American political system as a whole, or for that matter of the society beyond its confines. The processes of politics are nearly always an accurate reflection of the larger culture, and that is especially true in this case. All sorts of transactions that used to be conducted by organized groups with stable loyalties and enduring rules are now mostly a matter of individuals selling themselves as transients on an open market. The presidential campaign just happens to be one of those transactions.

But it produces some ludicrous spectacles. Perhaps the most garish exhibit of 1996 is the Republican candidacy of Lamar Alexander, an obsessive political careerist who began running for office in childhood but is nevertheless seeking to present himself as a flannel-shirted man of the people untainted by the wickedness of Washington and its professional politicians. This is one of the things you get when you move

from a politics of standard-bearers to a politics of individuals. You get hustlers scrambling to market themselves in the most spurious way imaginable.

History does sometimes repeat itself in curious fashion. The 1952 campaign that produced Eisenhower, Stevenson, and Taft also gave us the candidacy of Estes Kefauver, the maverick senator despised by party leaders who hoped to ride to the Democratic nomination on the publicity from his televised anti-crime hearings and on the strength of a strong primary showing. Like Alexander, his fellow Tennessean, Kefauver was indulging in self-invention. He was an abrasive, alcoholic Yale graduate masquerading as a simple, good-natured rustic in a coonskin cap. Alexander, who seems to have none of Kefauver's worst personal qualities, nevertheless shares with him the notion that identities can be made and sold at will in a presidential campaign.

But there is one difference: Kefauver ultimately had to appeal to a convention controlled by colleagues and party leaders who saw right through him and wouldn't have nominated him no matter how many primaries he had won. Alexander needs to clear only the more modest hurdle of fooling the electorate. So far, he does not seem to be doing it.

No nominating system is guaranteed to produce good presidents. The process that created Dwight Eisenhower and Franklin Roosevelt also created Warren Harding. The circus we are engaging in now may yet serve up a statesman. It is impossible to be sure. What can be said with confidence is that the present system comes close to screening out conservatives of a particular temperament and attitude toward life. Taft's traditionalism, Eisenhower's caution, Stevenson's tragic perspective—all are bound to be scarce in a politics of self-nomination and compulsive Solutionism.

Perhaps there are moments in history when the absence of these qualities is not so serious. This is not one of them. This is a period in which the United States will be tempted into a whole series of foreign adventures for which an instinctive caution and respect for consensus would be reassuringly appropriate. At home, it is a time of middle-class economic insecurity that calls out for a president with an appreciation of the public desire for order and stability—not one who values change as a good itself.

Maybe even more important, it is a good time to elect a president who can tell the American people something very simple: that they have produced a successor generation too small to support them in the style to which they have become accustomed, and so have to stop spending so much money on Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security or the whole country will be broke sometime in the 2010s. In other words, this is a moment suited for a president with the courage and credibility to tell a society hooked on the present that it should begin facing the future. That is a job conservatives used to specialize in. It would be nice to have one around now. ♦

Mr. Lewis's Center for Public Moralizing

By Tucker Carlson

Americans may be tired of politics, but you'd never know it from the sales of a book released last month called *The Buying of the President*. Compiled by the Center for Public Integrity, a Washington-based non-profit group, the modest-looking paperback promises to expose the identities of the businessmen, lobbyists, and cronies who finance presidential campaigns. "Based on data carefully culled from mountains of public records," touts the cover, "*The Buying of the President* is an incisive, unbiased guide to the *real* power behind the candidates." In less than a month, the book went into its second printing, with 45,000 copies now in circulation. Not bad for what is essentially a collection of rewritten Federal Election Commission reports.

Not that the book isn't brimming with interesting, if sometimes insignificant, facts. Who would have guessed, for instance, that Alan Keyes's fifth largest

"career patron" is an insurance broker from Chevy Chase, Maryland? Or that Kentucky Fried Chicken has made contributions to the Rainbow Coalition? Financial disclosure forms can yield choice nuggets to those who make the effort to wade through them. Clearly, the editors at the Center for Public Integrity have done some wading.

Unfortunately, they didn't stop there. Not satisfied with being a mere conduit for useful information about political candidates, employees of the "nonpartisan 'watchdog' research group" tried their hand at political analysis. Like much the center has produced in recent years, the results are sometimes silly, sometimes important, but rarely do they qualify as objective.

Founded in 1989 by a former television producer named Charles Lewis, the Center for Public Integrity has dedicated itself to nothing less than "confront[ing] this national crisis of confidence in the political process." In practice this has meant bringing the misdeeds of politicians to public attention, mostly by combing through public documents, then publishing the findings. Over the past six years, the group has produced more than a dozen reports on topics ranging from conflicts of interest at the National Forest Service to the failures of the Superfund program—subjects that other media frequently find too dull or complex to tackle. The center also offers its services, as well as its sizable storehouse of information from the FEC, to journalists working on political stories. Reporters can call the center and quickly find out how much money Bob Dole has received during his career from, say, California wineries. (Quite a bit, it turns out.)

Much of what the center does falls within the tradition of high-minded political reform, so it's not surprising that an avalanche of good publicity has followed. Lewis is regularly invited to appear on news programs and op-ed pages as an expert on political ethics. Media luminaries such as Ben Bradlee and Diane Sawyer have been quick to cite the center as a beacon of honesty in American journalism. "Ethics must be reintroduced to public service to restore people's faith in government," wrote former anchorman Walter Cronkite in a letter reprinted in the center's promotional literature. "Without such faith, democracy cannot flourish. Your ambitious agenda is filling a desperate need."

Ambitious, indeed. And that is part of the problem. In its latest book, for example, the center has chosen to introduce each presidential candidate's financial history with an essay describing highlights of his political career. The center's editors clearly are better accountants than biographers, and the sketches often degenerate into psychobabble. Phil Gramm, we are told, is "an elusive, enigmatic figure, full of contradictions and surprises"—presumably in contrast to most other politicians. Pat Buchanan's "strongly held beliefs," we learn in another place, "can be traced back to his conservative upbringing. William and Elizabeth Buchanan were strict parents and their nine children were brought up in accordance with their Catholic faith." As for front-runner Bob Dole, an erstwhile friend is quoted as saying, "He was obsessed by money and power. There are a lot of personality traits in Dole that parallel Nixon."

THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY'S ANIMATING BELIEF SEEMS TO BE THAT RICH PEOPLE ARE COVERTLY RUNNING THE COUNTRY AND THE REST OF US HAVE NO CONTROL OVER THE PROCESS AT ALL.

As psychoanalysis, these may or may not be accurate assessments. Either way, it is disconcerting to find them in a book ostensibly concerned with bringing objective financial facts to the public.

But it isn't just the motivations of individual candidates that the center seeks to explain. It aims to lay bare the nation's whole "brutal, victimizing political process," as Charles Lewis puts it in the introduction to *The Buying of the Presidency*. According to Lewis, the "garishness of money in politics has reached new levels of audacity, and all within the law." Needless to say, this development poses serious problems for American politics—indeed, for the future of the Republic itself. Lewis explains: "Amidst Washington's mercenary culture, in which wealthy private interests play an increasingly crucial role, the impression is unmistakable and indelible that our government—theoretically of the people, by the people, and for the people—is actually being sold to the highest bidder."

This appears to be the center's animating belief—that rich people are covertly, and for their own nefarious gain, running the country. To make his point, Lewis frequently quotes William Greider, who argues that the enormous influence of lobbyists has created a

"mock democracy—a system that has all the trappings of a free and open political discourse but is shaped and guided at a very deep level by the resources of the most powerful interests."

The rest of us, by implication, have no control over the process at all. So it's no wonder, as Lewis asserts in the book, that the "American people are growing more and more economically insecure and politically reactive, increasingly disempowered and disenfranchised."

It's an arresting thesis. But is it true? Is the political process really less democratic than it once was? Less democratic than it was in 1960, when John Kennedy colluded with Chicago mayor Richard Daley to rig the presidential election? Less democratic than it was during Teapot Dome?

Of course not. American politics—like the rest of the culture—has become radically more democratic, more slavishly responsive to the desires of ordinary people, than ever before. The majority of Americans couldn't even *vote* until 1920. Now they can't get pollsters to stop calling during dinner.

But that may be taking Lewis's complaint too seriously. Judging by some of his public statements, the head of the Center for Public Integrity doesn't seem concerned by the influence of *all* special interest groups, just the usual ones. When it was revealed that Sen. Phil Gramm had received extensive contributions from the National Rifle Association, Lewis took to the *Washington Post*'s op-ed page to fret over the power of "gun zealots" in American politics. Lewis didn't seem nearly as agitated about the corrupting influence of special interests a few years earlier, however, when a reporter asked him about Rep. John Dingell's ties to the automobile lobby. Sure, Dingell had worked to defeat mandatory fuel efficiency standards, explained Lewis at a 1991 press conference. But keep in mind that the liberal congressman from Michigan "does speak out on a lot of consumer issues and a lot of taxpayer waste." And anyway, said Lewis, the auto industry executives Dingell caved in to aren't just lobbyists, they're "constituents."

Lewis's slant on politics became even more obvious—and more embarrassingly mushy—in 1994, when he wrote another *Washington Post* op-ed, this one

concerning the fight over health care reform. Likening the president to "the tragic Cuban fisherman Santiago in Ernest Hemingway's classic parable, *The Old Man and the Sea*," Lewis declared that Clinton's "historic health care reform" had been ripped apart in a "feeding frenzy of special interests." Somehow, these don't sound like the words of a politically impartial observer. And indeed they weren't. In its literature, Lewis's organization openly and aggressively defended the president's health care plan from Republican attacks.

No subject seems to worry the moralists at the Center for Public Integrity more than the notion that money from special interest groups sways political discourse. Which makes it all the more interesting that, as the rest of the country was debating the merits of the soon-to-be-passed North American Free Trade Agreement, Charles Lewis co-authored a cover story on NAFTA for the *Nation* entitled "The Big Buy." Over the course of 12 pages, the article detailed the sinister efforts of deep-pocketed businessmen and the Mexican government to shape the debate on NAFTA—a bill, Lewis left no doubt, that would have terrible consequences for the economy and the environment. "All this intensive lobbying by U.S. and Mexican interests," he wrote, "is dedicated to drowning out any contrary or questioning voices in the United States." The result: the potential passage "of a treaty that could prove harmful to a vast number of Americans."

Almost unmentioned in the piece were the forces on the other side of the NAFTA debate—namely, the labor unions, which spent millions in an effort to defeat the bill. In an accompanying sidebar, Lewis did mention that "the United Auto Workers, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and the Machinists, Teamsters and others have lobbied lawmakers" by, among other innocuous things, calling attention to "worker exploitation in Mexico."

Lewis, in other words, didn't exactly train the spotlight of scrutiny on organized labor's lobbying efforts. But that shouldn't be surprising. Four out of the five unions Lewis mentioned in the above quotation have been regular contributors to Lewis's own group. In 1993, the year the *Nation* piece appeared, these four unions gave a combined total of $17,500 to the Center for Public Integrity. (Between 1990 and 1995, labor unions of all kinds gave more than $200,000 to the center.)

But organized labor wasn't the only opponent of NAFTA to fund the center's work. Milliken and Co., a South Carolina textile company that actively lobbied against the trade bill, gave a total of $150,000 to the organization over several years. Needless to say, when it came time for the center to write about NAFTA, Milliken's point of view was adequately represented. In a 1993 Center for Public Integrity report entitled "The Trading Game: Inside Lobbying for the North American Free Trade Agreement," a lawyer for Milliken and Company named John Nash is quoted—uncritically and without any balancing comment from the report's editors—slamming the bill: "I want somebody to make the case to me that we will enter into a [trade agreement] with a country with one-tenth our wage scale, and tell me that it is going to create jobs in the United States. I don't see how it can." A paid advertisement couldn't have said it better.

LEWIS DOESN'T EXACTLY TRAIN THE SPOTLIGHT OF SCRUTINY ON ORGANIZED LABOR'S LOBBYING EFFORTS. BUT PERHAPS THAT SHOULDN'T BE SURPRISING, SINCE UNIONS ARE HIS MAJOR DONORS.

To its credit, the center has been relatively forthcoming about its funding sources, providing upon request a list of its contributors going back to 1989. Alejandro Benes, the center's managing director, denies there is anything untoward about soliciting or accepting money from an interest as entrenched as organized labor. "They were interested in us, we knew they were a source of funding and we went to them," he says. Still, it's hard to imagine the unions didn't expect something in return. In articles like Lewis's *Nation* cover story, they got it.

What to make of a group like the Center for Public Integrity that seems to have transformed itself from a disseminator of information into a political spinner? Charles Lewis himself may have said it best, waxing indignant one morning last June on National Public Radio about the evils of lobbyists: "These organizations are incredibly influential, incredibly powerful, and are affecting public policy, and have special tax status, and I just think it's arrogant and self-serving to try to kind of look down their nose and say, 'Well, not us. We do good work. How dare you question our group?'" ♦

Affirmative Action and the Black and Tan Fantasy

By David Tell

Barnstorming high above Congress in the limitless political sky of his State of the Union, his white scarf trailing in the warm wind of recent poll results, the president makes an unassisted plane-to-plane transfer. His rickety "big government" turboprop spins out of sight. And suddenly a daredevil Bill Clinton is standing safely on the sleek new wings of "self-reliance." His Washington audience gasps with delight and admiration. Such audacity and skill! How will Republicans ever top *that*?

Remind yourself: It's only a movie. Back home at the White House after the show, President Clinton is confronted by unpleasant real-world facts. He still supervises a very big government. His party's strikingly unpopular ideological obsessions still crowd that government's hallways and offices. And because he remains a Democrat, and dependent on Democratic votes, the president must protect those obsessions as best he can. By hiding them from public view. Can he do it? Can Bill Clinton float through a nine-month reelection campaign on the wispy vapors of philosophical self-portraiture, without answering more than occasional specific questions about actual governance?

Questions concerning race, for example, a subject unmentioned in the State of the Union. Largely unnoticed outside the specialty press, the Clinton administration still plays feverishly in the ugly mud of race-conscious national policy.

The president's Office of Management and Budget is troubled by complaints made on behalf of what it provisionally calls "multiracial persons." So it is struggling to decide how and whether to revise Statistical Directive No. 15. From this 1977 document, which standardized federal record-keeping on matters of race and ethnicity, come the familiar, strictly limited categories: Black, White, Hispanic, Asian or Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaskan Native. Needless to say, lots of Americans do not fit these categories neatly. The 1990 Census counted at least 4 million children of mixed-race couples, children on whom the government now affixes an obviously arbitrary label. They deserve a better one, advocates say.

But what shall this new label be? The answer will involve what OMB's Sally Katzen calls a "substantively complex and humanly sensitive journey." According to an August 1995 notice buried in the *Federal Register*, serious options range from the startlingly retrograde "mulatto" to the cosmically contemporary "TIRAH," which stands for "Tan InterRacial American Humankind." And if mere words like these ultimately prove uselessly subjective, the administration has another taxonomic arrow in its quiver. It may dispense with racial and ethnic categories altogether and employ something called a Skin-Color Gradient Chart instead. The chart would be a comprehensive color wheel of numerically identified skin tones, against which each Census respondent's flesh might be judged.

A project heavy with potential political embarrassment, you would think. But still it continues, despite OMB's admission that most of the federal agencies using racial and ethnic data oppose any alteration of existing categories. They have technical reasons. A change of terms might damage the historical continuity of government data. The skin-tone chart, in particular, might produce future statistical perversions, since "individuals could change skin colors over a lifetime as a result of exposure to sunlight or disease." And such a chart also "requires precise, multi-color printing" of government forms, which would be expensive.

Yeah, right. There is another, cruder and more political reason why the president's agency appointees—along with their outside allies in mainline civil-rights organizations—oppose any revision of Directive No. 15. Allowing a "multiracial" response to the Census would tend to undermine affirmative action. Some number of Americans now classified as "Black" or "Hispanic" would presumably opt for the new category, and the discrete racial and ethnic classifications so central to the federal preference regime would then finally begin to melt away. Administration officials cited in the *Federal Register* view this prospect with barely concealed disdain and alarm. Any American inclined to switch categories deludes himself about his victim status: "The perception of others is more valid for evaluating discrimination than individual self-identification." Better the choice be left in government's hands. If it isn't, if existing "Black" and

"Hispanic" groupings grow murky and diluted, then civil-rights litigation and federal contracting set-asides intended for their benefit will become harder to justify.

Can't have that. After all, affirmative action is difficult enough to justify as it is. In a landmark case last summer (*Adarand* v. *Pena*), the Supreme Court ruled that federal minority-preference programs no longer pass muster unless they a) are conducted on behalf of identifiable, proven victims of discrimination, and b) involve a remedy that is provided directly by the discriminating party itself. Which plainly means that virtually every existing such federal program is now presumptively unconstitutional.

Those programs were not originally designed to make specific minority victims "whole." Other laws do that. Instead, affirmative action has become a permanent, regular, free-standing function of government social and economic policy, one that presumes the "victimization" of favored minority groups without ever bothering to prove it, case by case. And the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments do not abide such groupthink, according to the court.

ONLY WHEN HE IS BACKED AGAINST THE WALL WILL CLINTON GIVE UP AFFIRMATIVE ACTION.

Faced with this development, a "responsible" president would scuttle his government's affirmative action programs and (maybe) try to start from scratch. But nothing in the law formally obliges him to, and "our base would go nuts" if he did, as an anonymous senior Clinton administration official acknowledged last year. So instead, the White House has decided largely to ignore the Supreme Court and to quietly delay or thwart *Adarand*'s effects wherever possible. Only when he is backed against the wall by a direct court challenge will President Clinton concede an isolated, particularly indefensible affirmative action mechanism. And he will do so with great public fanfare. *Liberal? Who, me?*

Last October, the White House leaked a front-page *Washington Post* story about how the Pentagon was abandoning its "rule of two," a flat-out minority set-aside policy which reserved defense contracts for "small disadvantaged businesses" whenever at least two such firms had placed a bid. Big money was involved: $1 billion a year. Guess what? Some of it still will be. A December *Federal Register* notice reveals that the Pentagon will now grant a previously unused "bid preference" to any such minority concern. All competing "white male" businesses will have a full 10 percent added *ex post facto* to their regular proposed fees. In order to win Defense Department work, in other words, non-minority businesses will have to *underbid* the field by a comparable amount. Which, in many or most cases, will make their bids unprofitable—and pointless.

There is no meaningful legal distinction between the discarded "rule of two" and this bid preference. Federal procurement is a hard-and-fast matter of blind, low-dollar bidding. Discrimination is practically impossible. So there is no conceivable constitutional justification for the use of affirmative action here, a simple fact that the administration pretends it can't figure out. Even where the specific set-aside program at issue in *Adarand* is concerned, the Clinton Justice Department claims it needs another three to six months of internal review before it can proceed. In any case, the "rule of two" was abolished for a practical, not theoretical reason: A federal trial court in New Mexico was about to abolish it anyway.

Bill Clinton is uniquely qualified by temperament and experience to pull off such political fakery. He ran traditionalist Arkansas this way for 12 long years, talking a good, sort-of-conservative game while diligently doubling the size of that state's government. He managed his 1992 presidential race this way, too, squirting away like thermometer mercury every time a finger of ideological accusation touched him. And his State of the Union signaled conclusively that he now plans to run for reelection in much the same style, muddying the campaign choice into two highly abstracted brands of the same, essentially conservative product: the GOP's frighteningly aggressive one, and his own cautious and caring version.

The ploy infuriates and worries Republicans. They should worry less and get on with their business. Things should not be so easy for Clinton in 1996. The presidency is more than an Oval Office communications strategy. It is governance, too, governance that leaves an unmistakable trail of daily evidence. Bill Clinton *is* the executive branch. And this particular executive branch has established—and is still busily accumulating—a voluminous record of ideologically fraught activity that belies his current rhetorical disguise. A race-fixated federal bureaucracy is just one example. There are many others, none of which can any longer bear public scrutiny in the new, post-big-government America President Clinton wants to lead for another four years. It is that kind of public scrutiny this year's Republican presidential campaign would do well to ensure. ♦

Babar, Bennett, and the Book of Values

By Wendy Shalit

How is it that kids in Communist China don't seem to have time for much of anything but reading, writing, and arithmetic, while we Americans are the ones with the luxury of exploring the communal classroom, the intricacies of self-esteem training, and the blessings of outcomes-based education?

For answers to these and other questions, let us take up the extraordinary case of Herbert Kohl, radical educator. From the 1960s to the 1990s, Kohl is a lens through which to study not only the crisis in American education, but the depths of confusion and moral idiocy to which the left has sunk.

Back in 1969, Kohl wrote an influential book called *The Open Classroom* in which he described "ways of teaching that were not based on compulsion but on participation; not on grades or tests or curriculum, but on pursuing what interested the children." Unfortunately, what interests students is often themselves, whereas the purpose of education was once thought to involve leaving the cave of one's own experience in pursuit of more profound knowledge.

But to Kohl, the ideal classroom "means allowing children to become who they care to become." The irony of this philosophy—which is mostly the logical conclusion of John Dewey's favoring of "growth" over content in education—is that students are not likely to grow much when they are taking cues from their belly buttons.

Kohl makes much, in his description of the democratic classroom, of not "parading out . . . do's and don'ts," but the price exacted by such a classroom becomes clear when Kohl details how it would resolve a dispute over coats.

> IT IS NO ACCIDENT THAT, WHILE WILLIAM J. BENNETT TALKS ABOUT VIRTUES, HERBERT KOHL TALKS ONLY OF "VALUES."

> Hanging up coats in the morning, for example, might become a real problem if students fight over hooks or take things from each other's pockets or throw coats on the floor. In these circumstances something must be done . . . but that does not mean that the teacher should legislate the problem of coats out of existence. The people in the class must deal with it as their problem and come to some resolution. The students can, for example, settle the matter in private with the teacher adjudicating. The problem can also be settled by the class in a general discussion or a mock trial.

Kohl concedes that, yes, "all this may take time—time that will be taken away from reading and science and social studies and other supposedly basic work," but these plans may need to be "put aside," since "it is necessary to take time to solve problems communally."

Flash forward to late 1995 and the release of his fat new book, *A Call to Character: A Family Treasury*, edited with Colin Greer (HarperCollins, 456 pages, $25). *A Call to Character* is designed to guide "the development of values for you and your children." It promises to be "more progressive" than William J. Bennett's *The Book of Virtues.* That is to say, its purpose is to find a market for a leftist version of *The Book of Virtues*—since surely there are millions upon millions of progressive parents hungering for a collection of bedtime stories for their kids who don't go for all that Bennett-style moralism. "The 'call' of the title," write Kohl and Greer, "is the call of a familiar dinner bell to a feast with good friends, not a strident trumpet call to attention and obedience."

And such a timbre that bell has. Consider the treatment of "character," the book's ostensible subject. "Character develops and is tested throughout life; it is not fixed once and for all," they write, and again, a page later, they insist that it "is not a moral nature that is set once and for all in childhood." After all, how can we talk about character when such talk might stigmatize the underprivileged? For, as the authors note, "It is not easy to be consistently honest if one is deprived."

It is no accident, therefore, that Bennett talks about virtues, while our friends with the coy dinner bell talk only of "values." "Values" and "value judgments" are, after all, distinct from factual or empirical knowledge and are therefore, in the

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most fundamental sense, ultimately arbitrary. And so, in miniature, we see the crisis of modern-day leftism, bereft of even its belief in a utopian future—unmoored, but still needing to inculcate something in the hearts and minds of its children.

At first glance, what Kohl and Greer have to teach kids is, proudly, nothing. They counsel parents explicitly not to say anything much about the stories they are presenting to their own children:

> Be careful, however, not to shape your conversations about literature in ways that demand definite conclusions for each session or lead to your children feeling manipulated. Trust is crucial for critical family reading. Children will use their own judgment, make up their own minds about the issues at stake, and often understand the messages of what they read in ways that are surprising to adults. The personal closeness provided by serious, nonjudgmental discussion, based on shared stories, is as valuable as any specific conclusions you or your children come to.

Can't you just see it? "Mommy, does that poem we read yesterday in *A Call to Character*, the one about practicing 'being myself' and being 'amazed at myself,' mean I can push little Susie down the stairs if 'myself' want to?"

Mother: "Why, Justin, what a *surprising* conclusion you have reached! I'm so glad we were able to share this kind of personal closeness, a closeness which is afforded only by such a serious, nonjudgmental discussion in which I don't tell you what I think about your conclusion. That process, as you know from our prior exchanges, is intrinsically valuable, so inasmuch as . . ."

"WAAAAAAH!" And poor Susie is already at the bottom of the stairs, pacifier flung in one direction, Pocahontas toy mangled in the fall.

Like *The Book of Virtues*, *A Call to Character* is an anthology of literary works with didactic introductory material. Only in *A Call to Character*, the idea that morality is arbitrary is the subject of all the didactic passion. In the section on integrity, for example, we are told that integrity "is not a matter of dogmatic adherence to a rigid code of behavior." It is about being true to your navel: "Integrity is rooted in the comfort you feel within," you see, and the selections chosen to illustrate this value are intended to demonstrate "the effort it sometimes takes to like oneself."

AMONG THE TRADITIONS KOHL WANTS TO KILL ARE CHILDREN'S STORIES HE DOESN'T LIKE, STARTING WITH BABAR.

Another section is devoted to celebrating the wonders of "adaptability," a character trait that may or may not be desirable depending on what exactly one is adapting to. Even that old-time liberal favorite, compassion, is good mostly because "a compassionate embrace of the world includes ourselves as well and is therefore a central source of love and self-respect."

What purpose could all this passion for self-respect and character "choice" serve? It's a fair bet that, just as teachers' unions often abandon measurable outcomes in order to absolve themselves of responsibility for actually teaching children, so does abandoning the task of giving content to the moral life of children in favor of such dicta as "be at home with yourself" render the parent obsolete.

Just as the democratic classroom absolved teachers of responsibility for teaching children, the democratic family absolves parents of any responsibility for raising them. What a perfect book for our time, then—a whole tome filled with rationalizations for divorced parents, working mothers, for those whose children spend all their time in day care. After all, if children create their own values, what does the parent need to be around for, anyway? Happily, Kohl and Greer just happen to be on hand to substitute for parents, to help guide children toward sweeter, more progressive hopes and dreams.

And so, surprise of surprises, all that relativism proves too much for Kohl and Greer; they, too, have some absolute beliefs they want to inculcate. The first is that whatever you do, you must buck the system. The best thing about *creativity*, for example, is "the excitement of taking on something new and breaking old boundaries." *Courage* is particularly admirable when it withstands pressure from "authority figures." What is most praiseworthy about *self-discipline* is that it gives children the confidence to "take chances . . . challenging illegitimate authority." *Idealism* means "challenging our conventional ways of doing things." *Responsibility* "means paying attention . . . to the hurt which can be caused by thoughtless habit and ill-considered convention [and] paying attention to the active if invisible role that is played in keeping harmful traditions alive." Among the harmful traditions that Kohl wants to kill are the children's stories he doesn't like. That is the subject of another recent Kohl tome, *Should We Burn Babar?* (The New Press, 178 pages, $18.95).

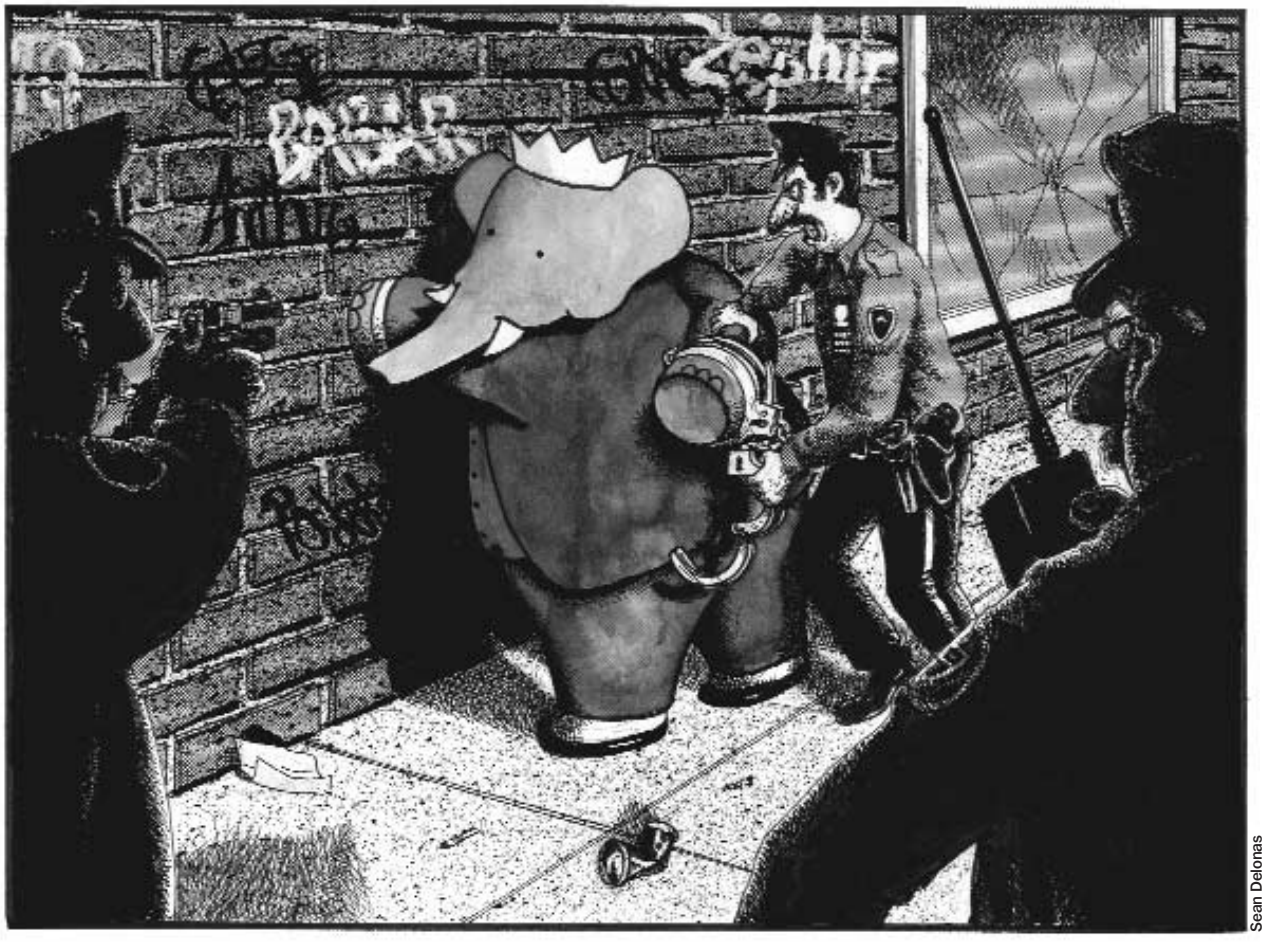
Kohl analyzes the "power relationships" in the now-classic children's stories by Jean de Brunhoff about the king of the elephants and his family, and finds that "in *Babar* the power is with people and not animals." Thus, of the kind Old Lady—or, as Kohl calls her, the Rich Lady—who takes Babar in after his mother is shot, Kohl writes: "She is seen as an extension of the patriarchy, a product of capi-

talism and colonialism who maintains power by buying it." He even insinuates that the Old Lady was in cahoots with the hunter who shot Babar's mother, offering this suspicious reading: "The Rich Lady has money, lots of it. The source of her wealth is unclear. (Maybe it has to do with hiring hunters to trap and kill elephants?)"

Worse still, Babar reveals he is a sellout by treating his little elephant-cousins to sweets. "Babar has been so taken in by people-ways," Kohl explains ominously, "that he does the job of recruiting for them. This is one form of colonization: seducing some members of the group into letting them proselytize for you." And when the Old Lady wonders sadly from her balcony, "When shall I see my little Babar again?" Kohl tartly comments, "She had it right. By the time she is done civilizing him, she owns him."

In sum, "Babar has been marginalized in both the human and animal worlds by his contact with the Rich Lady." And when Babar is crowned king, and gives wise old Cornelius his hat before going off with Queen Celeste in a lovely yellow balloon, Kohl warns us that "the use of symbols and possessions to legitimize authority is dangerous and antidemocratic. . . . Thus power is given to the male military by the Europeanized king who goes off to new adventures."

When Babar lovingly rests his hand on his new elephant-bride's shoulder, that represents "the triumph of the Europeanized male." After all, the relation between Celeste and Babar "is not based on their mutual elephantness at all. It's based on his being able to dress and therefore civilize her." Did it harm a friend of Kohl's, he wonders, to have loved this scene as a child? "Perhaps. It was one of many children's books that showed her that women's happiness derives from being chosen by the right male. Should she have been given a copy of *Babar* to read when she was six? Perhaps not." Then there are those who have "been uninvited to Babar's world"—for example, "working-class people who don't work in stores and serve the rich; poor people; human children; and humans Babar's age"—and let's not forget that "the people in Paris don't all live like the Rich Lady,



Sean Delonas

her friends, and the people that serve them."

Even in this book Kohl vacillates about how "for the active reader, there is no need for one authoritative interpretation" (with the exception, presumably, that *Babar* is colonialist). One thing that doesn't get to be voted on, however, is that stories for children must be radical ones, and to be sufficiently radical means having the following characteristics. "The major force in the story is the community or some natural social group larger than the family." And "in the story members of the group participate in some collective activity that is centered on an issue of social or economic justice." Anything else? "An overall aspect of the book [must involve] a group working toward unity and focusing on solving a problem of inequity" or "creat[ing] a new order of living."

Kohl concludes that, yes, children can be permitted to read *Babar*, as long as they are made to understand the "power relationships" that lurk within. "Often the question is not *whether* they encounter Babar but *how*. Are they aware of colonialism? Do they understand that civilizing the elephants is symbolic of destroying the culture of colonial people? Or that the beneficent free-flowing money of the Rich Lady is a form of glorifying the ruling class?" Kohl has now made it something of a habit to visit schools and alert pupils to these dangers and has discovered an amazing thing—namely, that "pointing [these complications] out to children can have a devastating effect on their reaction to the story." For example, Kohl takes his case to a third-grade class:

> I defined colonialism and pointed out that the costume of the hunter gave him away as a colonist. Next I gave them some history of French colonialism in Africa, and we discussed the meaning of clothes in the story. There is no reason why a discussion like this shouldn't be part of the critical literature program as early as the third grade, if not earlier. Finally the issue of what Babar learned from people came up, and to the group it seemed that he no longer liked being an elephant. Thus, not only was he not trying to avenge the death of his mother; in a way he became the friend of his mother's murderers. Franz Fanon described this internalization of the colonists' culture as one of the deepest forms of dehumanization experienced by the victims of colonialism. . . . The third-graders must have sensed some of this, because most of them expressed anger at the hunter and no longer thought the story was cute or charming.

And as long as we're dumping books, let us not forget the *Little House on the Prairie* series. "As moving as this 'classic' might seem to European American readers, it is offensive to Native American people who are portrayed in the books as barely human savages . . . its dehumanization of the Native Peoples whose lands are being stolen makes it painful reading." And what about *Pinocchio*? Yet another seemingly innocent children's book that reinforces "dangerous attitudes"—in this case, the "boys will be boys!" dictum, "one that leaves the door open for the sanction of male violence." Moreover, since Geppetto and the Blue Fairy are helped by Pinocchio when they fall ill, "the passive role of women and old folk is reinforced by Pinocchio's nurturing role in the story." Thankfully in the case of *Pinocchio*, at least, one is permitted to read the story to children, but only if the "sexist components" of the story are fully explored.

IF ONE MUST DRAW A LESSON FROM PIPPI LONGSTOCKING, "PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH" SEEMS MORE APT THAN DISARMAMENT.

After all, "children will not come to a healthy critical stance without adult help. . . . It is our responsibility, as critical and sensitive adults, to nurture the development of this sensibility in our children."

Then it would seem that, like Bennett, Herbert Kohl does have a trumpet at his disposal. So, then, which stories *are* children allowed to read in the world of *A Call to Character*, and what lessons are to be garnered from them?

From "Lad: A Dog," we learn that dogs are superior to humans: "Time, patience, firmness, wisdom, temper control, gentleness, these be the six absolute essentials for training a puppy. Happy the human who is blessed with any three of these qualities. Lad, being a dog, was abundantly possessed of all six."

In "How the Children Stopped the Wars," we learn that if the children of soldiers would only come to the battlefield, then wars would stop (each side would be too ashamed to fight with their children watching). From Gregory Bateson's "Metalogue: About Games and Being Serious," we learn about the perils of speaking logically all the time—then, as a father puts it to his daughter, "we would only parrot all the old clichés that everybody has repeated for hundreds of years."

In the chapter on fairness, children learn that "in our society, prejudice, racism, and discrimination on the basis of gender loom as challenges to the value of fairness. Many young and older people also feel that they are victims of unfair treatment because of their age." Gary Soto's story "The Jacket" is intended to illustrate such age discrimination in action. A little boy's mother is too poor to afford any other jacket for him but one "the color of day-old guacamole." So, "The next day I wore it to sixth grade and got a D on a math quiz. . . . And so I went, in my guacamole-colored jacket. So embar-

rassed, so hurt, I couldn't even do my homework. I received C's on quizzes and forgot the state capitals and the rivers of South America, our friendly neighbor." Clearly, we are meant to feel sorry for the boy and side against his "unfair" mother, but I can't help feeling sorrier for her, I confess—particularly when the grown-up man accuses, "I blame that jacket for those bad years. I blame my mother for her bad taste and her cheap ways."

Then in "Some Advice to Those Who Will Serve Time in Prison," by Nazim Hikmet, children learn to

> *watch out for lice*
> *and for spring nights,*
> *and always remember*
> *to eat every last piece of bread . . .*

After watching for lice, children might want to beware plummeting skydivers. In the chapter on adaptability, they are told that "one of the most challenging demands on us is how to deal with the inevitable blows we experience, especially blows to our self-esteem." Thus, this excerpt from Ishmael Reed's "Sky Diving":

> *The following noon he leaped*
> *But his parachute wasn't with him*
> *He spread out on the field like*
> *Scrambled eggs*

Perhaps this is the right moment to mention that a good many of the stories and poems in *A Call to Character* are not really *appropriate* for children.

For example, a selection from *Farewell to Manzanar* is intended to show how "a young Japanese American woman learns to become strong in the face of prejudice and racism." This story also shows children that "we all have resources we can draw upon to grow and live fully." And what are these resources? In the story, our heroine becomes a majorette and discovers a rather unexpected lesson:

> Radine and I were both maturing early. The boys in the band loved having us out there in front of them all the time, bending back and stepping high, in our snug satin outfits and short skirts. Their dads, mostly navy men, loved it too.

And in the chapter on courage, a poem by Marge Piercy illustrates this value by "urg[ing] women who have been silenced because of their gender to unlearn habits of silence":

> *You have the wrong answer,*
> *wrong line, wrong face,*
> *They tell her she is womb-man,*
> *babymachine, mirror image, toy,*
> *earth mother and penis-poor,*
> *a dish of synthetic strawberry ice-cream*
> *rapidly melting.*
> *She grunts to a halt.*

The reader hopes, upon reaching a chapter on "playfulness," that the gross stuff will stop for a minute in favor of some amusing stories. Not so fast, white man. The playful Pippi Longstocking is brought into the mix merely to raise "the question: can conflict be defused through play?" But anyone familiar with the Longstocking *corpus* knows that this sprightly girl doesn't command respect because of her playfulness (though that was, to be sure, endearing) but rather on account of her superhuman strength. Her habit, for example, of tossing burglars up to the ceiling and smashing them into bookcases. Or her habit of crooning while skipping, "I am Pippi Longstocking . . . Watch out heeere I coooome!" If one must draw a moral lesson from Pippi Longstocking—and I'm not sure that I am recommending it—then Pippi seems more an exemplar of "peace through strength" than a paragon of playful disarmament.

If only Kohl and Greer had contented themselves with twisting fiction to suit their purposes and left history alone, *A Call to Character* might have been merely silly. Instead one is disturbed to find in the chapter on idealism an excerpt from *The Diary of Anne Frank*—to illustrate "optimism"—that isn't really from the diary at all, but rather from the Pulitzer-prize-winning play that Lillian Hellman and Albert Hackett contrived out of it, which features these immortal lines: "We're not the only people that've had to suffer. There've always been people that've had to . . . sometimes one race . . . sometimes another."

Only these are not Anne Frank's words. Anne Frank's remarkable reflections on her suffering—on the suffering of *Jews*—apparently offended Kohl and Greer's sympathies as they did Lillian Hellman's communist sympathies years ago:

> Who has inflicted this upon us? Who has made us Jews different from all other people? Who has allowed us to suffer so terribly up till now? It is God that has made us as we are, but it will be God, too, who will raise us up again. If we bear all this suffering and if there are still Jews left, when it is over, then Jews, instead of being doomed, will be held up as an example. Who knows, it might even be our religion from which the world and all peoples learn good, and for that reason and that reason only do we have to suffer now. We can never become just Netherlanders, or just English, or representatives of any country for that matter, we will always remain Jews, but we want to too. Be brave! Let us remain aware of our task and not grumble.

Kohl and Greer force Anne Frank to take back these words, because the lesson *they* want to inculcate is that "prejudice knows no boundaries, is color-blind and cruel." And, of course, her actual words do happen to be inconvenient for that purpose. Just because Anne Frank was murdered for being too Jewish for Hitler doesn't mean we should allow her to draw attention to that fact. That would be too "particularistic" and might get in the way of the universalist lessons which need to be drawn. And if a girl's last words need to be distorted by the living in order to accomplish this, well then so be it. The first priority, after all, is to teach children only relevant, updated lessons. And the truth be damned. But then, of course, there is no truth, is there?

Perhaps the best tactic of the left, when faced with the success of *The Book of Virtues*, would have been to sit tight, with lips sealed. If questioned, they should have insisted it was merely an accident that someone on the right produced such a book, because such virtues and codes of conduct are in fact common to all.

Herbert Kohl, in setting himself up in opposition to Bennett and the virtues he enumerated, has now produced two books (totaling 634 pages) in which he is guilty of the very crime the right has accused the left of perpetrating for three decades or more—politicizing *everything*, even a sweet children's story about a happy elephant. ♦

Books

Odyssey of Impotence

By Robert Kagan

Anyone who wants to know why "Europe" doesn't work very well when the United States refuses to call the shots can consult the last chapter of David Owen's *Balkan Odyssey* (Harcourt Brace, 389 pages, $25), a personal account of the ups and downs of European diplomacy in Bosnia from 1992 to 1995. To avoid future catastrophes like the genocidal Balkan war, Lord Owen writes, it will be necessary, among other things, to "link the European Council of heads of government with the Council Secretariat which serves the EU Foreign Affairs Council and the WEU" by creating a new post called the "European Council's Secretary-General," who would be appointed by the European Council of heads of government but would not be answerable to the FAC or the EP. "The key to making this an effective reform," of course, "would be for the existing SG of the Foreign Affairs Council Secretariat and the existing Secretary-General of the WEU to be charged by their respective bodies with working under the authority of the Secretary-General of the European Council of heads of government and the Presidency of the European Union for those matters, and only those matters, which are before the European Council at any one time."

Or you could just have the United States bomb the hell out of them and send an assistant secretary of state to draw up the peace terms.

Events in Bosnia over the past six months have demonstrated two enduring facts of international life in the post-Cold War world, facts our most thoughtful foreign policy experts have spent the last decade denying. First, Europe is not now nor can it ever become what Henry Kissinger has called one of six "major powers" in the world. Great Britain, Germany, and France are each medium-sized powers, capable of wielding some influence on their own. But "Europe" is not any kind of power, major or minor. When it comes to carrying out joint military action in pursuit of a common foreign policy goal, as in Bosnia, the Europeans cannot accomplish anything as "Europe."

As part of the U.S.-led NATO alliance, on the other hand, the Europeans can accomplish a great deal. And that brings us to the second enduring fact of international life: the unprecedented supremacy of American power. What Charles Krauthammer a few years ago called the "unipolar moment" is beginning to look more like a "unipolar era." If even Bill Clinton can lead a divided, hapless Europe in effective military and diplomatic action, and if Richard Holbrooke can bestride the European continent like a colossus, perhaps it is time to stop clucking about America's "relative" decline in the world and come to grips with the reality of America's global hegemony.

Just about everyone else in the world has. Lord Owen may have written *Balkan Odyssey* to defend his failed effort, with former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, to bring peace to Bosnia in 1993. But his memoirs are more interesting as an account of just how unpleasant it is to be a British diplomat in a world where only American power is feared. According to Owen, international thugs like Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic routinely gave him the Rodney Dangerfield treatment while they looked to the Americans for the final word.

"It was clear when we met," Owen writes, "that Milosevic had a deep respect for Cyrus, as he always called him. I talked little in these early meetings, measuring up Milosevic and trying slowly to build a relationship with him, knowing it would be a long time, if ever, before I could command the same authority with him as Cy did." Lesser thugs like Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic also had eyes only for the Americans and felt free to snub both Owen and Vance when it became clear that the real powers in Washington weren't backing their peace proposal.

The Bosnian Serb military leader, Radko Mladic, believed he could only prove his manhood by standing up to a U.S.-led NATO air campaign. Making a deal with the beleaguered Muslims was "beneath [Mladic's] dignity," Owen writes, but after a couple of weeks of NATO bombing, Mladic was proud to surrender to the big boys. As for

the Bosnian Muslims, of course, they spent every waking moment trying to attract the Americans' attention to their plight—much to Owen's acute perplexity and distaste.

Even in the capitals of the great powers of Europe, it was clear that no peace proposal for Bosnia was worth the paper it was printed on unless Washington gave a nod of approval. In the Bush years, when the likes of James Baker, Lawrence Eagleburger, and Brent Scowcroft were trying hard to pretend that there was no Bosnia, everyone in Europe nevertheless had to read the tea leaves to discover Washington's attitude toward the evolving Vance-Owen plan. A wriggle of Eagleburger's nose could make French President François Mitterrand "shift his position" from appeasement to confrontation. A raised left eyebrow from a disapproving member of the Clinton *transition team* could send Vance and Owen scrambling desperately to repair the damage. The pretense that Owen derived his power and authority from the European Community proved as thin as gossamer. Any peace plan he drafted would live or die in Washington, and he realized only belatedly that "our antennae in Geneva should have been more focused on Washington and on picking up the signs of a build-up in negative perceptions" of the Vance-Owen plan.

Owen, not surprisingly, found all this international disrespect thoroughly annoying—imagine a British lord having to compete with Cyrus Vance, of all people, to win the respect of a Serb—and in the very first paragraph of the book he stamps his feet indignantly, fuming that "never before in over thirty years of public life have I had to operate in such a climate of dishonour, propaganda and dissembling." Owen directs most of his anger at the Clinton administration, which undermined his plan and then lacked the will, until last fall, to put anything else in its place. But he saves plenty of wrath for the Balkan peoples, too, including those troublesome Bosnian Muslims who refused to surrender quietly.

Annoyance at the victims of aggression is a common enough response when one feels helpless to save them. In 1938 Neville Chamberlain and other British leaders grew positively furious at Czechoslovakian president Edvard Benes's refusal to keep quiet as Hitler prepared to obliterate his country. In *Balkan Odyssey*, Owen makes all the appropriate declarations placing primary blame for the Balkan horrors at the feet of the Serbs—the purpose of this book is to prove he was not pro-Serb. But Owen's anger at the Muslims is visceral. While he refers repeatedly to the "pragmatism" of Milosevic, for instance, he finds that the Bosnian Muslim leaders just didn't seem to take the same pragmatic view of their situation. Believing that the United States would eventually enter the war to save them, they preferred to sacrifice more Muslim lives rather than accept what Vance and Owen had determined was their fate. Of one Bosnian Muslim leader, Owen complains that "his message to America [was] simple—'we are the victims'—and like all good propagandists he [did] not shrink from repeating the message over and over again." Owen calls this claim to victimhood a "ruthless" strategy by the Bosnian government, on a par, it would seem, with all the other ruthless behavior of this brutal Balkan war. On these grounds Owen feels justified in declaring a pox on all the Balkan houses. How could one be expected to make peace in a place where "nothing is simple" and where "history pervades everything"?

> OWEN'S MEMOIRS ARE INTERESTING AS AN ACCOUNT OF JUST HOW UNPLEASANT IT IS BEING A BRITISH DIPLOMAT IN A WORLD WHERE ONLY AMERICAN POWER IS FEARED.

The real problem for Owen, however, was that the Bosnian Muslims were right: The Balkan war couldn't be declared over until the United States said it was over. No peace plan could succeed without American support, and the Americans never found the terms of the Vance-Owen plan acceptable.

Why not? Much ink has been spilled by Owen and his defenders pointing out that the Vance-Owen plan would have granted less territory to the Serbs than the agreement signed at Dayton last fall. Thus, although it was widely derided at the time for "rewarding Serbian aggression," the Vance-Owen plan actually rewarded it less than does the present arrangement. This is absolutely correct, but it is also quite irrelevant. For both the Bush and Clinton administrations, the problem with the Vance-Owen plan was not only that it appeared to reward Serb aggression, but that it was also impossible to implement and incapable of providing more than the briefest reprieve in the fighting. The Vance-Owen plan called for a "decentralized" Bosnian state divided into 10 virtually autonomous provinces. Just as in the Dayton plan now being carried out, all the parties to the conflict were to be demilitarized, all forces were to withdraw into their designated provinces, and in each province a multiethnic government was to be established "to reflect all groups fairly, based on the pre-war census." Compared with the current tricky plan which NATO troops are trying to enforce, the

Vance-Owen proposals were an even bigger nightmare, and military planners at the Pentagon, much as they may dislike implementing the Dayton plan, liked the Vance-Owen plan even less.

This does not absolve either the Bush or the Clinton administration of its sins. The weaknesses of the Vance-Owen plan were less the fault of its authors than a product of the international failure of will, which in turn was caused by the American failure of leadership. The Bush administration tried to let "Europe" solve the Bosnian problem, even though Bush officials ought to have known perfectly well that only the United States could put the necessary pieces together. The Clinton administration claimed to want to do more but proved so inept and so fearful of taking action that another two years went by, and thousands more lives were lost, before it summoned the will. If Owen appeased the Serbs—and, of course, he did—it was chiefly because appeasement was the only route left to someone without the power to back up his words.

The truth, however, is that it hardly matters what Lord Owen did or thought. The question from the beginning of the Balkan conflict was whether the United States would or would not play the role in Europe that it had established for itself a half-century ago. On the broad tapestry of history, the Vance-Owen peace plan will be but a detail, and the role of Lord Owen himself, notwithstanding this attempt at self-justification, will scarcely be visible at all. ♦

Movies

Cry, the Beloved Opus

By John Podhoretz

What makes a movie a sentimental classic? It certainly doesn't have to be an artistic achievement, a work that advances the form. Think of some of the Hollywood perennials—*Casablanca*, say, or *Gone With the Wind*. At their core, they are as preposterous as any romance novel, featuring tortuous plots and overripe characters. Emotions are overdrawn. Conversation is false, epigrammatic, like a presidential speech laden with self-conscious "soundbites." No matter. Something remarkable happens when you are watching a classic; it overpowers you. It compels you to suspend your judgment. You lose yourself in it, which is, after all, the very feeling that you go to movies to experience. And it's rare enough to have such an experience that to recapture it, people will see a classic again and again, watch it over and over on television through the years, rent it every few months on video.

There have been a few genuine cinematic accomplishments this decade—the overwhelming Russian film *Burnt by the Sun*, maybe *Schindler's List*. But only three American movies in recent years will, I think, prove to be sentimental classics. Of these, one is an obvious choice: *Forrest Gump*. Another is *Groundhog Day*, a clever conceit with Bill Murray as a selfish man forced to live the same day over for years and years until he gets it right—a movie that proved to be the first successful romantic comedy practically since the advent of the sexual revolution. The third is the new *Mr. Holland's Opus*, detailing the 30 years of service of a high-school music teacher (Richard Dreyfuss). These are the American movies from our time that people will be ordering up from video-on-demand 40 or 50 years from now, just as *Casablanca* and *The Philadelphia Story* found perpetual life at revival houses on college campuses and in big cities until the VCR killed off the revival house.

Mr. Holland's Opus is a relatively modest production that did surprisingly good business in its first week of release and made almost the same amount of money the second—a good sign that it has generated great word of mouth and is about to break out as a major hit. Certainly it is generating enthusiasm of a sort one rarely sees in these parlous moviegoing days, though it's an enthusiasm I don't really share. *Mr. Holland's Opus* begins jerking tears about 20 minutes in, when a newborn baby gives a yawn on camera, and doesn't let up until the eponymous piece of music concludes it two hours later. It's by turns subtle (a beautifully rendered relationship between Holland and his most gifted student) and shameless (a deaf son with whom this dedicated musician must somehow find common ground). But this movie is, like all classics, somehow beyond criticism. At the climax, when the 60-year-old Mr. Holland is told by a former student, now the governor of Oregon, that "we are all your opus," he weeps and so does everybody watching.

But is *Mr. Holland's Opus* just the cinematic equivalent of a really effective Kodak or McDonald's commercial, one of the ones where a father and a son share a hug, and a tear wells up in America's collective eye? No. It succeeds, and will endure, not because it deploys emotion-churning gimmicks like those commercials, but because it allows

its audience to share in the joys and sorrows and triumphs of a man we like and admire. And this, above all, is what classics, whether good ones or bad ones, have in common: They are, in the end, fables about decency. They are about people trying to behave well despite their weaknesses, to do the right thing in the face of temptation. Or they are about selfish people redeemed, made whole, by sacrifice and good works.

When Mr. Holland comes face to face with everything he has given up in his life in the person of a young student-singer who wants him to go to New York with her, we don't really doubt that he will stay with his loving wife and son. But the girl is wonderfully talented, beautiful, and worshipful, and so this is no easy choice; indeed, all of us remember, or know of, some high-school teacher who could not resist the temptation of adolescent flesh. Richard Dreyfuss, who gives the performance of his life in the movie, shows us both how torn Mr. Holland is and yet how unimaginable it would be to him to indulge himself in such a harmful way.

The struggle to behave well when it is so easy to behave badly—this is the stuff of the movie classic. It is what links *It's a Wonderful Life* to *Friendly Persuasion*, a screwball comedy like *It Happened One Night* to the uncategorizable *Forrest Gump*. What could be more inspiring than the docile, stupid Forrest deciding that he loves the troubled, smart Jenny and sticking mulishly by her until her death? With a good heart, *Forrest Gump* and other classic movies tell us, you can accomplish anything. "No man is a failure who has friends" is the moral of *It's a Wonderful Life*, while the selfish stooge at the beginning of *Groundhog Day* uses his cosmic punishment to become a doctor, a jazz pianist, and an ice sculptor and so win the love of the woman who can set him free.

Mr. Holland's Opus is going to set some teeth on edge, especially by its philistine dismissal of classical music and an entirely unnecessary and pathetically pompous speech Dreyfuss gives to the local school board. But as I said, there's no use carping. This movie is going to be with us forever. ♦

David S. Brøder

Wise Words from the Sage of Elsinore

It's become fashionable in today's cynical Danish society to deride the role of the palace court and the men and women who are part of it. Critics say courtiers are out of touch with the lives and desires of the Danes who live "beyond the moat."

This feeling of alienation from Elsinore—confirmed by a trip last week to Jutland, where I rang doorbells and talked to swing peasants—is new and disturbing. Only a few short years ago, the common image of the palace courtier was, of course, the universally beloved Yorick, whose way with a jest led many in this town to dub him "the Mo Udall of the 16th century." Now Danish public servants are considered treacherous, two-faced sycophants who think nothing of hiding in a woman's bedcloset and eavesdropping on her while she rolls around on her bed with her son.

But while it is true that some Elsinore bureaucrats are corrupt, most are dedicated public servants who have forgotten more about politics in this palace than their critics have ever learned. And they may have a lot to teach us in these difficult days.

I'm thinking of one in particular: Polonius.

It's fortunate that our new king, Claudius, has kept this seasoned old hand close to him, because his common-sense views on a variety of issues make him perhaps the wisest man in Elsinore. He is quiet, subtle, clever, and fully aware of his own intellectual gifts. "By indirections," he has said, "do we of wisdom and of reach find directions out."

Well spake.

I talked to him last week as he said goodbye to his son Laertes, now off to college in England. He would not say much to a reporter— "give every man thine ear, but few thine voice," he chuckled—but what he did say deserves a hearing.

On the budget deficit, Polonius offered typically sage counsel. "Neither a borrower nor a lender be," Polonius said, citing a recent study by the respected Brüükings Institution indicating that a tight-money policy using CBØ figures would close the budget gap in seven years.

He was equally eloquent about diplomacy. "Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgement," Polonius offered, indicating his support for a multilateralist approach that seeks to gather support, not bully opponents.

Polonius avoids the errors that most Danskers have fallen into of dividing the world into left and right, ghost and human, King and Player King—a voice of reason at a time when the embattled Claudius administration needs one.