the weekly
Standard

APRIL 22, 1996 $2.95

IS HE HONEST?

Tucker Carlson on Ross Perot's sleazy adventures in the Nixon White House

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

June 16, 1970

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

MEMORANDUM FOR HARRY S. DENT

From: Jack A. Gleason

Re: Ross Perot

Harry,

I understood that it was alright to contact Perot regarding his involvement with us this fall, and yesterday I did contact him. I believe our judgment that Perot is ready to participate with us is somewhat premature. In a half-hour discussion with him, he outlined the four following stipulations upon which his participation would be contingent;

(A) The HEW situation vis-a-vis his company must first be resolved.

(B) He would like Bob Haldeman to call him and specifically state that this project has indeed the priority that you and Herb Kalmbach have suggested it has.

(C) He wants to meet individually with every candidate we propose to him that he support. In meeting these candidates, he wants to assure himself (1) that they have a "plan to win" and (2) that they are philosophically and personally acceptable.

(D) The fourth stipulation was that he in no way be identified as a contributor to these candidates. This is fairly manageable although tricky considering the sum that we are looking for.

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Casual

The Hottest Duo in Academe

Set against the backdrop of the multicultural and progressive All Souls Unitarian Church in Washington, Henry Louis (call him Skip) Gates and Cornel West fearlessly fought the conservative backlash and reaffirmed their commitment to radical chic, affirmative action, and world revolution—all while promoting their new book, *The Future of the Race*.

Gates and West are the hottest duo in academia; as the driving force behind Harvard's African-American Studies department, Gates paid big bucks to get the in-demand, bestselling West (author of *Race Matters*) to jump from Princeton to the climes of Cambridge. In the past few years, Gates has moved from being an academic voice on political issues to being an icon in his own right—a jet-setting journalist doing pieces on Hillary Clinton for the *New Yorker*, the magazine for which he has just finished guest-editing a special issue on black America.

West is definitely the more high-flown of the two; he considers himself a philosopher. His slow English transfixed the salt-and-pepper bourgeois audience at the church, his prophetic voice soothing their social consciences. "He's so reeeal!" sighed one girl seated in front of me. Gesticulating wildly with his white starched cuffs and cufflinks shining in the spotlight, West proclaimed, "We need something that can appeal to the hearts and minds and souls of America."

His first invocation was to the "lost giants," which seemed to refer to the late Ron Brown and other black leaders. But as the meeting wore on, West tried to find and resurrect all the old "giants" who were suffering or dead, especially Marxist ones.

We need to have more dialogue locally, nationally, and of course internationally, West said, because "we're talking about international capital, global capitalism." But, West quickly added, "I'm not demonizing the rich. I'm telling the *truth*!" His voice reached a crescendo. The obliging audience applauded wildly. West's version of Marxism has none of the *angst* of world-historic struggle, and certainly none of the pain of the proletariat. He has the frenetic and hollow sound of a health-tonic salesman.

Occasionally, Gates would try to elevate the discourse and make West's show respectable by actually talking about something serious. For instance, how was it possible for Gates to defend the obscenity of the rap group 2 Live Crew? Not because he condoned obscenity, certainly, but because prosecuting a rap group for obscenity was a) racist and b) against the First Amendment. We should, Gates said, study 2 Live Crew in the context of racism, just as we should study *The Merchant of Venice* in the context of anti-Semitism. "This," he informs us, "is real teaching."

Criticizing Newt Gingrich and the Contract with America was another crowd-pleaser. "Our main goal is to protect, preserve, and expand affirmative action," said Gates. Thundering applause. Never mind that a majority of blacks oppose affirmative action, or that the courts continue to strike down racial preferences as unconstitutional.

Even though there are more blacks than ever before in the middle class, Gates asks, "What is the responsibility of college-educated blacks? No, even more than that, what is the responsibility of government? Of corporate America?"

For Gates and West, the battle lines are clear: wealthy white folks against poor black ones. But how exactly do bestselling authors fight capitalism? By raising money. Over the past four years, Gates has raised over $6.2 million for his department, and another $2.5 million for the university's endowment.

The downtrodden, poor, and homeless were hardly attending the $5 lecture: "Please, sir, can have a dollar to go hear Skip Gates and Cornel West promote their new book?" It looked like a church full of capital-drive types to me.

Gates and West position themselves above the corporate hype. Race may be a hot, money-making issue, but even West seems to realize that it can be talked to death. He asks the audience, "What is the moral content of your racial identity?" If you don't understand that, then blackness becomes "amorphous . . . promiscuous, and then, nothing at all."

West and Gates both demonstrate the viability and vitality of one form of racial identity, at least when it comes to public adulation, speaking fees, and book advances. Their success may not have all that much to do with "moral content," strictly speaking, but then, you can't have everything.

Neomi Rao

Perot: Autocratic and Just Plain Nuts

Tucker Carlson's piece on Ross Perot was well-researched and perceptive. ("Temperamental Tycoon," April 8). It is, I hope, becoming more apparent to the American voters that a vote for Ross Perot is a vote for autocracy.

Neither "Chairman" Perot nor any of his henchmen will answer probing inquiries. Recently, Perot was visiting a Texas university to be interviewed by a group of students. He ended the meeting by screaming at them because they had dared to ask hard questions and were openly skeptical of his opinions.

By proposing to eliminate the Electoral College, Perot wants to scuttle our republic and its representative government and institute a democracy, over which he believes he can have better control.

In about 60 B.C. Marcus Cicero noted that republics decline into democracies, and democracies break down into autocracies.

By publicizing Perot's beliefs, actions, and attitudes, we may yet educate the public to look elsewhere for a protest vote.

Robert L. Wichterman
Lancaster, PA

After a while, don't most people find Ross Perot boring?

The continued toadying of the leadership of both parties to this huckster from Texarkana is beginning to annoy me. Perotism is simply a cheap imitation of Walter Winchell's political musings brought up to date.

Perot ought to take a good look at taking on freemasonry. After all, William Wirt's Anti-Masonic party in the 1840s galvanized many citizens and politicians who were trying to work against Jacksonian Democracy. If someone would be kind enough to put Wirt's collected writings on the Internet and mail a hard copy of them to Larry King, Ross could get them in time for his next presidential run.

President Clinton and Sen. Dole are both accomplished individuals, and the voters should take the time to study their ideas.

By comparison, Perot is just a cheap confidence man who has realized that he can make money and obtain power by turning the public against a bureaucracy that, with his computer systems, he helped create.

It is time that we put Perot on a shelf along with the Anti-Masons, the Greenbacks, and the Know-Nothings. It is no longer interesting, just the same ol' thing.

James C. Rowen
Santa Clara, CA

Your editorial "A Vulgar Spectacle" (April 8) points out some of the bizarre aspects of Ross Perot's political forays.

Perhaps the most bizarre was his

dropping out of the presidential race because he thought George Bush might try to embarrass his daughter at her wedding.

It seems nobody really questioned this astonishing event. The George Bush story was so unbelievable, I decided to unravel the mystery.

The real reason that Perot dropped out of the race for president was that he is really D.B. Cooper, the parachuting skyjacker!

This is provable by Perot's own standards. If you look at the drawings of Cooper, he and Perot both have the same wingnut ears, and besides, nobody has ever photographed Perot and Cooper in the same place at the same time.

Pierre Stephenson
Ocean Park, WA

The Black-Actor Limit

In "Jesse's Issue du Jour" (April 8), Matt Labash challenges Jesse Jackson's claim that blacks are underrepresented as actors by citing that blacks constitute 11.9 percent of the Screen Actors Guild, which approximates their 12 percent of the general population.

But could not Jackson have turned these statistics around by alleging that the 11.9 percent figure constitutes a ceiling, not parity, limiting the upward mobility of blacks? Looked at this way, the 11.9 percent figure is near definitive proof that discrimination occurs against black actors. How else could one explain the statistical dead heat?

My guess is that a look at black representation in the Guild would show a trend that tops out at about 12 percent, with nary a peep above this figure. In short, affirmative action looms large here.

One sees yet another ill effect of a policy that reinforces racist thinking in the name of getting rid of racism. Affirmative action is all the more insidious in its discrimination as it gives license for bigotry under the guise of racial parity.

When are we going to drop the notion that statistical parity indicates equality before the law for all citizens, regardless of color, and get back to true civil rights—the equal rights of citizens?

Lucas Morel
Siloam Springs, AR

We Are Our Budget

David Frum's article "Don't Wait, Govern" (April 8) is on the mark. With experience as a federal program and budget official in the DC environs for more years than I'd like to remember, I have seen that the budget, as enacted, represents the ultimate policy document in the United States.

Laws, resolutions, executive orders, treaties, regulations, and political commitments are next to worthless unless provisions for funds and staffing are provided in budgets and/or subsequent appropriations. The promise of reform—the curtailment or abolishment of functions and activities—is also ultimately a function of the budget process.

Correspondence

The budget is the vehicle for forcing choices about national priorities where unlimited needs, and, yes, greed, all compete for funding.

It is wrong to think of the budget as the product of a green-eyeshade mentality. Instead, it is a programmatic mix of what we are and will become as a people. It is the fuel within the engine of our government.

PAUL M. VETTERICK
BEAVERTON, OR

MAUREEN DOWD'S IRONY

On "carefully reading" *Blood Sport* by James B. Stewart, I commend Robert Novak's review, "The Book on Whitewater" (April 8).

But it appears that Novak missed the point when quoting Maureen Dowd's column concerning the book. Novak implies that Dowd is in league with such White House apologists as press secretary Mike McCurry, of censorship fame. This would be a rather uncomfortable alignment.

My impression, knowing Dowd's wit and savvy, would be that "it's the same story" illustrates her perfect sense of irony. In other words, how many times do the American people need to hear this until they get it!

JESSIE ADAMS
WILSONVILLE, OR

CARING FOR THE HOMELESS

Andrew Peyton Thomas asserts that our nation's citizens are no longer preoccupied with the homeless ("The Rise and Fall of the Homeless," April 8). I believe this assertion is inaccurate and unfounded . The results of a recent national Gallup survey commissioned by the Los Angeles Mission tell us otherwise.

The survey, which was conducted to help us understand our community's concerns, revealed that the majority of Americans remain sympathetic to the problems of the homeless and that they are ready and willing to support homeless people. In fact, 55 percent of those surveyed said that they regularly donate money to an aid organization, and 66 percent said they advocate such donations.

The most interesting finding was that one out of six Americans fears becoming homeless himself, given the state of today's economy.

As a minister who has worked with the homeless for two decades and as president and CEO of the Los Angeles Mission, I have experienced great compassion and gratitude from thousands of people.

I believe that as long as we continue to provide effective programs that take the homeless off the streets and into productive living, our community will be there to support us as they have for more than 47 years.

MIKE EDWARDS
LOS ANGELES, CA

CAPITALIST PARADISE

David Horowitz's review of *The Age of Extremes* ("Socialism Never Dies," April 1) is right on target.

However, I considered it somewhat ironic that the once very liberal Horowitz surrendered the moral high ground to socialism in order to condemn it: "a wish to believe that ordinary mortals can create heaven on earth" or "the futile quest for an earthly paradise." Well, socialist theory is just as evil as its practice, and if heaven has an economy, I think it's laissez-faire capitalism.

JOHN HELLERMAN
CHICAGO, IL

FREE THE STOCK MARKET

Irwin Stelzer suggests changes in securities regulations to give shareholders more influence over management ("Dole and the Undeserving Rich," April 1). But his suggestions—like forcing CEO pay increases to be approved by shareholders—take us in the wrong direction.

We don't need more government regulation, but a freer market in stocks themselves. If the owners of corporations object to high salaries or the composition of corporate boards, they should register their dissatisfaction the old-fashioned way: by selling.

JEFFREY TUCKER
AUBURN, AL

the weekly Standard

Newt Gingrich Time

This time last year, Newt Gingrich bestrode the narrow political world like a colossus. The exhaustingly productive first hundred days of the 104th Congress had concluded, and opinion was unanimous: It was a triumph of ideological vigor and political logistics. Gingrich and the Republican House had done what they had promised when the Contract with America was unveiled six weeks before the November 1994 elections: They brought ten different substantive items to the House floor for a fair vote, and passed nine of them. An astonishing 302 votes on different pieces of legislation were taken overall. The theme of the moment was "promises made, promises kept," and the man universally considered responsible for keeping those promises was Newt Gingrich.

The master of the universe in 1995 has become the invisible man of 1996. Gingrich is lying low, and has been since January. With his national popularity ratings at around 30 percent and his name supposedly synonymous with Republican excess, his friends counseled him to get out of the line of fire.

That was wise counsel if you think Gingrich's political value depends on his personal popularity. But it doesn't, it never has, and it won't (at least, not for the foreseeable future). It is time for Gingrich to come out from hiding and do what he has always done best: Rally the faithful, articulate the agenda for his movement and his party, and help frame the national political conversation in a way that will clarify the stark choice facing the United States in November 1996.

To be blunt, Gingrich's personal popularity is beside the point (though we certainly understand why he may not feel that way). He is speaker of the House, not a candidate for president. He needs the votes not of 50 million, but of 120,000. If he is a polarizing force in American politics, that quality is intrinsic to Gingrich himself and to his achievements in building the new conservative majority. Furthermore, Congress has long been an unpopular institution, and a few months of Republican activism weren't going to transform the national hostility toward the House of Representatives—hostility that has spilled over onto Gingrich as its leader.

But Gingrich is not just speaker. He is the national political figure most associated with the ideas of the "revolution" of 1994 and the governing agenda that has yet to be implemented. It needs to be implemented, and it's going to take a far longer time than he may originally have thought at the height of the enthusiasm in early 1995. That will take dogged persistence, the one quality we do know the American people admire in a politician (see Nixon, Reagan, Clinton). Gingrich certainly made some mistakes last year, but they didn't come when he discussed policy. In that realm he was, and is, without peer. And Gingrich's policy prescriptions are under threat from two opposing forces: a president who will say and do anything to get reelected, and a Republican presidential candidate who has yet to construct a clear case on his own behalf.

IT IS TIME FOR GINGRICH TO DO WHAT HE HAS ALWAYS DONE BEST: RALLY THE FAITHFUL, ARTICULATE THE AGENDA, AND HELP FRAME THE NATIONAL POLITICAL CONVERSATION.

For months Bill Clinton has been letting fly at Republicans and conservatives while the GOP presidential candidates cannibalized each other to little purpose and left him alone. It is dispiriting to have one's ideas labeled "extremist" without effective reply, and so the troops—Gingrich's troops, also known as the Republican political base—are demoralized. Who can rally them? Who can remind them that Clinton can be beaten in 1996 as he was thoroughly trounced in the midterm elections of 1994? Who can lay out the case for a Dole presidency—for an era of Republican

governance that would feature tax cuts, welfare reform, conservative judges, reduction in the size of government, and a balanced budget—first for his natural supporters and then more broadly to the country? Who can draw the bright lines between the two parties and the two philosophies? As we look around, the only person we see is Gingrich.

Is this risky for Gingrich, for Republicans, for conservatives? Sure. But what's the alternative? Today we see the costs of Gingrich's withdrawal from the national debate: Clinton getting a free ride, the Republican agenda on the Hill in stasis and dismissed as though it had been tried and found wanting, bickering among conservatives rather than renewed assaults on the liberal welfare state. Bob Dole is not going to fill this vacuum; indeed, he'd be better off worrying about how to run a good three-month campaign, from the Republican convention in August through the election in November. The four months before the convention present an opportunity to remind people why they voted for Republicans in 1994 and why they ought to vote Republican again in 1996.

Gingrich is certainly a quick study, and he surely understands when, how, and why he made mistakes last year. There were legislative mistakes—excesses of green-eyeshade, balanced-budget politics; going head-to-head with the president on the government shutdown. There were personal mistakes—off-the-cuff remarks about his supposed mistreatment on Air Force One. Now relieved of the burden of being the maximum leader of the Republican party—for that is what candidate Dole is, for better and for worse—Gingrich should forget about making himself more likable in the public's eyes. That's not going to happen, not for a while. Indeed, the fact that he is so unpopular should afford him a certain measure of freedom. Things aren't going to get any worse. It is time for Gingrich to speak first on behalf of the sizable number of Americans—32 percent, in one poll—who admire, respect, and look up to him. They need him. And many other Americans, whatever their doubts about Gingrich personally, could benefit from hearing his arguments and seeing a revivified Republican party in the House. Certainly, this would help the Dole candidacy. And without it, the ideas Gingrich brought to the fore in 1994 are at risk. ♦

GOP Zoo Revue

by Matthew Rees

House Speaker Newt Gingrich could have used his stint hosting *Larry King Live* on March 29 to preach free-market environmentalism. With a zookeeper, a Bengal tiger, an iguana, a wallaby, a mountain lion, and a cockatoo among his guests, he could have denounced failed government programs and laid out an alternative vision inspiring to those who share his conservative convictions and his passion for nature. But for most of the show, Gingrich was too entranced by the animals to make policy points. Only in the last minute of the hour-long program did he talk about the environment, putting in a plug for biodiversity and for keener awareness of man's place in nature.

REPUBLICANS ARE HAVING A HARD TIME FINDING THEIR VOICE ON THE ENVIRONMENT. THE PRESIDENT HOPES TO TAKE ADVANTAGE.

Gingrich's reticence on *Larry King* typifies the GOP's defensive posture on environmental issues. Having initially pursued an ambitious deregulatory agenda, congressional Republicans took a public relations beating and still are licking their wounds. They moan that environmental politics could plague them in November.

The concern is justified. While much environmental polling is unreliable (nobody claims to be "against" clean air), a January poll by Linda DiVall was a wake-up call for Republicans. She found that "55 percent of Republicans do not trust their party when it comes to protecting the environment, while 72 percent of the Democrats do trust their party." More specifically, she found that cutting the Environmental Protection Agency's budget—a GOP proposal—is a political loser. There are conflicting opinions on the implications of these findings, as "the environment" tends to rank low among the issues voters cite as most important. Still, no party can afford to be seen as pro-pollution.

This is especially true with the White House planning to make the environment a centerpiece of the presidential campaign. President Clinton regularly excoriates Republicans for their environmental agenda, and verdant Vice President Al Gore can be trusted to lead a scare cam-

paign. In connection with Earth Day on April 22, the Clinton administration is dispatching cabinet and sub-cabinet officials to showcase its record on environmental protection.

Because Bob Dole has little public profile on environmental issues, the Democrats' offensive is expected to draw blood. Clinton will charge that as majority leader, Dole has pushed anti-environmental legislation. Dole's inability to communicate a convincing free-market environmental position will help the charge stick. After an April 5 tour of the environmentally troubled Florida Everglades, Dole said vaguely, "We want to see things happen. Not more studies, not more regulation, not more personnel." Then, as if to prove he was not, as he put it, "an extremist," he called for federal involvement in the Everglades.

This is an area where Gingrich could provide leadership and clarify the GOP position. But the *Larry King* appearance suggested he's not yet prepared to do this. A more fundamental problem is that Gingrich is out of step with most conservatives on environmental issues. (One of his environmental advisers, for example, is E.O. Wilson, a world-renowned professor at Harvard who has called for a moratorium on the development of undisturbed land.) He sees a greater need than they for a government role in environmental protection and has openly defied some proposals advanced by his conservative cohorts. Thus, he tried (unsuccessfully) to maintain funding for the National Biological Survey, an inventory of plants and animals despised by property-rights groups, and he led the effort that restored spending on wildlife conservation in Africa. In November, he said Republicans were "strategically out of position on the environment. . . . We approached it the wrong way, with the wrong language."

The muddled messages coming from Dole and Gingrich do not inspire confidence. And having been spooked by last year's experience, the party has adopted a modest environmental agenda for 1996: passage of Superfund reform and the Safe Drinking Water Act. These initiatives should be no-brainers, as President Clinton called for Superfund reform in his 1995 State of the Union address and the Senate passed the water legislation in November 99-0.

But the bipartisanship has begun to evaporate. Environmental groups have begun attacking the GOP for its approach to Superfund, and House Democrats such as Rep. Henry Waxman are retreating from the Safe Drinking Water Act as not strict enough. Repub-

Sean Delonas

licans will shout "hypocrisy" with some success, but the green media and well-financed environmental groups will drown them out. The Environmental Defense Fund and the Natural Resources Defense Council have budgets of more than $20 million; such groups crushed congressional Republicans' environmental agenda last year. By contrast, the Competitive Enterprise Institute, which maintains the largest free-market environmental program of any think tank in the country, devotes only $1 million to environmental issues.

At best, the environmentalist indictment of Republicans could spur the GOP to close ranks. This would be a big step forward, as Republicans have suffered as much from infighting as from the opposition's attacks. The first and most jarring display of disunity came in July, when moderate House Republicans voted down measures relaxing environmental enforcement. Since then, more and more House Republicans have peeled away to side with Democrats on a series of votes.

The chief dissident is Rep. Sherwood Boehlert, a moderate from upstate New York who says Republicans have "deservedly been verbally and publicly spanked" for their approach to the environment. Boehlert pens op-eds and gives speeches on this theme. And he is obstinate. In March, he refused to sign on to radically scaled back regulatory reform, forcing Republicans to drop the bill. Yet Boehlert, who boasts that he counts the speaker as an ally, was rewarded a few weeks later when Gingrich named him co-chairman of a task force on the environment.

This makes conservatives cringe, as does the fact that Boehlert's views are prevailing among House Republicans. While Boehlert was one of only two Republicans to vote against last year's regulatory reform bill, 191 voted for his recent amendment to the farm bill, adding over $2 billion for environmental protection. The shift is also evident in the rhetoric. Conservatives now talk more about minimizing political damage from environmental issues than about launching an ideological offensive against Democrats. They know how hard it will be for them to turn the public relations tide.

Jonathan Adler of the Competitive Enterprise Institute argues that environmental issues need not be an Achilles heel for Republicans. In the past, the GOP has successfully exploited anger over job-destroying regulations. But to repeat those successes, Dole and Gingrich must shift the terms of debate, from Republican opposition to environmental protection to Republican support for effective regulations that aren't overly intrusive. A disgruntled House Republican aide explains, "If we're going to try to compete with the Democrats on who is more sensitive to the environment, we're going to lose every time." ♦

WAGES OF THE *TIMES*

by Bruce Bartlett

A FEW MONTHS BACK, the *New York Times* reversed itself on the flat tax: In the recent past it supported the idea without reservation, today it opposes the flat tax unequivocally. Now the *Times* has done it again on the minimum wage. On April 5, it endorsed an increase in the minimum wage from $4.25 to $5.15, as proposed by President Clinton and congressional Democrats. "There is a strong case for raising the minimum wage," the *Times* said. However, there is a far stronger case for not raising the minimum wage, and for 20 years the *Times*'s own editorials consistently made it.

As recently as June 15, 1989, the *Times* said "higher minimum wages sound humane but in practice are an obtuse, ineffective way to help poor workers." There are two reasons for this. First, the benefits of a higher minimum wage go to both rich and poor families alike. "Most minimum wage workers are members of middle- and upper-income families," the *Times* correctly noted. Second, low-income families bear much of the cost of a higher minimum wage. "When forced to raise wages for low-paid jobs, employers will hire fewer workers. The number of lost jobs will be relatively small. But disadvantaged teenagers desperately trying to establish work careers will be among the victims," the *Times* pointed out.

These twin themes, that higher minimum wages mainly benefit the well-off while reducing job opportunities for the poor, were repeated in numerous *Times* editorials throughout the 1970s and l980s. On September 21, 1988, for example, the *Times* observed that "five out of six jobs paying the minimum wage are not held by poor people at all, but by the teenage children of middle-income families or by second earners in families with few children." And what aid does get to the poor comes at a price. "The catch is that a higher minimum wage would also induce businesses to get by with fewer employees," the *Times* wrote.

In a July 11, 1988, editorial, the *Times* argued that raising the minimum wage would be inflationary and

add to government welfare costs, through higher unemployment. Together, these effects would worsen an already bloated budget deficit.

An April 15, 1987, editorial was aimed directly at Democrats. "Democratic legislators are right to search for ways to help the working poor," the *Times* said, "but wrong to think that raising the minimum wage is one of them. To do that would hurt many low-income workers, something legislators need to grasp before ramming a bill through Congress." The reason is that employers would circumvent the higher minimum by hiring underground labor or letting workers go. The *Times* thought that a higher minimum wage "would probably price many working poor people out of jobs, since they could not demonstrate the productivity necessary to justify the higher wage."

In a truly remarkable editorial on January 14, 1987, the *Times* even went so far as to call for outright abolition of the minimum wage. The title read: "The Right Minimum Wage: $0.00." In this editorial the *Times* argued that "the minimum wage is an idea whose time has passed." Raising it only means fewer jobs, with the greatest burden falling on "young, poor workers, who already face formidable barriers to getting and keeping jobs." The *Times* believed that using a minimum wage to fight poverty is a "fundamentally flawed" idea. "It's time to put this hoary debate behind us, and find a better way to improve the lives of people who work very hard for very little," the *Times* concluded.

And lest one think that supporting abolition of the minimum wage was some kind of one-time aberration, the *Times* earlier had made the same argument in a December 2, 1980, editorial. Increasing the minimum wage would only fuel inflation, the *Times* said, because "every raise for those at the bottom of the income ladder creates pressure to raise the wages of those on the higher rungs." The best course, therefore, "would be to abandon the minimum wage altogether."

An August 29, 1977, editorial said that "evidence linking the minimum wage to joblessness is compelling." On August 17, 1977, the *Times* thought that "the basic effect of an increase in the minimum wage . . . would be to intensify the cruel competition among the poor for scarce jobs." It concluded that "minimum wage legislation has no place in a strategy to eliminate poverty."

A March 21, 1977, *Times* editorial even attacked labor unions for driving support for a higher minimum wage. Organized labor only supported a higher minimum wage, in the editors' view, because it reduces management resistance to union recruiting. "Where cheap alternative sources of labor are eliminated, high-priced union labor no longer looks so bad to company managers," the *Times* said.

Thus we see that *New York Times* editorials were consistently critical of the minimum wage for almost 20 years, even endorsing its abolition. Why the *Times* has suddenly changed direction 180 degrees is unknown. It would seem that keeping up with liberal fashion has become more important to the *Times* than maintaining intellectual consistency.

Bruce Bartlett is a senior fellow with the Dallas-based National Center for Policy Analysis.

The Naked Public Cave

by David Brooks

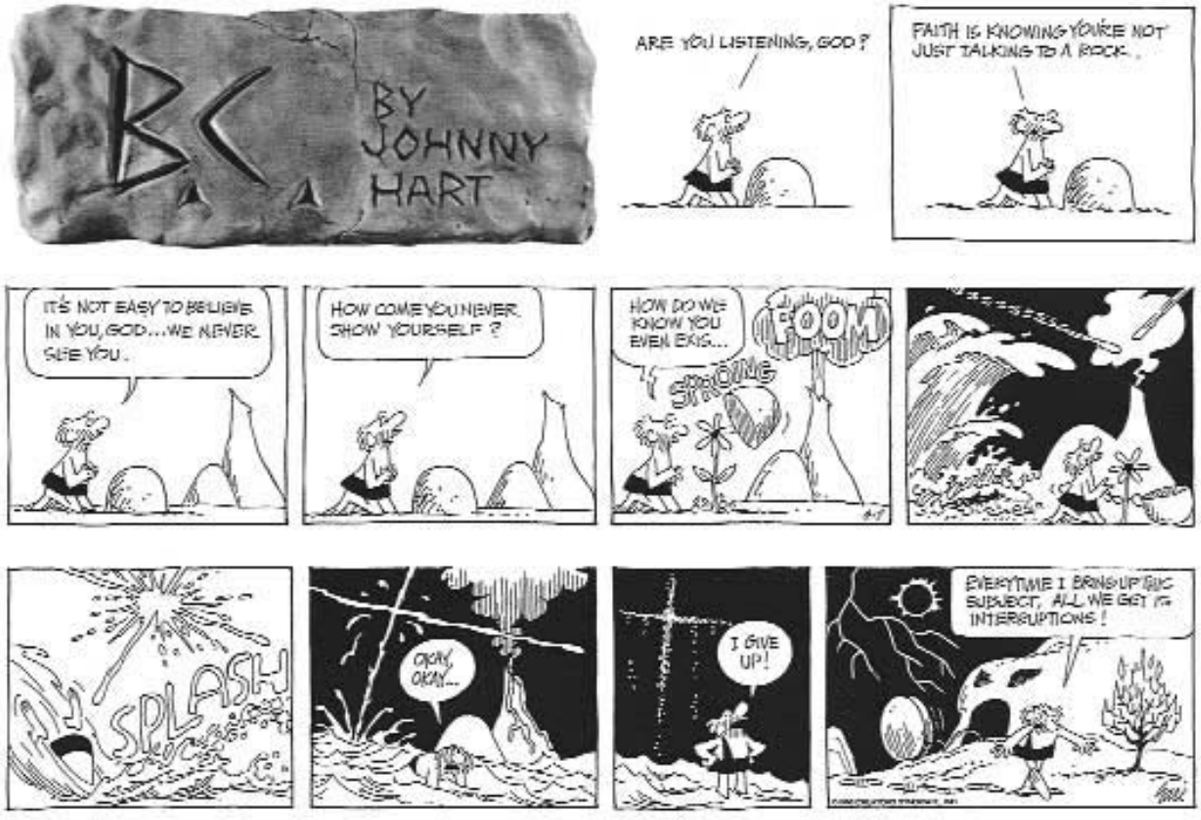
THE *LOS ANGELES TIMES* PRIDES ITSELF on being Sensitivity Central in American journalism. Its editor, Shelby Coffey III, created a media frenzy when he championed a new stylebook for the paper that epitomizes political correctness. What, then, explains the paper's decision to pull three "B.C." comic strips around Eastertime because of their religious content?

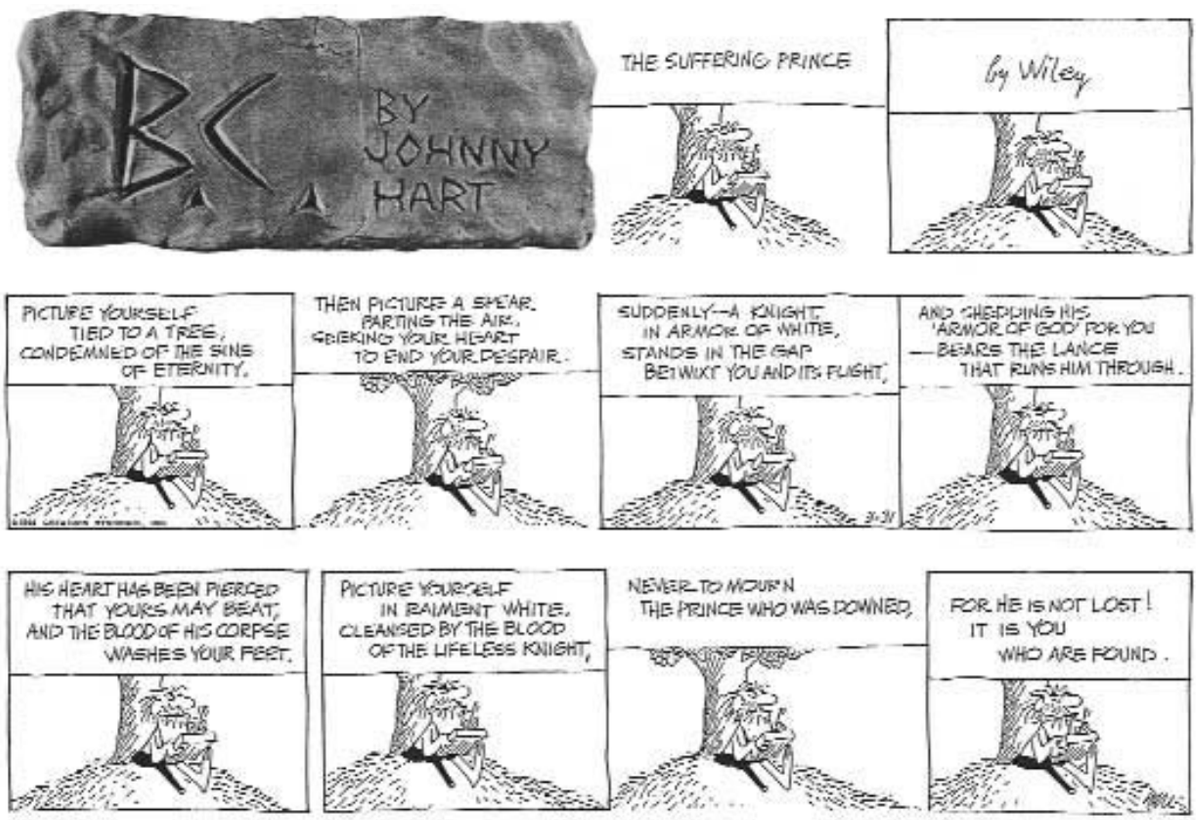
The strips themselves were mild. Anybody who found them overly religious would suffer seizures in a museum of Renaissance art. The strongest content came in a Palm Sunday strip which contained a poem called "The Suffering Prince," with the words:

Picture yourself in raiment white,
Cleansed by the blood of the lifelong Knight,
Never to mourn the Prince who was downed,
For He is not lost:
It is you who are found.

Religious-conservative groups such as the Christian Coalition that are making hay out of the spiking of "B.C." cite it as evidence of anti-Christian bigotry. That's overstating things. In fact, it's the sensitivity and diversity movement itself that explains the paper's decision not to run the strips. Mike Lang, a spokesman for the paper, says the strips are "insensitive and exclusionary." According to this understanding of diversity, in order to be sensitive to other faiths, everybody has to shut up about his own. It's fine to pray in your own church, but anybody who brings religious sentiments into the public square is deemed to be proselytizing. That's automatically offensive. Don't ask, don't tell.

As usual, the effort to enhance diversity merely creates uniformity. Instead of living in a world of com-





plicated and diverse religious sentiments, in the name of diversity the *Times* helps construct a public square that is monolithically secular.

On April 6, the *Times* ran its own story on the "B.C." controversy. The *Times* had decided to print the spiked cartoons on the religion page not because the paper changed its mind, the story said, but because they had become newsworthy. There's an interesting contrast of tone here. The paper explained itself by using the ponderous, cliché-ridden rhetoric of the diversity movement: "We are mindful that The Times is a secular publication serving a large and quite diverse and pluralistic community," the story quoted associate editor Narda Zacchino as saying. "While we respect affirmations of personal religious faith, we are also aware that aggressively urging such affirmation on others who have not sought them all may be considered proselytizing and inappropriate for the comics page."

After that pomposity, "B.C." creator Johnny Hart is straightforward and modest. He lives in upstate New York and has been drawing "B.C." since 1958 (he also does "The Wizard of Id"). The vast majority of the "gags," as he calls the strips, are secular, but on certain holidays he likes to introduce a religious element. "I believe mine is the right faith, and I wish others would come over to it for true salvation, but I don't think I'm offending anyone. Other religions don't offend me."

Though this is not the first time the *L.A. Times* has spiked his strip, Hart is mystified by the controversy and speaks with the simplicity of one who has missed the recent change of etiquette. "I was shocked when people would write to tell me that I'm being brave. They write to say, 'How do you get away with it?'" The whole episode reminds us how oversensitive America has become, and how in the name of diversity, we've stripped religion from the public square.

God isn't dead; we just don't let Him out much anymore. ♦

Wizards of MUOSZ

by Herman J. Obermayer

The Iron Curtain is a memory, but the Communist debris has not been swept away in the former Eastern bloc. In Hungary, for example, the main journalists' association is still dominated by leftist former apparatchiks. And the United States is providing it significant infusions of cash.

In late 1989, the American embassy in Budapest was looking for some additional space. It decided to lease the education facility of the Hungarian Journalists' Association (known by its Hungarian acronym MUOSZ). It seemed a pleasant idea: Where Marxist-Leninist indoctrination once took place, an American library would bloom. But there was this unfortunate fact: the rent would amount to approximately $225,000 a year, five times the market rate; and the money would contribute to the coffers of a notorious KGB front.

MUOSZ has a long and scandalous record. It was, and is, a key player in the International Organization of Journalists (IOJ), the worldwide league of Communist news workers. The Soviet bear may be dead, or hibernating, but much of communism's global infrastructure remains. The IOJ controls journalistic accreditation in several former Soviet republics and maintains training centers in three Communist lingerers: Cuba, North Korea, and Yemen.

THE HUNGARIAN JOURNALISTS' ASSOCIATION HAS A LONG RECORD AS A FOE OF FREEDOM AND FRIEND OF THE KGB. WHY, THEN, HAS IT RECEIVED WHAT AMOUNTS TO A U.S. SUBSIDY?

In the lease negotiations, MUOSZ was represented by the Hungarian government's Office for the Support of the Diplomatic Corps, a KGB affiliate responsible for bugging embassies, placing diplomats in controlled apartments, and so on. The American embassy sent a minor-league bureaucrat.

Something else is rotten about the arrangement: MUOSZ headquarters was a gift to the association from the Nazis, who had expropriated the mansion from a Jewish family. The adjacent marble-and-limestone villa, which the Americans now occupy, was given to MUOSZ by the Communists. One wonders whether the title is any good.

In the afterglow of Hungary's "bloodless revolution," the 5,000-member MUOSZ made a few symbolic gestures of contrition, all of them meaningless. It submitted an official resignation from the IOJ. Middle-level functionaries replaced big Communist names on the officer roster. But the IOJ still has a business office in Budapest and holds seminars and conferences at MUOSZ-owned resorts. The

MUOSZ secretary-general, elected in 1989 on a "reform ticket," represented Hungary at an IOJ Congress in Zimbabwe, two years after Vaclav Havel expelled the IOJ from Czechoslovakia for its continuing KGB ties.

MUOSZ also readmitted as honorary members approximately 100 journalists who had been kicked out for supporting the anti-Communist revolt in 1956. But this meant little to men and women who had been deprived of their chosen profession for decades.

About its political alliances, MUOSZ is unabashed. After the 1990 elections, it became an unofficial public-relations agency for the opponents of Hungary's first freely elected government. The association's president is the former editor of the official organ of the Communist party. Explains Peter Nadori, former editor of *Magyar Narancs*, a liberal weekly, "Hacks from the old order run MUOSZ. Jobs are scarce. They take care of their own." Ex-premier Jozsef Antall refused to grant interviews to MUOSZ reporters, remarking in 1992, "They're just a bunch of Mickey Mouses"—a statement widely quoted in Europe.

Also in 1992, Arpad Goncz, the conservative president, charged MUOSZ with complicity in a scheme to tie him to neo-Nazis. A TV camera crew—all MUOSZ-ites—filmed an important presidential address. In the audience were a small number of neo-Nazi hecklers. The state-owned TV station did not link Goncz to the neo-Nazis. But the out-takes repackaged for home video, and for use at political meetings, pictured Goncz with swastikas looming in the background, implicitly connecting the president to skinheads.

Since communism's fall, Hungary has had only one newspaper strike. It was political, not economic. The alleged reason for striking *Magyar Nemzet*, the country's leading conservative newspaper, was that the publication refused to join the publishers' association. But many newspapers do not belong to the association. The real reason was that the newspaper was owned by Robert Hersant, publisher of *Le Figaro* in Paris and one of Europe's most visible conservatives.

Defending the strike, a press union official declared, "Fascist-type conservatives like Hersant have no place in Hungary. I'm glad we helped drive him out." (Hersant sold the newspaper back to the state in 1994.)

A new generation is moving to the top in Hungary's newsrooms. Most were not schooled in Marxist-Leninist communications theory. There is now a rival organization to MUOSZ, the more democratic Community of Hungarian Journalists (MUK), which has 750 to 1,000 dues-paying members. But MUK has a hard time competing with MUOSZ. The older organization boasts many advantages: vast real estate assets, a large government subsidy, muscle in hiring, and Uncle Sam's rent. MUOSZ attracts more young applicants than does MUK. College graduates seeking entry-level positions in the media naturally gravitate toward the association that has the jobs and the perks. Moreover, MUOSZ is enjoying a bit of a renaissance now that the government has been taken over by former Communists. The subsidy has been increased and is slightly larger than the American rent payments.

Those payments are scheduled to cease later this year. The change could not come soon enough. For over six years, the American government has carried out an agreement that has enriched an organization whose work against democratic freedoms is infamous.

Herman J. Obermayer, a former daily newspaper editor and publisher and a longtime member of the* Commentary *publication committee, has conducted several publishing seminars in Hungary.

Ms. Takes Out After Boys

by Christina Hoff Sommers

Take Our Daughters to Work Day, the girls-only school holiday, will be commemorated for the fourth year in a row this April 25. According to the Ms. Foundation for Women, which originated and organizes the holiday, more than 30 million adults and "millions of girls" participated in the last one. But as the holiday grows, so do the protests. More and more parents are asking: Why persist in excluding the boys? Why can't the name and character of the holiday be changed to Take Our *Children* to Work?

Because that heretical question threatens the event's feminist purity, the Ms. Foundation has been working frantically with several cooperative men's groups to launch a separate holiday for boys. As foundation president Marie Wilson put it in a March 29 memo: "My experience on the firing line with the media tells me that unless the day for boys is as upbeat, and as well planned . . . as Take Our Daughters, we will be vulnerable to a great deal of criticism." To safeguard the boy-free character of its Daughters' Day, and to make a future merger unlikely, the new

holiday will be called Sons' Day and will take place on a *weekend*.

The first Sons' Day is planned for Sunday, October 20, a date Ms. considers ideal since, the memo says, "October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, so there will be lots of activities scheduled."

Here are some of the ways the Ms. Foundation proposes Sons' Day be celebrated:

> •Take your son—or 'son for a day'—to an event that focuses on . . . ending men's violence against women. Call the Family Violence Prevention fund at 800-END-ABUSE for information.
>
> •Plan a game or sport in which the contest specifically does not keep score or declare a winner. Invite the community to watch and celebrate boys playing on teams for the sheer fun of playing.
>
> •Since Sons' Day is on SUNDAY, make sure your son is involved in preparing the family for the work and school week ahead. This means: helping lay out clothes for siblings [and] making lunches.

For boys not exhausted by all the fun and excitement of the day's activities, Ms. has a suggestion for the evening: "Take your son grocery shopping, then help him plan and prepare family evening meals on Sons' Day."

Thus, Ms. seems to have devised a holiday that is the functional equivalent of a punishment for boys as recompense for a day in which girls are taken out of school and made a big fuss over in offices and factories across the country. Ms. had already developed a similar set of atoning exercises to fill the boys' time at school while the girls visit their parents' workplaces. In an "especially for boys" worksheet, the boys are asked to "brainstorm" and to question the "male stereotypes" that "box them in," such as, "a 'real man' doesn't do laundry."

Ms. talks glibly about "the coalition of men's groups" behind Sons' Day. The coalition turns out to be a handful of organizations doing the bidding of Marie Wilson. One is a Boston-based group called "Real Men" whose founder, Jackson Katz, is the first male to take a degree in women's studies at the University of Massachusetts. Another participating group is the Oakland Men's Project, a nonprofit community training program that works to end violence against women. In charge of coordinating Sons' Day is the Northeastern Community Development Corporation. It mans the 800 number one may call for information on Sons' Day.

I called and spoke to its director, Clarke Martin, who told me the October 20 date was still firm. I asked whether the Boy Scouts had signed on, and he told me that "conservative organizations" like the Boy Scouts and the YMCA had so far declined to sponsor the event. I then asked why the men's groups had not requested the Ms. Foundation include boys in a Take Our Kids to Work Day. He explained that boys do not need a career day: "Young men know they can succeed, but girls don't. Boys need to learn how not to fight, and how to establish nurturing long-term relationships."

Ms. had initially planned to announce Sons' Day on March 27. But since only a very small number of men's groups had come on board, Wilson sent them an apologetic memo canceling the press conference and pointing out that the coalition might not be "perceived as credible and capable of pulling off such an event." She went on to say that the advent of Sons' Day would still be used to ward off the charge that the Ms. Foundation is unfairly excluding boys, which she expected would be made by "hundreds of reporters."

That the Ms. Foundation will do whatever it takes to keep boys from participating in its school holiday is

Peter Steiner

to be expected. The interesting question is: Why is no one challenging the public school boards for their complicity in the exclusion? And why are corporations like Ortho-McNeil Pharmaceutical, AT&T, New York Life, Reebok, Merrill Lynch, American Express, and Deloitte & Touche footing the bill for a holiday that gives girls an excused absence to go off with their parents while keeping the boys behind to be chastened by Big Sister?

***Christina Hoff Sommers is the author of* Who Stole Feminism?**

An Uncommon Man

by David Aikman

IT IS NOT EVERY DAY that a *New York Times* reporter, even after his death, is lauded as "a brilliant correspondent" by the president of the United States, celebrated by nationally syndicated newspaper columnist Cal Thomas as having brought "honor and distinction" to the profession of journalism, and described by Joseph Lelyveld, executive editor of the *New York Times*, as possessing "a sweetness . . . that was treasured by all who knew him." Sweetness, as Lelyveld rightly noted, isn't intuitively associated with excellence among foreign correspondents.

Nathaniel Nash, 44, died in the plane crash in Croatia on April 3 that claimed the lives of Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown and 34 other passengers and crew members. The *New York Times*'s warm and generous obituary correctly called Nash "a passionate student of the Bible," but suggested this was part of "a bundle of gentle anomalies" that included a good tennis game and enjoyment of fine wines. Those who knew Nathaniel primarily from the standpoint of his spiritual convictions, however, would have put it differently.

The very core of his personality was a passionate personal Christian faith that colored every aspect of his life: his decision to go into journalism itself, his marriage to Elizabeth, and above all that "sweetness." Well-born and well-bred as he was, Nathaniel derived his character not from his blue blood but from what Christians often call "a close walk with the Lord."

Nathaniel might have grown into a career as a pleasant, successful New England agnostic had he not experienced conversion in his first two weeks at Harvard. With the integrity that characterized him, he almost immediately made his faith public, believing that, if Christianity were indeed true, it was good news that everyone should hear. At one point, he sang hymns to the accompaniment of his own guitar at the top of the steps of Harvard's Widener Library, arguably one of the most sternly secular spots in North America. To his amazement, seven passing strangers stopped to listen, then mounted the steps to sing with him. They just "happened" to be Christians. He took it as divine encouragement.

> NATHANIEL NASH WAS NO ORDINARY *NEW YORK TIMES* REPORTER. A GENTLE AND SWEET MAN, HE WAS ALSO, AT THE VERY CORE OF HIS PERSONALITY, A PASSIONATE CHRISTIAN.

Nathaniel was never in the least offensive with his faith, but when he went to the *New York Times*, he didn't hide it either. He once told friends that the editors had worried openly during a job interview that his Christianity might be incompatible with good reporting. Nathaniel's energetic and often brilliant performance of his job put their fears to rest. But he didn't stop playing his guitar, either. Sometimes, late of an evening among his business-section colleagues, he would quietly play hymns to help quell the fatigue and restlessness of deadlines. The *Times*, to its credit, didn't object to this manifestation of "sweetness."

Before his marriage in 1985 to Elizabeth, a missionary returned from South America, Nathaniel lived modestly in a small Christian community in Yonkers. He often spent lunch hours and spare moments doing evangelical work in the streets, even in Times Square, just blocks away from his newsroom. Nathaniel was certainly a gifted journalist. But those of us who knew him well will cherish forever his seamless Christian character: diligent, full of wry humor, kind, and yet courageous in every way. For us, he will always be the epitome of a Christian in the profession of journalism: a witness for all seasons.

David Aikman, a former* Time *senior correspondent, is the organizer of an international conference of Christian journalists in Jerusalem in May.

Ross Perot and the Quid Pro Quo

By Tucker Carlson

On June 16, 1970, a Nixon White House aide named Jack Gleason called Ross Perot to ask for money. Months before, Perot had agreed to contribute $250,000 to a secret fund set up by the Nixon administration to finance Republican Senate candidates running in the fall elections. To the exasperation of the White House, however, Perot had not delivered. Gleason was calling to remind him of his pledge.

Over the course of the 30-minute conversation, Perot told Gleason he would send the money, but only in return for a favor. Perot's company, Electronic Data Systems (E.D.S.), was having trouble landing a lucrative contract with the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. If his contract were to come through, Perot said, he would be willing to make the contribution. Otherwise he would have to pass.

> EVEN BY THE STANDARDS OF THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION, PEROT'S REQUEST STRUCK ONE OFFICIAL AS RECKLESS.

Even by the standards of the Nixon administration, Perot's request for presidential intervention in his business dealings struck Gleason as reckless, and for the White House to comply would have been baldly illegal. Worried, Gleason immediately called White House chief of staff H.R. Haldeman, who recommended that Gleason keep Perot at arm's length. Next, to cover himself, Gleason wrote a memo to fellow aides Harry Dent and Herbert Kalmbach explaining the various stipulations the White House would have to meet to get money from Perot. "The HEW situation vis-à-vis his company must first be resolved," Gleason wrote. In addition, Perot had asked to meet personally with all candidates who might benefit from his contribution to "assure himself that they have a 'plan to win.'" Last, Perot insisted that "he in no way be identified as a contributor to these candidates." Keeping Perot's identity secret, Gleason wrote, would be "fairly manageable although tricky considering the sum that we are looking for."

Gleason's apprehension about the fund-raising scheme proved to be warranted. The administration's covert effort to finance Senate candidates—dubbed "Operation Townhouse" for the building in downtown Washington from which it was run—would later result in the criminal convictions of a number of White House aides, including Kalmbach, Dent, and Gleason himself. Obscured by the larger scandal of Watergate, the details of Operation Townhouse are, 25 years later, largely forgotten. Yet they remain instructive, not only for how they reflect on the Nixon administration, but for the light they shed on the ethics of Ross Perot.

On the only occasion he has been asked by a reporter about his involvement in Operation Townhouse, Perot flatly denied shaking down the executive branch for favors. "It was a fantasy land," Perot told Michael Sznajderman of the *Tampa Tribune* last year. "Only God knows what they wrote in those memos." Maybe. On the other hand, there are a number of reasons to believe Jack Gleason's memo is accurate, beginning with the single phrase attributed directly to Perot. (It is Perot-like, to say the least, to demand that the candidates he supports have an explicit "plan to win.") But the evidence extends beyond idiomatic similarities. Gleason, it turns out, was but one of a number of people in the Nixon White House Perot approached for special access to public funds.

Alexander Butterfield, a former Air Force colonel who worked as an assistant to H.R. Haldeman, fielded many of the calls Perot placed to the White House during the early 1970s. According to Butterfield, "the intimation was always there" that Perot would be willing to trade political contributions for help securing contracts for E.D.S. When it came time to deliver those contributions, Butterfield told me, Perot invariably balked, and instead demanded more favors. "I think all of us that had anything to do with Perot in '69 and '70 came away shaking our heads and under-

standing that he was in no way dependable," Butterfield says. "We all felt he was an a—hole, a complete a—hole." In an interview several years ago, Butterfield recalled that dealing with Perot and his incessant "intimations" finally became too much to take, even for a disciplined career military officer. "I lost my temper two times when I was in the White House," Butterfield said. "Once, on the phone with Ross Perot—I was out of control."

Another former Nixon aide, who insists on remaining nameless, remembers Perot as equally insistent and considerably more blunt. During a telephone conversation in 1970, Perot told the aide he would be willing to make a major contribution, then explained that his company had a contract pending with HEW. "It really astounded me," recalls the aide. "I assume he doesn't speak Latin, but it was as close to a *quid pro quo* as I ever got. There was no subtlety—*no* subtlety. I'd been through the '68 campaign, and some people made some oblique hints of things they would like, but nobody *ever* said, 'Oh, I've got a contract pending.'"

"THERE WAS NO SUBTLETY—*NO* SUBTLETY" WITH PEROT, SAYS A NIXON AIDE. "SOME PEOPLE MADE SOME OBLIQUE HINTS OF THINGS THEY WOULD LIKE, BUT NOBODY *EVER* SAID, 'OH, I'VE GOT A CONTRACT PENDING.'"

To the aide who spoke with him, Perot's open invitations to bribery were threatening as well as almost comically inept. "A guy who comes on to you that strong, there's no telling where the mayhem will end," the aide says. "That's the kind of thing that makes criminal defense lawyers rich. For all he knows, I could have been from the U.S. attorney's office. It was a massive lack of judgment. If you find yourself with a nutcase like that, you steer clear of him. Think what you want about the Nixon administration, but it wasn't that stupid."

Stupid or not, according to Ron Walker, the former head of Nixon's advance team, the White House had trouble keeping Perot at bay. "Toward the end of the first four years" of the administration, Walker says, "Ross started to get arrogant and began to make demands about private meetings with the president." Some of those demands were made to H.R. Haldeman, who noted in a January 1972 diary entry that he'd told Perot "I'd see what we could work out." Others were more direct. A memo from aide Gordon Strachan indicates that Perot was told to "goddamn stop calling."

In the meantime, Nixon's staff attempted to appease the demanding Texan. "E.D.S. was a very good company, and obviously Ross had helped the president in his election in 1968," says Walker, "so any of those things we could do to include the Post Office and some others that [Perot hoped to secure contracts with], we would certainly say, 'Look, this is someone who we think has a really good company.' So without telling anybody to do it, we would simply suggest that he be given a good look."

And indeed he was. In 1972, for instance, E.D.S. entered a bid to process Medicare claims in Ohio and West Virginia. Perot's company was awarded the contract after a personal review by the secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, Elliot Richardson. Months later, with no competitive bids offered, the White House paid E.D.S. $62,000 to do work for the president's Domestic Council. During the same period, the White House also pressured officials in Texas to pay E.D.S. $400,000 that Perot claimed he was owed under a contract with the state's Social Security office.

Not every favor, however, was so grand in scope. In his memoir *Witness to Power*, Nixon domestic adviser John Ehrlichman describes Perot as a "frequent visitor" to the White House. On one occasion, Ehrlichman wrote, Perot "called to tell me that he had built a small fishing cabin on the shore of a Bureau of Reclamation lake in Texas some years before, but now the Bureau was trying to cancel his lease. It was my pleasure to try to save his cabin for him."

Such special considerations, of course, were not meant as charity. Perot had promised on many occasions to provide contributions to the Nixon administration, both for Operation Townhouse and for other purposes. "How could I spend $50 million to help you?" Perot asked the president during his first term. In 1970, the year E.D.S. reached its peak value on the stock market, offers like this didn't seem entirely outlandish, and the White House was at first eager to cash in on Perot's support. But getting the money proved more difficult than expected. In a memo to Harry Dent, written in July 1970, Jack Gleason expressed frustration that, despite many promises, the notoriously cheap Perot had not produced a dime in contributions. "At least the oilmen keep their word," Gleason noted bitterly.

A quarter century later it is still not clear how

much money Perot gave to the Nixon administration, though at least one published report indicates he contributed $450,000 to Operation Townhouse. It *is* clear that Perot has long been sensitive about the subject. In the mid-1970s, a business writer named Laton McCartney was preparing a profile of Perot for *Harper's*. Midway through his research, which included gathering information on Perot's contributions to the Nixon administration, McCartney got a call from a man who claimed to have inside knowledge of the billionaire's financial dealings. McCartney agreed to meet the caller at his office, in a bank building in Manhattan. "About 20 minutes into the interview," McCartney remembers, "the doors burst open and these two E.D.S. guys came marching in, scared the s— out of me. They said, 'What are you doing, why are you writing this story?' and started doing an inquisition on me. I've never had an experience like that. It was obviously a set-up and it certainly had an effect." *Harper's* later killed his story on Perot.

Sean Delonas

Perhaps more than most businessmen, Perot had ample motive to seek favors from politicians. At times, close to half of his company's revenue came from government, usually in the form of contracts to handle the paperwork for social welfare programs like Medicare and Medicaid. Less than a decade after it was founded, E.D.S. took in more business from state-run Medicaid programs—which, on average, produced higher profits than private-sector contracts—than any other data-processing company in the country. Later, E.D.S. expanded its client list, administering programs for workmen's compensation, black-lung benefits, and food stamps. At some point along the way, Perot seems to have realized that it is hard to get rich off welfare without the cooperation of Congress.

By the early 1970s, Perot had become a major player in congressional elections. In 1972, two E.D.S. employees secretly gave $100,000 to finance a presidential bid by House Ways and Means chairman Wilbur Mills. Although Mills didn't get far in the race, it didn't matter. At the time, Perot needed all the friends in Congress he could get, since, only a year earlier, a House subcommittee had begun to look into allegations that E.D.S. had routinely overcharged on government contracts. In 1974, Perot gave a total of $90,000 to various candidates, becoming the largest single contributor to House and Senate races that year. Not surprisingly, in his giving, Perot paid special attention to members who might help him get business, including those on the House Appropriations subcommittee for HEW. His generosity did not go unnoticed either by reformers, who later cited it as proof of the need for tougher campaign-finance laws, or by cash-strapped politicians. In 1974, Sen. Ted Stevens of Alaska introduced an amendment to an appropriations bill that was clearly designed solely to protect Perot's Medicare contracts.

It is not surprising that the Ross Perot who emerges from the records and memories of many of those who knew him in the 1970s bears little obvious resemblance to the Ross Perot who is running for president in 1996. In his public life, the new Ross stands firmly against—indeed, defines himself in opposition to—all the sordid trappings of Washington, very much including dishonest back-room deals and clumsy attempts at graft. Yet in substance, it is without mistake the same man, exhibiting as always the same contempt for any process he cannot control. Which is worth remembering as Ross Perot enters the presidential field once more. As Perot himself put it during the 1992 presidential debate in St. Louis, "I think the American people will make their own decisions on character. . . . I think they need to clearly understand the backgrounds of each person." ♦

The Interminable Grief of President Clinton

By Andrew Ferguson

"This has been a long week for those of us who loved Ron Brown."

—President Clinton, during his seventh eulogy of his Commerce secretary

It was indeed a long week—"interminable," as the president himself called it in eulogy number six. It was a week, you began to notice, that was longer than it needed to be. You began to notice, in fact, that over the course of those seven days the president had taken his widely acclaimed role as national healer to a new level—not merely rising to it, not merely acting it out for the country's benefit, but actually (how else to put it?) milking it for all it was worth.

We are often reminded that President Clinton's is the first baby boomer presidency, but seldom as forcefully as during the first week of April, when the sad news came of the death of Ron Brown and 34 others on a Croatian hillside. From that moment a process unfolded that would have been thought excessive in any other time than ours, unimaginable under any other administration than Bill Clinton's.

Some aspects of the process, of course, were classic Washington, and appallingly so. Mere hours elapsed before political hay was being made. The most shameless comment came quickly from the right. Paul Weyrich, eponymous host of NET's "Direct Line with Paul Weyrich," linked Brown's death with the failure of the do-nothing Republican Congress to abolish the Commerce Department. "Had the Republicans prevailed," Weyrich told his dozens of viewers, "it is likely Brown would be alive."

The president refused to be outdone. Upon hearing of Brown's downed plane Wednesday morning, he met with Brown's wife, then motorcaded to the Department of Commerce. There he delivered the first of his many eulogies, even though Brown's death had yet to be confirmed. Mrs. Brown had asked him, Clinton said, to tell the assembled bureaucrats: "Ron was proud of them, that he liked them, that he believed in them, and that he fought for the Commerce Department, and tell them that you're going to do that now." And he added: "Which I thought was appropriate." And don't let any budget-cutting Republicans tell you different.

But then the politicking ended. The president was not so crass as to further exploit Brown's death for political purposes. His appearance at the Commerce Department that Wednesday afternoon was a dazzling performance: He spoke as if in conversation, in unhurried tones. He came equipped with a Bible verse that he read to good effect, and then said: "Ron Brown walked and ran and flew though life, and he was a magnificent life force." He continued in this vein for a while longer; every spontaneous sentence was exquisitely parsable, as the transcript shows. Then he called for a moment of silence, broke it off with a somber amen, and began hugging. He started at the stage and worked his way outward. Employees, family members, guards: He hugged as though he were trying to keep warm.

The president cancelled all appointments; he did not resume a normal schedule for another four days. By Thursday the plane crash was being called a "national tragedy," and it was clear that Clinton's handling of his role as national healer was going over extremely well. He attended a memorial service that morning, at which he delivered another eulogy. He greeted the press outside the chapel and rephrased his remarks for the cameras. He hugged almost everyone who had attended the memorial service.

In the meantime, his press secretary told the press that the president was calling the families of the dead "one by one." Any time left over, the president was going to use to call friends and colleagues of Brown because he found the experience "very therapeutic." Friday morning he invited the press onto the South Lawn of the White House, to photograph him and Mrs. Clinton as they planted a tree in Brown's memory. He delivered a brief eulogy on the South Lawn, then flew to Oklahoma City to pay tribute to the victims of last year's bombing. He devoted a large part of his remarks to eulogizing Brown.

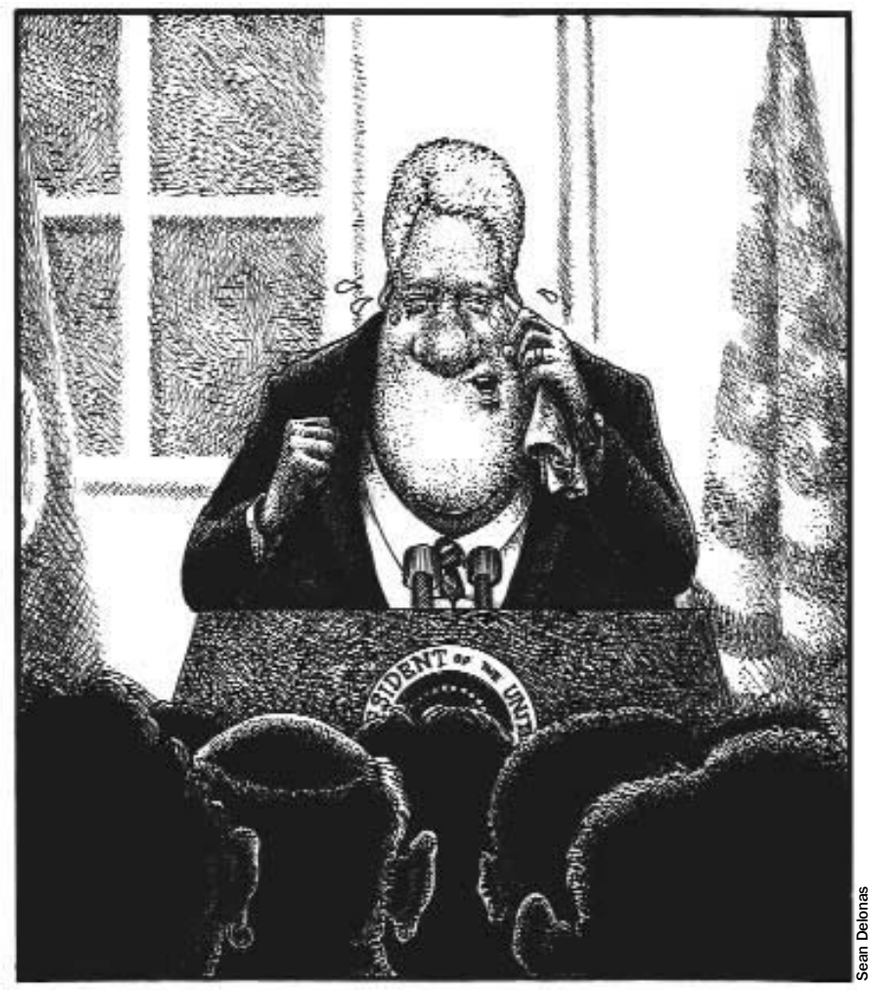
On Saturday, the president delivered his weekly radio address. It was a eulogy of Brown. He then flew to Dover Air Force Base, where the arrival of the bod-

ies from Croatia was being broadcast live on CNN. His press secretary said the president spent several minutes with the family of each victim, in private, for a total of several hours of one-on-one grieving. At Dover he delivered a eulogy of Brown. It was the longest eulogy yet. On Sunday he rested.

Graveyard prose is inescapably extravagant, but the high notes of the president's various eulogies, especially those from prepared texts, were breathtaking. At the time of their deaths, Brown and his staff were escorting American businessmen in pursuit of business opportunities. In the president's rendering their trip became "a mission of peace and healing and progress," and their deaths a martyrdom to . . . industrial policy. The death of Lincoln was solemnly evoked, and comparisons invited. These excesses were not uttered in the clumsiness of the moment but were written out in advance of carefully staged events. The extravagance of the sentiments was their essence. You got the feeling that if you stripped it away, there would be nothing left.

Not even grief, perhaps. Even some journalists began to flinch as the "interminable" week refused to come to a close. "It's something this president does exceedingly well," said NBC's Bob Faw, about the redundant eulogies and daisy-chain hugs and meticulously publicized private phone calls. Faw went on: "The gestures, the words do seem genui ne. Sometimes they aren't." To illustrate, Faw showed a tape of Clinton leaving one of the Brown events. "Recently," Faw said, "he seemed jovial until he noticed the cameras, then switched to tears."

After the sabbath, there was another visit to the Commerce Department, and then, at the full-dress funeral, the longest eulogy of all, and then a graveside service at which Clinton was, so to speak, never far from center stage. When at last it was over, he had taken his office beyond the rhetorical presidency, beyond the bully pulpit, beyond, even, the ceremonial presidency; what we watched evolve during Brownfest was the narcissistic presidency.



Sean Delonas

There is more to come: another memorial service in Harlem's Apollo theater, sponsored by Charlie Rangel, and the promise of a charitable foundation dedicated to "continuing Ron's work," which will of course require some sort of kick-off event at which the president will want to appear and make a few remarks. As before, loss and grief will not be exploited politically. But they will be reduced, as they were this week, to an occasion for personal indulgence, mere instruments of vanity. Faw is right: The president is very good at it. He is an exemplar of the generation that gave us the "task force" and the "workshop," the "hotline" and the "crisis resource center." He calls himself a "change agent" when he's upbeat, the "adult child of an alcoholic" when he's feeling blue. A man of such inclinations could never be expected to treat grief the old-fashioned way, with a measured, brief ceremony of sorrow and then silence. ♦

The National Association for the Advancement of Liberal Guilt

By Christopher Caldwell

When Kweisi Mfume ended a 10-year congressional career to become president and CEO of the NAACP in February, House colleagues asked if he had gone out of his mind. Just 47, Mfume had a carefully tended and impregnable seat. He had been chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus during its period of greatest influence and spoke openly of his ambition to one day be the first black speaker of the House. The NAACP has followed an opposite trajectory. The 1994 resignation of executive director Benjamin Chavis for filching $332,000 to fix a sexual harassment suit and the ouster of board chairman William F. Gibson for $110,000 in alleged "double dipping" brought to light a pattern of financial mismanagement. Layoffs were necessary, and the NAACP, headquartered in Baltimore, now has fewer national staff (under 50) than board members (64).

The problems are not just financial. The NAACP remains a venue for the squabbles of a black elite. But that elite doesn't speak for poorer blacks, who now have voices out of their own culture, most notoriously Louis Farrakhan. Mfume appealed as one who, with his origins in the slums of Baltimore and his comfort in the boardroom, could square the circle. His challenge—his unstated goal, even—will be to mediate between two indispensable and hitherto irreconcilable blocs: an angry black activist populace that now gravitates toward Farrakhan and a well-meaning, largely white donor base appalled by Farrakhan's racism and anti-Semitism.

Born Frizzell Gray in Baltimore in 1948, Mfume was orphaned at 16. He joined a gang and had fathered five sons out of wedlock (by four different women) by the age of 22. In 1978, having established himself as a radio personality and taken on his new name, Mfume won a seat on the Baltimore City Council. Bruce Bortz, who edits a newsletter on Maryland politics, was a beat reporter at the *Baltimore Sun* at the time and thought Mfume a buffoon. "He was provocative, and unbalanced," Bortz remembers, "not a fair arbiter or broker of ideas, but always good for an outrageous quote. It seemed to me his raison d'être was to cause as much fussing as possible if not necessarily accomplish anything." But Mfume changed, Bortz says. "He became dignified, distinguished, thoughtful, and respected. He made people proud of him." By the time Mfume entered Congress, Bortz was one among many Baltimore insiders hoping Mfume would someday return and run for mayor.

THE NEW HEAD OF THE NAACP, IS AN INFLEXIBLE LIBERAL, DOCTRINAIRE DEFENDER OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, AND A MAN OF CONSIDERABLE CHARM.

Iowa Republican Jim Leach called Mfume's House Banking Committee work "substantive" and "not reeking of political macho." *National Review* Washington editor Kate O'Beirne, who has appeared with Mfume on television as both host (on *Capital Gang*) and guest (on *Both Sides with Jesse Jackson*, for which Mfume is the backup host), describes him as "always very cordial and tempered in tone, never adversarial. There's something very classy about him." He was extremely well received as one of the keynote speakers at Jude Wanniski's Polyconomics conference in Boca Raton in 1994—the bastion of latter-day Reaganomics. Such testimonials—for an inflexible liberal who was the most doctrinaire defender of affirmative action and Great Society welfare during his tenure at the Congressional Black Caucus—are evidence of a considerable charm.

His reflexive left-liberalism strikes a chord at the NAACP, of course. At his swearing-in—held in the Department of Justice and attended by President Clinton, Vice President Gore, Attorney General Janet Reno, and her civil rights deputy, Deval Patrick—Mfume condemned the "extreme ultra-right-wing

policies of the Republican Congress." Although he also attacked the "politics born of guilt or misdirected compassion of the ultra-left, that seek to *maintain* the poor," there is no mystery about how rigid Mfume will be in defending federal programs as head of the NAACP. "This organization believes there's an important role for affirmative action in society," Mfume says. Along with Charles Rangel, he was one of the few Black Caucus members who defended to the very end the tax-certificate policy for television-station owners that resulted in the notorious Viacom subsidies to black millionaires.

Nor is there much debate at the NAACP on welfare reform or any other policy measure. "In none of these fights is there any ideological component," says board member Julian Bond, who served on the search committee that picked Mfume. The last major issue on which the board made a forceful stand—against backing Clarence Thomas for the Supreme Court—saw a vote of 63-1, with only Ben Andrews, the sole Republican on the board, voting aye. (And Andrews pleaded days later that his vote be changed to an abstention.)

In a sense the NAACP is a victim of its triumphs: The civil rights agenda has become government orthodoxy. Affirmative action has become so widespread that the black upper-middle classes who make up the NAACP's elite are now profoundly dependent on it. This pyrrhic victory has turned the NAACP, which still views itself as a vanguard organization, into a lackey of the state at a time when most blacks feel the state is failing them.

By contrast, Louis Farrakhan's ability to throw the "gift" of affirmative action back in the government's face sets his movement apart from the NAACP and gives him not only more maneuvering room but also more credibility among blacks—59 percent of whom, according to a recent poll, say Farrakhan "speaks the truth." Arthur J. Magita, author of a biography of Farrakhan forthcoming from BasicBooks, thinks less-fortunate blacks see the NAACP as "more bourgeois, stuffy, antiquated, ossified, from another era, composed of people who wouldn't know what's happening out on the street."

Uniting the Farrakhanites and the Black Bourgeoisie is Mfume's Job One, although no one at the NAACP will admit it publicly. Mfume has shown himself more than willing to traffic with Farrakhan himself. He not only addressed the Million-Man March but was even one of its Maryland organizers. He has cannily avoided condemning Farrakhan for his recent bile-filled tour of Iran, Iraq, and Libya.

Chas Fagan

Kweisi Mfume

In fact, Mfume and Farrakhan go back a ways. In September 1993, Mfume broadened the invitation list to the annual Washington meeting of the Congressional Black Caucus to include Farrakhan and others who had been excluded from a 30th-anniversary reenactment of the march on Washington. There, Mfume declared that he hoped to forge a "sacred covenant" with the Nation of Islam similar to the one the caucus had with the NAACP.

The gesture alarmed Jews inside and outside the civil rights establishment, but the incident might have blown over had not Khalid Muhammad, a close ally of Farrakhan, given a speech at New Jersey's Kean College in November 1993 in which he referred to Jews as "bloodsuckers on the black nation." After Farrakhan himself offered an endorsement of the speech disguised as a condemnation—saying he deplored Muhammad's manner of delivery but stood by the "truths" he spoke—pressure mounted on Mfume to renounce the "sacred covenant" and repudiate Farrakhan. Mfume condemned Muhammad alone, saying, "Nowhere in

America can we give sanctuary to such garbage." But never, ever—then or since—has he condemned Farrakhan.

The equivocation went on for months, and the lengths to which Mfume went to avoid any denunciation were astonishing: Not until February 2, when *the caucus itself* repudiated the "sacred covenant" Mfume had made in its name, did Mfume address the issue squarely. Even then, at a long news conference called that day, he said only, "I think that Minister Farrakhan has had some problem in communicating exactly where he is and even what he is to the larger press in this nation." Pressed for a clarification, Mfume was hardly more specific: "Do I believe he's anti-Semitic? I believe that there have been things that have been said over the years by the Nation of Islam that, without clarity, have been by many people, including myself, questioned as to whether or not they were anti-Semitic in nature, either by happenstance or deliberately. And I think you will find that most people are going to continue to have those kinds of questions as long as there continue to be statements that are made that cause us to feel that way."

Mfume participated later in meetings intended to mollify Jewish and white supporters. He was so convincing that one Jewish participant now apologizes on *his own* behalf for Mfume's failure to denounce Farrakhan: "We had been defining black-Jewish relations the way the Nation of Islam wanted us to. The Jewish relationship with the Nation of Islam does not define black-Jewish relations." Says Abraham Foxman, executive director of the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League, "We do wish him well." But when asked if Mfume had ever satisfactorily condemned Farrakhan in any speech, Foxman replies, "I don't think you're going to find it. But then again, I don't think anybody's really asked him to."

Thus, what must be the central insight of Mfume's career proves itself yet again, even in the wake of his cowardice toward (or, worse, support of) Farrakhan: that white liberals have a persistent desire to think well of black leadership, regardless of its message.

Mfume's speech at the NAACP's annual meeting in the New York Hilton in February was a perfect straddle between wooing Farrakhanites and allaying liberal fears. Mfume began by saying, "I pledge, as your president, to every American who believes in equal opportunity, who believes in equal justice under the law, who believes in racial tolerance, in religious tolerance, that I will work as your president to heal the drift. . . . Racism, sexism, anti-Semitism are wrong. As long as there is an NAACP, they will never endure a quiet and comfortable existence. Racial and religious intolerance will only continue to divide us as a nation. . . . Black bigotry is just as wrong as white bigotry. Both are divisive and wholly indefensible." He left no liberal (or donor) misgiving unassuaged, appealing to Jews, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans. He even mentioned sexual orientation.

Nonetheless, Mfume sounded the note not only of racial harmony but also of racial apocalypse, warning his listeners that "whether you're at the bottom or the top of the well, . . . unless we change things in this nation, all of you will drown. *All of you* will drown." Farrakhan went completely unmentioned, apart from one nudge-nudge, wink-wink overture. "Someone asked, 'Did I have a holy, sacred covenant?' Let the record reflect that I do." Mfume coyly goes on to say he has three (with God, the NAACP, and America), but it's the first allusion that draws the big cheers.

As the speech wound down, Mfume made it clear that some bigotries are more equal than others: "Let me say one more thing before I go to my seat: Jim Crow is dead—but Jim Crow Junior is alive and well. Unlike his father, who liked to segregate, liked to discriminate, and got joy from our lynching, Jim Crow Junior's different. Oh, yeah, he likes to discriminate, he likes to segregate because it's in his genes. But he gets his joy watching us lynch ourselves. Our enemy today is not so much him as much as it is a reactionary Congress, that seeks to disenfranchise minority voters and to deny equal opportunity. Our enemy is a Supreme Court that has turned its back in the last decade of this century as it did in the first on then the American Negro and now on all minorities because it seeks to undo civil rights gains. Our enemy is inadequate housing that keeps us living in second-class citizenship." Of those who would make America safe for discrimination, he said, with the crowd screaming in support, "We will chase them to hell if we must."

After the speech, Julian Bond could be seen strolling down the hall towards a board meeting with a big smile on his face. "That," he says, "was a barrrrrrn-burner." It was also—in its (literal) damning of Congress as worse than Jim Crow—possibly a bridge-burner for Mfume. But he clearly knows what he's doing. Time has run out on the Congressional Black Caucus's ability to advance a race-based, redistributive grievance politics. Voters, even Democratic voters, are sick to death of it. But foundations have a longer fuse. The NAACP may be ideal for Mfume: It's the last place possible to resuscitate through liberal gullibility a politics that can no longer sustain itself on liberal guilt. ♦

William Blake, Capitalist

By Paul Cantor

William Blake cries out for biographical treatment. His writings are among the most profound and powerful in the English language. Even though they are often difficult to the point of obscurity, nearly two centuries after his death his poems still command an audience while more accessible classics go unread. Moreover, Blake is increasingly winning recognition as a graphic artist. His striking and often startling paintings, water colors, engravings, book illustrations, and other forms of visual art are now hung proudly on walls everywhere, the originals in the great museums of the world, reproductions in college dormitories. But for all the exposure, Blake remains an enigma, perhaps the most unfathomable figure in the history of literature and art.

With all sorts of basic questions about him still unanswered, it is tempting to turn to biography to try to get a fix on Blake's identity and the meaning of his works. In *Blake: A Biography* (Knopf, 399 pages, $35.00), Peter Ackroyd offers a richly detailed account of the great visionary's strangely simple and yet strangely complicated life. Ackroyd's book is not a work of scholarship; he has not done much in the way of original research into Blake's life, and is content with synthesizing the existing work of Blake scholars. But it is useful to have a readable new biography that takes into account recent scholarly discoveries about the poet and artist.

Ackroyd's biography reflects the shifting academic perception of Blake in the past two decades. For much of this century he has been studied as a literary man who also happened to illustrate his own books and work in other visual media. Ackroyd places Blake's activity as a visual artist at the center of his career. In particular, Ackroyd stresses the fact that by profession Blake was a commercial engraver. He was apprenticed early in his life to an engraver; he earned his living (such as it was) largely as an engraver; to the extent that he was known in London during his lifetime, it was chiefly for his work as an engraver.

> RATHER THAN A LITERARY MAN WHO ALSO HAPPENED TO DO ILLUSTRATIONS, BLAKE WAS A VISUAL ARTIST, WHO ALSO WROTE.

Thus Ackroyd forges a new image of Blake as a tradesman, a freelance entrepreneur in the world of art. This runs counter to the highly romantic image of Blake that is fixed in the 20th-century mind—the lonely genius who scorned the marketplace and developed his vision in stark opposition to all that was going on around him. This is linked to the image of Blake the proto-Marxist, whose interest in radical politics and the French Revolution, together with his scathing indictment of the early signs of industrialism in his day, are taken to indicate that he was a critic of capitalism and perhaps even a proponent of socialism (though no such thing existed in Blake's lifetime).

Ackroyd shows that Blake was a bit of a capitalist himself. His capital consisted chiefly of a small printing press, together with supplies of paper and engraving plates, which he and his wife dutifully lugged with them whenever they changed domiciles. Here Ackroyd draws upon Joseph Viscomi's monumental study, *Blake and the Idea of the Book* with all its painstaking research into Blake's career as a printer. (Ackroyd repeatedly acknowledges his debt to Viscomi in his notes, though he does not quite let on just how derivative of Viscomi his central thesis really is.) Blake did reject the nascent world of mass marketing already taking shape in 18th-century publishing, Ackroyd (echoing Viscomi) says, but not in favor of a romantic return to medieval craftsmanship that would involve the utter rejection of technology and mechanical reproduction. Blake was in fact highly skilled in bookmaking techniques, and prided himself on having invented a new and (he believed) cheaper method of printing. Ackroyd accepts and develops Viscomi's view of Blake and his wife Catherine as boutique publishers, producing for a distinct (though small) niche in the market.

Viscomi shed new light on Blake by viewing him in the context of the burgeoning English market for graphic art in the second half of the 18th century, a market spurred by technological developments like the invention of lithography. In his remarkable illuminated books—most familiar to us in the beautifully illustrated *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*—Blake was catering to new forms of artistic

Paul Cantor is professor of English at the University of Virginia.

connoisseurship, trying to capitalize on market trends. The childlike lyrics of his *Songs of Innocence* may well have been an effort to cash in on the demand for children's books that had made the Mother Goose and Goody Two Shoes stories into 18th-century bestsellers. In Ackroyd's account, Blake time and again is drawn into get-rich-quick schemes, seeking to hop on one marketing bandwagon after another ("If illustrated copies of Milton are selling, why not try illustrating Dante?"). To be sure, Blake's schemes generally failed miserably in financial terms, but that means he constantly *misread* the market; he didn't ignore or abjure it.

Indeed, Blake had the temperament of the entrepreneur. Rather than work for someone else, he was continually willing to venture whatever little capital he had in a variety of publishing projects, accepting the risk of failure for the sake of reaping the financial rewards of success. Above all, he valued his independence. In one of the most telling anecdotes Ackroyd reports, Blake's friend, the painter Henry Fuseli, found him one day making do with cold mutton for a meal and commented: "Ah by God! This is the reason you can do as you like." In Blake's willingness to accept a lower standard of living in order not to have to take orders from anybody, we recognize the dogged spirit of the English small businessman.

Of course the fact that Blake was himself a kind of capitalist does not prove that he was in favor of capitalism, but it does raise doubts about his supposed proto-socialism. He did support radical causes in politics, but, as Ackroyd shows, in Blake's time that meant that he favored policies that would today be labeled libertarian rather than socialist. Blake inveighed against collusion between the rich and the powerful in his day, but, then again, so did Adam Smith. Indeed, much of Blake's polemic against the unholy alliance between government and business in support of empire resembles Smith's attack on mercantilism, rather than a critique of free-market economics (which, after all, had not been put into practice in Blake's day).

Ackroyd keeps emphasizing that from his home environment on, Blake was shaped by the attitudes of the religious dissenter tradesmen of 18th-century London. But he fails to draw the full consequences of this view. The watchword of Blake's politics was liberty; all he wanted was to be able to pursue unhindered his art and his business (Ackroyd showsf that ultimately the two were inseparable for Blake), and for him that meant primarily to be free of government intrusion in the arts. He objected to suppression of free thought and speech, whether in the form of censorship, licensing of publication, or persecution of writers. He also objected to government-sponsored monopolies (such as the Royal Academy of Arts) and other forms of interference with commercial art. In Blake's most comprehensive statement on art, his "Public Address," his quarrel is not with the free market but with what he calls "the Monopolizing Trader."

> BLAKE'S SCHEMES FAILED MISERABLY, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN HE DISLIKED THE MARKET; HE JUST MISREAD IT.

To be sure, one cannot go so far as to say that Blake was opposed to public support of the arts. He certainly wished that the public had supported him better, and sometimes advocated grand public artistic projects (he proposed, for example, making frescoes for the walls of Westminster Hall at public expense). But on the whole Blake seems to have been convinced that any artist who accepts patronage from a government or a political figure will be corrupted. His vision remained fundamentally individualistic and anarchistic, and he always gave the arts a central role in supporting society rather than society a central role in supporting the arts ("let it no more be said that Empires Encourage Arts for it is Arts that Encourage Empires").

But Ackroyd's justifiable quarrel with romantic images of Blake as an isolated genius leads him to question the very idea of Blake as a Romantic poet, and here the biographer goes too far. For Ackroyd, Blake must be viewed as a product of the 18th century and thus should be categorized with poets such as Thomas Chatterton (subject of a previous Ackroyd biography) and James Thomson, rather than with Romantics like Wordsworth and Coleridge. True, Ackroyd's argument has solid critical foundation, but it compels him to downgrade the ways Blake participated—in very Romantic fashion—in all the new currents of thought and feeling unleashed by the French Revolution, above all the effort to rethink human nature itself and thereby liberate the creative potential long held in check by the old regime in Europe.

Ackroyd's argument that Blake was not a Romantic largely rests on the claim that he was in touch with the marketplace, whereas Wordsworth and the other Romantic poets were not. This is an odd claim, since Wordsworth was much more successful in the literary marketplace than Blake ever was. Byron, the arch-Romantic, was the bestselling poet of his day. In trying to show Blake's link to popular culture, Ackroyd makes much of his interest in the London theater. Yet

Byron served on the management committee of one of the London theaters (Drury Lane) and wrote plays for it, one of which (*Werner*) became a box-office hit. In fact, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats all at one time or another eyed the London stage as the road to literary and financial success.

Important recent scholarship on the Romantics has taught us that they were all deeply implicated in the literary market of their era. Even when a Romantic poet adopted the pose of the isolated genius or cultivated the seemingly backward-looking role of the medieval bard, he was appealing to the prevailing middle-class nostalgia for the pre-modern world. In the early 19th century, poetry allowed a troubled public to escape from the ugliness and tensions of the industrial world. Scholars have become obsessed with showing that all the Romantics were creatures of capitalism and more or less shrewd participants in the new mass market for literature. The irony of this neo-Marxist scholarship (called the New Historicism) is that it is supposed to lower the Romantics in our esteem, but it ought to improve the reputation of capitalism. The New Historicist critics have unwittingly documented the benefits of free market competition, even in the realm of literature, by showing how the new economic situation in the realm of publishing in early 19th-century England spurred the Romantic poets on to their creative achievements.

Ackroyd's attempt to deny Blake classification as a Romantic is thought-provoking and a healthy reminder that all such critical categorizations have an element of arbitrariness in them. But it is one example of how his attempt to correct earlier images of Blake will have to be corrected in turn. One of the most suggestive features of Ackroyd's account is his effort to present Blake as a Londoner through and through, and to show how many of the odder moments of his poetry can be explained just by looking at a map of the neighborhoods in which he lived. But as valuable as this emphasis on the local in Blake's poetry may be, it does tend to make us lose sight of Blake's extraordinarily modern ability to envision Europe as a whole, indeed his ability to embrace the earth and even the cosmos in his poetry.

William Blake

Chas Fagan

Similarly, Ackroyd does an excellent job of documenting the ways Blake was influenced by occult and esoteric traditions, especially the writings of Swedenborg, Paracelsus, and Jacob Boehme. But the result of this emphasis is to downplay (though not completely ignore) the major literary influences on Blake that he himself acknowledged: Shakespeare, Milton, and above all, the King James Bible. For example, at one point Ackroyd makes it seem as if Blake did not really engage with Milton's poetry until after he met his patron William Hayley and began work on his poem named *Milton*. But in fact, Milton was always on Blake's mind as an author and he confronts him directly as early as his seminal work *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (which Ackroyd discusses largely in relation to Swedenborg).

Ackroyd is to be commended for in fact having written a *new* biography of Blake, one that usefully highlights aspects of his career earlier biographers have tended to ignore or neglect. But despite the wealth of detail in Ackroyd's biography and his many local insights, he seems to lose sight of what is centrally important in Blake. I wonder if someone coming to this book with only a passing knowledge of Blake would be able to understand the greatness of his major literary works: *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem*. Ackroyd discusses them in a cursory and superficial fashion, at no greater length than he devotes to Blake's minor works. He makes little effort to explain the complicated private mythology Blake developed (though there are some excellent passages on the figure of Urizen) or to analyze how his mythic system hangs together as a whole—precisely the kinds of issues that have preoccupied such great Blake critics as Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom.

In reading *Blake: A Biography*, I was struck by many moments at which Ackroyd's careful attention to biographical details seems to offer sudden illumination of some of Blake's most difficult poetry, as when Ackroyd explains a mysterious reference to Apollo in *Milton* by the fact that Blake's house in Lambeth was located near an establish-

ment named Apollo Gardens. But does this passage become any less mysterious just because we can now locate it on a map of London? At several points Ackroyd himself registers his concern that his explanations may be reductive. Ackroyd's account is of value as long as readers remember that, like the biography of any great artist, his *Blake* raises more questions than it answers. ♦

Books

Colorblind Like Me

By Jessica Gavora

Days before the California primary, Bob Dole stopped at a pagoda-roofed mall in Orange County's Little Saigon to remind voters of his support for the California Civil Rights Initiative (CCRI), the fall ballot proposition that would end state affirmative action programs. The site was chosen deliberately: Some groups, including Asian-Americans, are necessarily among the *unpreferred* in racial-preference programs. But the "visual" for the event said something quite different. A banner hanging behind the candidate invited viewers, in both English and Vietnamese, to "Celebrate Diversity With Bob Dole and CCRI."

CCRI, of course, is not meant to promote "diversity" but to expose it as a fraud—the latest justification for state-sponsored discrimination. For the first time since these programs began to germinate in bureaucracies and admissions offices 30 years ago, the California initiative will give citizens a chance to vote up or down on ending group preferences, regardless of their rationale. As such, it presents a choice that many Republican elected officials are finding more difficult to make than their constituents. For restoring the principle of colorblindness means rejecting more than "quotas" and "discrimination." It calls for penetrating—and casting off—the elaborate cloak of aliases and assumed identities under which affirmative action has learned to operate. Among other things, it means *rejecting* the seductive call to "celebrate diversity."

In *Ending Affirmative Action: The Case for Colorblind Justice* (BasicBooks, $23.00), Terry Eastland argues that it is time for citizens to decide the fate of affirmative action. And he has no doubt what their choice will be: Race and gender preferences must be rejected as unfair, unjust, and un-American. Eastland's new book continues an argument begun with much force in 1979 by Eastland and William J. Bennett in their post-*Bakke* treatment of affirmative action, *Counting By Race*. There, Eastland and Bennett discussed the concept of "moral equality," the notion that each individual is a moral agent, accountable to himself and others and therefore capable of self-government.

In *Ending Affirmative Action*, "moral equality" has become "colorblind principle," and the change is more than semantic. Where *Counting by Race* looked to the history of the republic and the philosophy of the founders to construct a principled case for moral equality, *Ending Affirmative Action* uses the stories of the people who have been victimized by racial preferences to make a populist case for colorblind justice. Their names are the stuff of federal court case law: Cheryl Hopwood, Danny O'Connor, Randy Pech, and Sharon Taxman. And by focusing on their stories, Eastland signals the coming of the final stage in the battle against race-conscious policy: the mobilization of the public.

Eastland sees populism as the force necessary to raze an edifice of affirmative action that was constructed by largely undemocratic means through executive order, bureaucratic activism, and judicial fiat. Beginning with the Johnson administration, he recounts how group preferences were pursued in government, private employment, and academe through "law enforcement that is better described as law transformation." The law transformed was the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Eastland's high-water mark for the principle of moral equality in American life.

The Civil Rights Act, he contends, was passed to codify the principle of nondiscrimination, not to mandate equal group outcomes. And yet, just as quickly as colorblindness was enshrined in the law, elites began to undermine it. In private employment, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act explicitly prohibits discrimination. But Eastland relates how bureaucrats hatched the "disparate impact" theory in order to mandate the correct "utilization" of minorities, and how the courts not only ratified that goal but made it the responsibility of business to achieve it. Similarly, the Civil Rights Act makes it a crime for most colleges and universities to discriminate. Eastland explains how the Supreme Court, by allowing race as "a" factor in admissions, opened the door for race to become "the" factor.

Jessica Gavora is director of programs at the New Citizenship Project.

Eastland's most valuable contribution, however, is revealing how affirmative action has come to travel under assumed names, the most popular of which is "diversity." Unlike the original justification for these programs—the remediation of past discrimination against black Americans—"diversity"is a goal in and of itself; it recognizes virtually no limit on its potential "beneficiaries," nor any time-limit on its application. Left unchallenged, Eastland points out, it is a guarantee of the permanence of affirmative action in American life.

Eastland also recounts how race and gender politics have warped the terms of our public discourse. Supporters of group preferences often claim to eschew "hard and fast" or "rigid" quotas for "flexible goals." In practice, Eastland points out, there is virtually no distinction. Defenders also tend to claim that most affirmative action is "voluntary." But the truth, Eastland writes, "is that much of what is called voluntary affirmative action is in effect compelled by government or its agencies and institutions."

Eastland finds bipartisan blame for the transformation of affirmative action into an open-ended system of preferences for a rapidly multiplying list of ethnic minorities. These programs, he writes, "advanced dramatically" under President Nixon. Ronald Reagan campaigned against preferences but did nothing to reverse them in office—partly, Eastland explains, out of fear that what he changed by executive order would immediately be restored by Democratic majorities in Congress. President Bush, of course, signed the Civil Rights Act of 1991, which Eastland contends codified a variant of the diversity rationale—the "underutilization" of minorities relative to their representation in the population—in employment.

Ending this system of increasingly open-ended, self-justifying racial preferences is the promise held out by the title of Eastland's book. He wrote before the federal appeals court ruling in the case of Cheryl Hopwood, which held that racial preferences at a state university are permissible only in narrow circumstances—a potentially fatal

Kent Lemon

Terry Eastland

blow to state-sponsored affirmative action. Still, Eastland offers little reason to be sanguine about the likelihood that the judiciary, despite decisions like *Hopwood*, can alone blaze a trail back to color-blindness.

The problem, as Eastland recently told a Heritage Foundation audience, is that "judicial decisions are not self-enforcing." He argues that *Hopwood* never should have come to trial at all. The two-track admissions policy that rejected Cheryl Hopwood at the University of Texas law school—one for preferred minorities and another for everyone else—had already been outlawed in the 1978 *Bakke* decision. But zealous college administrators maintained it as the only sure route to "diversity." As long as this remains a goal, Eastland infers, the education establishment can be counted on to resist *Hopwood* as tenaciously as it resisted *Bakke*.

In the end, as Eastland reminds us, affirmative action is a political as well as a constitutional disease, and it is in the political realm that he places his hopes for a cure. The elections of 1994, he writes, "transformed the political landscape" and produced "the most focused, enduring consideration of [affirmative action] that we have ever had." Paradoxically, Eastland has little faith in the ability or willingness of the GOP-led 104th Congress to sound the death knell of race-consciousness. Congressional Republicans are, he writes, divided and fearful of being cast as racist for seeking to end affirmative action without proposing an "empowerment agenda" of tax cuts and social-services deregulation to replace it.

Eastland is also silent on what role the 1996 presidential race will play in ending racial preferences. He writes approvingly of governor and then-presidential aspirant Pete Wilson's efforts in 1995 to curb affirmative action in California but fails to consider the more salient fact: Pete Wilson's candidacy—at the center of which was his opposition to preferences—died on the vine. As for the other contenders, Eastland dismisses them for having treated affirmative action as merely a "campaign issue."

But will ending affirmative action merit even the dubious rank of "campaign issue" in 1996? Less

than a year ago, Eastland's faith in the potential for change in the "new politics" of 1994 seemed justified. New GOP congressional committee chairmen announced their intention to hold hearings on the Clinton administration's enforcement of racial preferences and, in a blaze of publicity, Sen. Dole unveiled legislation co-sponsored by Rep. Charles Canady that would end race and gender preferences in government hiring and contracting. Today, the House has put aside affirmative action for the results of a leadership-appointed "empowerment task force," and Dole-Canady is stalled, awaiting a go-ahead from the presumptive Republican presidential nominee. Republicans, it seems, have lost their nerve.

And at a most inopportune time. What *Ending Affirmative Actio*n demonstrates is that the battle over principle in affirmative action is over, and the good guys have won. The principle of moral equality captured in the words of the Declaration of Independence has survived and is experiencing a rebirth in the courts and, most especially, in the hearts and minds of the American people. Initiatives like the CCRI are springing up across the country precisely because Americans recognize the friction between what we do as a people and what we believe—and they want to do something about it.

In the closing pages of his book, Eastland seems to abandon faith in the two major parties and suggests that it may fall to a third party to bring about colorblindness. But his solution, which is never fleshed out, seems chimerical. If the political moment for ending affirmative action has arrived, it falls to Republicans to act.

They won't get far, however, by chasing a well-intentioned but potentially limitless "empowerment agenda" or by attempting to make colorblindness and "diversity" co-exist in the same policy. Meanwhile, it appears increasingly likely that the people will get their chance to speak, and what they say will weigh heavily on the future of affirmative action. The question left unanswered is, who will lead them? ♦

Books

The German Question

By Allan Arkush

"No Hitler, No Holocaust" is both the title and the gist of an article by Milton Himmelfarb in *Commentary* twelve years ago, a memorable statement of what has come to be known as the "intentionalist" interpretation of the Holocaust. "Anti-Semitism was a necessary condition for the Holocaust," Himmelfarb wrote, "but it was not a sufficient condition. Hitler was needed. Hitler murdered the Jews because he wanted to murder them." From the reaction to Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's widely discussed *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (Knopf, 622 pages, $30.00), one might think the book is designed to disabuse its readers of any such notions and to place the primary blame for the Holocaust on the German people in general. But this is definitely not the case; indeed, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* is the ablest defense of the "intentionalist" position to appear in many years.

Hitler's genocidal plans, Goldhagen persuasively argues, long antedated his genocidal actions. If from the time he seized power until the launching of Operation Barbarossa he pursued less drastic goals than the extermination of the Jews, this was not by choice but for lack of any prudent alternative. At each phase of its development, Goldhagen seeks to demonstrate, the major thrust of Nazi policy was "*the maximum feasible eliminationist option* possible given the existing opportunities and constraints." And Hitler very clearly "opted for genocide at the first moment that the policy became practical."

All this may seem plausible or even self-evident, but it flies in the face of much of what the most fashionable Holocaust historians, the so-called "functionalists," have been arguing in recent years. Goldhagen must therefore devote some time to disputing the "functionalist" claim that the Holocaust was the initially unintended and largely inadvertent result of a confluence of wartime circumstances. On balance, however, he is more concerned with those who have failed to recognize the true nature of the part he believes the German people played in the implementation of Hitler's plans.

By the time Hitler appeared on the scene, Goldhagen argues, most Germans were thoroughly imbued with a racist brand of what he calls "eliminationist anti-Semitism." By this he does not mean to say that the Germans were fully primed for massacres, only that they agreed it would be desirable to exclude the racially alien and menacing Jews from the life of their nation one way or another. Although he does a less than satisfactory job of describing just how such a consensus

Allan Arkush is associate professor of Judaic Studies at SUNY-Binghamton.

evolved, Goldhagen makes a convincing case that it did indeed exist in early twentieth-century Germany without "institutional" opposition, with the partial exception of the Social Democratic party.

The German attitude, he writes, was "pregnant with murder," but the baby could not be born until a state that would not permit the organization of anti-Semitic sentiments "into systematic persecution" was replaced by one directed by "the most virulent and dedicated anti-Semites ever to assume the leadership of a modern nation." While noting that Nazi anti-Semitism "mirrored the sentiments of German culture," Goldhagen makes no attempt to link it to the electoral success of Hitler's party, citing instead a host of other factors to explain Nazi appeal. Once in power, however, Hitler and the Nazis could "unshackle and thereby activate Germans' preexisting, pent-up anti-Semitism" and guide it toward a murderous goal that would have been beyond the capacity of the great majority even to imagine. Yet "when others finally showed the way" to genocide, Goldhagen is most eager to demonstrate, they displayed a "ready willingness to follow."

In his ambitious effort to substantiate this point, Goldhagen seeks to discredit every account of the Holocaust that ascribes a lesser degree of responsibility for its horrors to ordinary Germans. He is particularly effective in his response to those who seek to exculpate the German people by depicting the majority of them as merely indifferent to the fate of the Jews. Such indifference in the face of one's neighbors' extreme suffering strikes Goldhagen as "a virtual psychological impossibility," but if indeed it somehow existed, he thinks it constituted a cognitive state that still requires further elucidation. Why, he asks, should Germans "have been 'indifferent' to the slaughter of Jews but not to many other occurrences that, on the face of it, should have been less likely to have stirred them from a state of total neutrality than would the eliminationist measures that culminated in mass murder?" His answer to this question is that what has been mistakenly labeled "indifference" was in reality an ideology-induced and morally depraved pitilessness.

This deluded and inhuman state of mind was, according to Goldhagen, so typical of the Germans of the Nazi era that virtually any citizen could easily have been promoted from the status of guilty bystander to that of wholehearted accomplice in genocide. Nothing illustrates this better, in his opinion, than the men of the Order Police, who patrolled German-occupied territory and massacred Jews by the thousands.

> BY THE TIME HITLER APPEARED ON THE SCENE, GOLDHAGEN ARGUES, THE GERMAN ATTITUDE TOWARD THE JEWS WAS "PREGNANT WITH MURDER."

Like Christopher R. Browning, the author of the recent *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, Goldhagen devotes a great deal of attention to the unusually well-documented activities of one Order Police battalion. The differences between Goldhagen's and Browning's analyses of Battalion 101 give the clearest and quickest view of the distinctive standpoint of *Hitler's Willing Executioners*.

Both Browning and Goldhagen stress that the men of 101 were selected for their task more or less randomly. In their attempts to explain how such ordinary men could rapidly become professional killers, both emphasize the fact that they were, in Browning's words, "like the rest of German society, immersed in a deluge of racist and anti-Semitic propaganda" that bred in them an aversion to Jews. For Browning, however, this was not enough by itself to turn the men of Battalion 101 into obedient murderers. The decisive contributing factor in their transformation was their fear that they would risk "isolation, rejection and ostracism" if they did not shoot Jews—"a very frightening prospect within the framework of a tight-knit unit stationed abroad among a hostile population." Thus motivated, eight or nine of every ten members of 101 fought the claims of their incompletely silenced consciences and went on with their filthy jobs.

Goldhagen sees precious few signs that the men of 101 had consciences to squelch. They seem to him to have been "feeling great." He finds evidence of this in their general good spirits, their "openness about their genocidal slaughtering," the excessive brutality with which they went about their business, what they said and did not say in their off-the-job conversations, the alacrity with which they participated in murderous operations from which they could have obtained exemptions, and their neglect of readily available opportunities to obtain transfers from the Order Police. The men of Battalion 101 and those of similar units killed Jews, Goldhagen concludes, because they *wanted* to kill Jews. And they wanted to kill Jews because they, like virtually all of their countrymen, had been thoroughly corrupted by an insidious ideology.

I am inclined to Goldhagen's reading, but I do not have the temerity to declare whether he or

Browning is closer to a correct understanding of the true motivations of the men of Police Battalion 101. They have, after all, spent years poring over these documents. Nor can I even begin to evaluate, or even summarize, the rest of the evidence Goldhagen brings to demonstrate just how hearty and enthusiastic was the participation of the German people in the Holocaust. What I can say for sure is that in the face of the facts and arguments Goldhagen marshals, it is extremely difficult to think of any evidence that might help to exculpate the great mass of ordinary Germans in the Hitler era.

Present-day Germans will have to decide whether they want to engage Goldhagen on this point when *Hitler's Willing Executioners* makes its scheduled appearance in their language this summer. One can safely predict that an American Jew's acerbic and scathing portrait of their forebears (or, in some few cases, their younger selves) will soon provoke a controversy that will dwarf the quite considerable stir the book has already created here. I hope that those who do become engaged in the controversy do not lose sight of the single footnote near the very end of his book in which Goldhagen states his opinion that Germany, while still infected with anti-Semitism, is no longer the home of a people under the sway of absurd, racist beliefs. ♦

Art

Guggenheim on Ritalin

By David Gelernter

You catch a glimpse of the fundamental strangeness of abstract painting in the fact that it never occurs to children, at least in my experience. Children will stretch their technical resources to the limit to get the image of some actual thing down on paper. It doesn't occur to them, no matter how hard they wrestle with a mouth or a nose (noses are the toughest), to bail out and go for color-field minimalism instead. Abstraction is a non-obvious and unnatural idea. It is mysterious in practice too: Certain kites and abstract paintings soar; others that appear on the surface to be almost the same can't struggle off the ground.

David Gelernter is a writer and painter who lives in Connecticut. His last contribution to THE WEEKLY STANDARD, *"Winslow Homer and Our Contemporaries," appeared in the March 11 issue.*

The best painting in "Abstraction in the Twentieth Century," at the Guggenheim Museum in New York until May 12, is a 1948 canvas by Willem de Kooning that soars against all odds. It is one of his famous black-and-white series and at first glance it is nothing much to look at, especially in an exhibit dominated by loud color. But once it has latched onto you, you cannot turn away. By means of subtle, brilliant draftsmanship, de Kooning has painted what seems (but only just) like the flat image of a three-dimensional object—a compressed telephoto image, full of tension. The writhing tube-like thing, whatever it is, wants to bust out of the canvas as a torrent of white paint drenches the picture's left edge like a rainstorm overwhelming your windshield and forcing you to a halt. There is satisfying structure to this painting, the rough equivalent of what counts as good narrative shape in a novel or sonata: It has a natural focus and entrancing subsidiary passages where the eye wants to linger.

Curator Mark Rosenthal has marshaled six de Koonings in all, and they tell the story of the show; it ought to be subtitled "masterpieces and mortifications." Half the de Koonings are inferior, flaccid paintings from the 1970s. So only two remain in which to present the man's achievement as one of the three or four greatest colorists of the century. And the single black-and-white is all we get of that brilliant series of paintings from the mid 40s through the early 50s in which he solved the deepest problem of abstract painting: how to make draftsmanship part of it.

Abstract art is arguably the brassiest, brightest fantasia ever composed on the theme of "art for its own sake, dammit"—"absolute art," founding father Vasily Kandinsky called it—and this show ought to leave a person vibrating with exhilaration. It doesn't. You get the feeling instead that these paintings and sculptures are trying hard to put out a message, and the show isn't quite picking it up; that the curator himself is less exhilarated than unnerved. Nearly everything about the exhibit suggests an anxious schoolteacher imposing decorum: the vibrant, superbly idiosyncratic artists left out, the raucous masterpieces passed over for lesser works by the same artist, the unaccountable obsession with minimalist and conceptual artists at their soporific peaks. (I mean *obsession*: Robert Ryman beats de Kooning, the incomparably better and more important artist, nine paintings to six. And I do mean *minimal.* A typical Ryman canvas would pass at the local discount art mart for slightly soiled but basically good as new.)

The polyphony that arises when you juxtapose paintings by differ-

ent artists is of no interest here. The search party that should have explored abstraction's pervasive cultural influence never departs. And contemplating this strangely hushed affair—the abstract movement on Ritalin with some of the noisiest troublemakers booted out and teacher's pets in good supply, guaranteed not to speak out of turn because they have nothing to say—it dawns on you that, from a certain viewpoint, curator Rosenthal is right.

Abstract art is far more incendiary today than it was 90 years ago when Kandinsky got the ball rolling. It deserves to be treated like potential big trouble and brought to heel—unless, that is, you are so cold and heartless, you just don't care a fig for the contemporary art world's peace of mind.

The show *is* full of fine pieces, and it is a pleasure to report that one of the better ones dates from 1996. Frank Stella's *Schools and School Masters* is a berserk walk-in closet of twisting, waltzing, cha-cha-cha-ing steel and aluminum panels that curl and plume like breaking waves. It is impossible to look at the thing without smiling. Rosenthal surprises us with lovely work like Dubuffet's 1959 *Substance of Stars*, whose crenelated foil surface has the brooding depth and darkness of a crystal wall in a secret cave. He offers audacious masterpieces like Malevich's 1918 *White on White*, a tilted white square faintly outlined in gray against off-white, which takes on life as you watch and turns to sculpture; the shadows cast by the coarse paint become part of the design. It is hard not to imagine the piece as the wall of an austere chapel instead of a small painting.

He rolls out striking Russian constructivist models: Rodchenko's 1920 *Hanging Construction*, a nest of wild, bright aluminum ovals slowly spinning; Tatlin's 1920 "Monument to the Third International," with its rising spiral coils vaguely suggesting the Guggenheim itself turned inside-out. He includes fine work by Gerhard Richter, arguably the best abstract painter at work today.

Kasimir Malevich, White on White *(1918).*

But the gaps make this show as jarring as a smile full of missing teeth, and there is always the pervasive sense of something out of joint. The story of abstract art is a sort of bell curve, with a handful of important artists in the early period (the 1910s through the mid-40s), the dazzling flame-up of New York School abstract expressionism in the middle, and a small handful, again, from the 60s down to the present. To name only the most obvious and painful omissions, Paul Klee is missing in the first period, Arshile Gorky and Hans Hoffman in the second, and Jasper Johns (especially the magnificent cross-hatch abstractions of the 70s and early 80s) in the third. It is a shame, too, that space couldn't be found for milestones like de Kooning's 1960

Door to the River, a desperate juddering rectangle in sunflower yellows, gray-brown pinks, and flares of blue. Or Barnett Newman's *Abraham*, with its trembling dark zip barely emerging in a shower of white sparks out of the shadows. Or for more Miró and Dubuffet, more drawings and watercolors, some Morris Louis, a dash of Adolph Gottlieb, a pinch of David Row, better Rauschenbergs.

Too many curators spoil the broth, but I infer from the catalog (which never addresses the issue head-on) that these omissions are less a matter of taste than of the "influence theory" that all aspiring art historians internalize by age six. Stella is in and Louis out because Stella was *influential*—although Louis (inconveniently) is a better artist than any of Stella's followers. The influence theory is a disaster wherever it strikes. Some of the century's finest artists were just too idiosyncratic to be influential.

Balancing the obvious bald patches is the lush minimalist and conceptualist profusion. Unlike most Guggenheim shows, this one runs from the bottom up (the Guggenheim is, in essence, one long spiral staircase that rises six stories from Fifth Avenue), and the air seems to thin out as you reach the contemporary artists near the roof. When showgoers stand finally before the listless, depleted masterpieces of minimalism, very few seem interested enough to disapprove. They tend to shrug, turn round and shuffle thoughtfully back down the long spiral ramp to the souvenir shop. Robert Ryman's vacant stares, Richard Long's trail of stones on the floor, Agnes Martin's glorified graph paper—these pieces are *supposed* to be boring. Touring this part of the show is the moral equivalent of listening to David Letterman tell the same joke 40 times.

Beyond the shortfalls and surpluses, it is disappointing that Rosenthal wasn't inspired to investigate the shaping of modern culture by abstract art. Take Wallace Harrison's Trylon and Perisphere, for example, at the center of the 1939 New York World's Fair: It strikingly resembled Russian constructivist designs, particularly Jacob Tchernikhov's. Harrison's ensemble was arguably the best-known, best-loved abstract artwork ever created; it is also a masterpiece. I can't say I am surprised to find it missing, but drawings of the monumental structure (Hugh Ferriss's, for example) would have been a lovely and provocative inclusion. Or ponder Pollock's 1943 *Composition with Pouring II*; with its greeny turquoise, chalk blue, white spattered on black, and the oval loops of its lazy, wandering drip, it forecasts a whole world of 1950s popular design. Pollock was conceiving, unawares, a million book covers and LP jackets and formica kitchen counters. An interesting footnote, surely? Evidently not.

PONDER THE TRANSITION FROM THE HEARTY, MEAT-AND-POTATOES ACHIEVEMENT OF DE KOONING AND HIS COLLEAGUES TO THE BLANCHED LETTUCE LEAF OF MINIMALISM.

In a historical retrospective you expect to make your way artist-by-artist; on the other hand, New York School abstract paintings generate energy surges when they are hung together. Mark Rothko, for instance, is a *basso* artist, slow and ponderous and deep. Each Rothko at the Guggenheim hangs by itself, wedged awkwardly into the middle third of a bay that is too wide but not high enough to make it comfortable. It's a shame no one thought to try a tenor picture (the small turquoise Pollock I mentioned above, for example) in one of the gaps on either side.

And then there is Rosenthal's long, exhaustive, fact-filled catalog. It delivers a ton of information with the grace of a dump truck. "The successful abstract work of art, it can be argued, succeeds on many of these counts, and so it is no wonder that abstraction has been and continues to be an extremely attractive option for young artists, and one that is stubbornly clung to." Grimly determined prose for grimly determined readers.

Good pictures, though. (But when will it dawn on art-book publishers that you can't assimilate work like this without a sense of its size, and that merely listing the dimensions is no good? Beneath every photograph of a painting or sculpture there ought to be a smaller photo of it with a "reference person" in front.)

Having looked at the show, you are struck by the sense of that undelivered message. The message, I think, comes down to this:

Back in the long-ago world of fauves and cubists, abstraction fit right in. Today on the other hand "art is so oriented to social issues," as Rosenthal tells it, that abstraction is a questionable proposition. "If art based solely on the sensuous effect of formal elements," he ventures—"empty formalist art," the Soviets used to call it—"is considered insufficient for an audience that demands cultural relevance, then perhaps artists will bend abstraction to new uses, if it survives at all."

Ponder the transition from the big, hearty, meat-and-potatoes

achievement of de Kooning and his colleagues to the blanched lettuce leaf of minimalism. How can you *avoid* asking whether abstract expressionism, despite its morose streak, might not be one reflection of the sublime hubris of an astonishing period when Americans owned space and time and worked their will? Is there a link somewhere between burgeoning highways, suburbs, and space shots on the one hand and de Kooning on the other, cramming huge canvases full of color and force? Today's is an age of conformist passivity, and artists scurry to hide behind their political views like children behind their mothers' skirts.

Today's intellectuals dismiss with a shudder the mainstream culture of the late 40s through the early 60s, the abstract expressionist years—but still rely on the roads and houses we created back then, and can't help admiring those New York School canvases. Harold Rosenberg pronounced them "action paintings." Don't they force us to confront our own passivity?

"Abstraction in the Twentieth Century" leaves you in the end with this realization: Underneath the swagger and dramatic installations and no-holds-barred materials, today's artists are terrified. Mostly they are too scared to be capable even in theory of putting a strong or original or beautiful painting on canvas, too scared to make a move without reassuring us that they are acting on behalf of AIDS victims or against sexism or, failing that, that it is all tongue in cheek, that artists are clowns. The same terror grips literary scholars in the universities: the nightmare dread that no one believes in art or literature anymore, that the public couldn't care less and that artists have no reason for existing.

Anguished artists would do well to come visit the absolute art at the Guggenheim. They'd do well to face up squarely to art's recent failures and former glories (and to take heart from the Richters and Stellas who still have what it takes). And then if they will only screw up their courage, come off their clowning and their "social issues" and their "cultural relevance" and be serious . . . maybe the public will care about modern art again someday, instead of shuffling off in disdain to the souvenir shop. ♦

Parody

Post Shut Out Again

Other People Win Pulitzers

(AP)—Here is a partial listing of the the 1997 Pulitzer Prizes:

Public Service—To the staff of the Nome (Alaska) Home News for its year-long series, "Take Back the Igloo," on domestic-violence prevention efforts in the Aleut-American community.

Feature Writing—To Sappho Running-water of the Butte (Montana) Bugle for her coverage of gender bias against male cocktail waitresses in Native American casinos.

Foreign Affairs—To Tiffany Chang-Rae of the New York Times for stories that revealed the flagrant Bosnian Serb violations of recycling regulations.

Explanatory—Donald Bartlett and William Steele of the Philadelphia Inquirer for their 80,000-word report, "Dangerous Detachment: Why Newspaper Readers Aren't Reading 80,000-Word Reports."

Biography—Drucella McMillan for "Alice Walker Needs Flour and Milk: An African-American Writer and Her Shopping Lists" (Wayne State University Press).

Non-Fiction—Terrence McBruce for "AIDS: The Screaming Silence" (Houghton Mifflin).

Drama—Bruce McTerrence for "The Screaming Silence."

Poetry—Bruce Terrence for "Scream, Oh Silence."