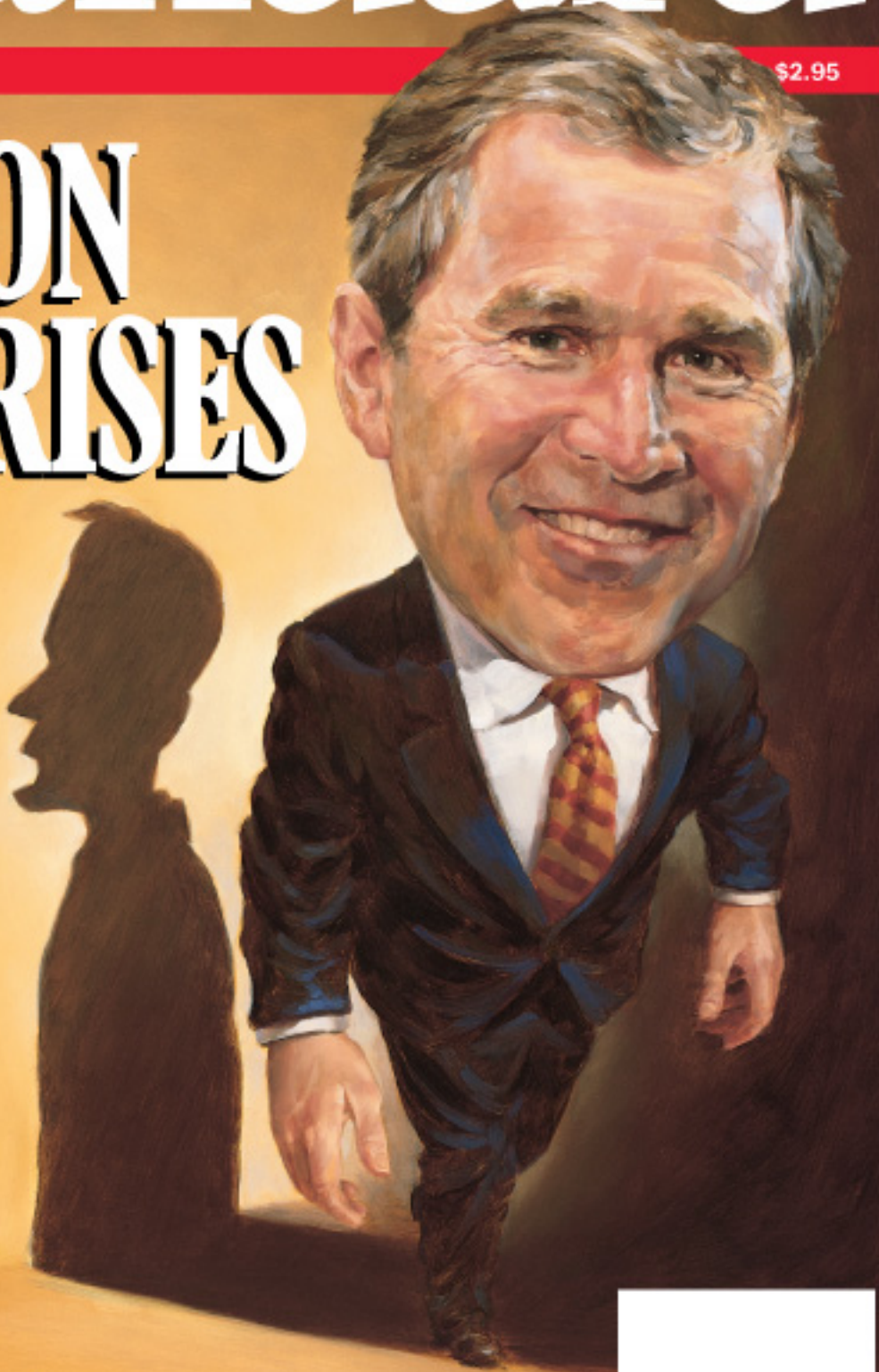
the weekly
Standard
FEBRUARY 10, 1997
$2.95

WHAT ABC REALLY THINKS ABOUT FOOD LION
RICHARD STARR

# THE SON ALSO RISES

*Does the future of the Republican Party go by the name of George Bush?*

*by Julia Reed*



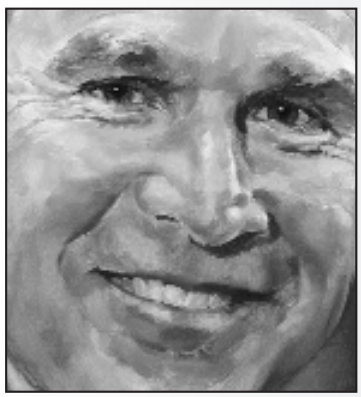
**A Cure for GOP Ennui**
WILLIAM J. BENNETT

**Worshiping False Internets**
ALAN EHRENHALT

the weekly Standard

VOLUME 2, NUMBER 21 • FEBRUARY 10, 1997





*Cover by Chas Fagan*



## Books & Arts





The Weekly Standard (ISSN 1083-3013) is published weekly, except for the first week of January and the third week of July, by News America Publishing Incorporated, 1211 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY, 10036. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Send subscription orders to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 96153, Washington, DC 20090-6153. Yearly subscriptions, $79.96; Canadian, $99.96; foreign postage extra. Cover price, $2.95 ($3.50 Canadian). Back issues, $3.50 (includes postage and handling). Subscribers: Please send all remittances, address changes, and subscription inquiries to: The Weekly Standard, Customer Service, P.O. Box 710, Radnor, PA 19088-0710. If possible include your latest magazine mailing label. Allow 3 to 5 weeks for arrival of first copy and address changes. For subscription customer service, call 1-800-983-7600. Send manuscripts and letters to the editor to The Weekly Standard, 1150 17th Street, N.W., Suite 505, Washington, DC 20036-4617. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. The Weekly Standard Advertising Sales Office in Washington, DC, is (202) 293-4900. Advertising Production: call Natalie Harwood, (610) 293-8540. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 930, Radnor, PA 19088-0930. 

# Clinton on Scandals: Heads Will Be Rolled

Who's responsible for the seemingly endless chain of White House fund-raising scandals now coming to light? Listening to Bill Clinton's recent press conference, it was hard to tell. "No one is blameless here," said the president, since "at the edges, errors are made, and when they're made, they need to be confessed." Fair enough. The only problem is, nobody ever has confessed. The closest the president came to an admission of guilt was summed up in a page-one *Washington Post* headline the next day: "'Mistakes Were Made,' Clinton Says of Gifts." Longtime *Post* readers couldn't help but feel a sense of déjà vu. It was only ten years ago, almost to the month, that another set of headlines said much the same thing. "Bush Says 'Mistakes Were Made,'" announced a front-page story on December 4, 1986. Less than a week later, a follow-up piece informed readers that "President Reagan acknowledged yesterday for the first time that 'mistakes were made.'" Both stories referred to the Iran-Contra affair then consuming Washington. And in both cases it was unclear, from the official semi-apologies at least, who, exactly, had made the mistakes in question. They seemed to have made themselves.

According to Landon Parvin, a Reagan speechwriter who worked in the White House during Iran-Contra, the passive, pronoun-free phrasing was not accidental—no mistakes were made in the choice of words. At the time, says Parvin, "there was a horrendous internal battle [at the White House], with some people wanting to go further. But 'mistakes were made' was sort of the lowest common denominator you could get away with. It was the most the political people and the lawyers and the other apologists would allow. It was always very hard to get the first-person pronoun in there."

It still is. Except in the Clinton administration, the "political people and the lawyers and the other apologists" don't have to argue their case at White House strategy meetings—they're the only ones present. The result: Clinton didn't stop with trying to avoid responsibility for misdeeds; he went for the extra point and tried to take responsibility for a good deed. And so the first-person pronoun finally made an appearance at the press conference: "It's up to me to do what I can to clean up the system," said the president. With a straight face.

## Hobson's Choice!

Bill Bradley was the first prominent political figure in either party to come right out and say that we might want to rewrite the First Amendment in order to enact what now passes for campaign-finance "reform" on Capitol Hill. An editorial in these pages ("Silencing Free Speech in the Name of Reform," November 25, 1996) pointed out that Bradley had at least injected some truth into an otherwise suffocatingly dishonest debate. Add to that list Dick Gephardt, who was quoted last week in a *Time* article on campaign-finance reform as follows: "What we have is two important values in direct conflict: freedom of speech and our desire for healthy campaigns in a healthy democracy. You can't have both."

Dick Gephardt can speak for himself when it comes to his desires. We'll still take freedom of speech any day.

## None Dare Call It Solipsism

President Reagan's chief of protocol Selwa Roosevelt took to the op-ed page of the Sunday *Washington Post* a week ago in despair over the valedictory op-ed written by outgoing Republican party chairman Haley Barbour. He had urged the party to "act boldly, but speak temperately" and to "stand up for what you believe is right, but tolerate those who disagree with you on this or that issue." But she was having none of that.

Roosevelt is what is commonly referred to as a "moderate" Republican, which is to say that her heroes are pro-choice Republicans Christie Whitman, William Weld, and Colin Powell. And unlike those notoriously intolerant and dogmatic right-wingers who apply "litmus tests" on the abortion issue, the moderate Republican Roosevelt offers . . . a nine-point bulleted list of items on which the party has failed her (and that's just on abortion). The points include such purported fiascoes as "the veto by Bush of the District of Columbia's legislation to pay for abortions for poor women" and "the inability of the Bush administration for months to find a suitable candidate to head the National Institutes of Health" because they wanted a pro-lifer. Talk about litmus tests. Talk about a long memory.

Roosevelt, by the way, is sure that she holds the key to electoral success for Republicans. In an analysis reminiscent of Pauline Kael's famous befuddlement over the 1972 Nixon landslide—since absolutely everyone Kael knew in

# Scrapbook


her neighborhood on Manhattan's Upper West Side had gone for McGovern—Roosevelt writes that just as she couldn't bring herself to vote for Bush in 1992 and Dole in '96, "almost every Republican woman I know also defected in both elections. We are the gender gap."

## People with Cluelessness

Deserving of at least a footnote in the history of Bill Clinton's second inaugural is the document distributed by the Presidential Inauguration Committee that offers "a helpful hints reference guide for politically correct speech when interacting with individuals with disabilities." Distributed to volunteers, the document emphasizes that "in speaking or writing, remember that children or adults with disabilities are like everyone else—except they happen to have a disability." Thus volunteers are advised not to say "handicapped or disabled child" but instead "child with disability." Similarly, don't say "retarded" but "person with retardation." Don't say "confined to a wheelchair" or "wheelchair bound" but "uses a wheelchair." Don't say "normal" or "healthy." That would be judgmental, so say "non-disabled."

Wow. Parodies of such hand-outs date back more than a decade. And outside of Maoist cells, it would be hard to find another instance in which the words "politically correct speech" have been used without irony since before many of the volunteers were born. More to the point, surely the new dogma has been around long enough to have reached the population that volunteers for Democratic inaugurations. Is there no end to the need for re-education?

## State's New Spine

There's been a well-publicized campaign these past few months to raise American consciousness about the alleged, um, religious persecution of Scientologists in the Federal Republic of Germany. Some of our great country's most prominent public intellectuals have joined the cause: Mario Puzo, Frank Sinatra's daughter Tina, Larry King, Goldie Hawn, and suchlike. They have investigated the situation carefully, and they have concluded—as they put it in an open letter to German chancellor Helmut Kohl—that "the deplorable tactics of the 1930s cannot be permitted." This time, they promise, "voices will be raised." (World War II, you see, would have been unnecessary had the American entertainment industry been as enlightened then as it is today.)

Despite the fact that the worst confirmed German "discrimination" seems to have involved the cancellation of a jazz concert by American Scientologist Chick Corea, the U.S. State Department's just released annual human-rights "country reports" (again) single out Germany for criticism on anti-Scientological grounds. In fact, the Germany report is a bit more pointed than it was last year.

What does this mean? Apparently, in between making nice to China and accommodating itself to the new doctrine of we'll-do-business-with-anyone, the State Department can still put its foot down somewhere and say: Damn the consequences, there are *universal human rights* at stake! Especially if that somewhere is the Federal Republic of Germany, and the assembled luminaries of Hollywood are standing alongside, shoulder to shoulder.

# Casual

## Bright College Days

A boozy housing agent once told me that the golden rule of urban real-estate speculation was "follow the homosexuals." Gays, he said, sought to maximize pretty architecture and proximity to museums and restaurants, even as they minimized grime and drab vistas. A neighborhood in which flower shops and hair salons were opening up would be a neighborhood all city residents could be expected to love in time.

As for me, I have always followed college students. A few years ago, I read an article titled "College Towns: Are They the Best Places to Live?" At the time, it struck me pretty much as would a piece called "Jobs: Is It Good to Have One?" I mean, what a stupid question; of *course* college towns are the best places to live! For wherever there are institutions of higher learning, there are bookstores, theaters, museums, bars, and a social life revolving around sherry, tea, and literary bloviation. And all of that suits me down to the ground.

I have spent as much time as possible in college towns. I remained in Cambridge, Mass., a year after I had any academic business there, and frequently stretched a one-night visit to my sister's apartment near Columbia University on New York's Upper West Side into a week's stay. She has since moved downtown to the Greenwich Village home of New York University, and I descend on her every chance I get so that I can satisfy my college-town consumer cravings with used compact discs and cannoli and veggie sandwiches.

I even spent a couple of months in Burlington, Vt. There, I earned my living typing papers for undergraduates (and writing them for the son of one prominent member of Congress) and playing video games in the pub where my other sister worked. I drank myself pie-eyed while reading the *New York Review of Books* and the *Times Literary Supplement* in a coffee house called Leunig's and sat around with friends in a tenement on College Street, listening to Frank Sinatra and filling the room with smoke. (Living across the hall from this particular apartment was a toothless 300-pound alcoholic gypsy woman who would bang on the door at odd hours of the night begging for sex, but that's another story. Let's just say that none of us was tempted to give it the old college try.)

Last week I spent in Palo Alto, Calif., on a seven-day fellowship at the Hoover Institution on the Stanford campus. I strolled, with my wife and infant daughter in tow, from bookstore to coffee shop to bookstore before wandering off to banter with faculty in the senior common room. Ah, the veggie sandwiches at World Wrapps! The double espressos at the University Coffee Café! The poetry at the Chimaera bookstore! Yes, Palo Alto is one of the better college towns I've ever been in.

Well, college towns must finally be losing their hold on me. Because one night last week I walked by an undergraduate hippie, sitting on a park bench with (surprise) an electric guitar. He was struggling with basic chords and philosophizing with a couple of dirty beggars who'd gathered to watch. This scene inspired several thoughts of the these-kids-today-with-their-rock-'n'-roll variety, among them: "Get a job, you stinking bum! Here you are on the campus of one of the world's best universities, with a multi-million-book library and a dozen Nobel prize winners—what the hell are you doing? You know, if there's any justice in this world, these buddies of yours will steal your wallet before the night is out."

I get the distinct sense that college life has gone downhill; the kids around Stanford just don't look like they're having much fun. Maybe it's because of political correctness. But there was such a thing when I went to college too, and that didn't seem to get in our way (though PC didn't yet have its own readily identifiable initials and we never had to fear getting expelled for calling someone a water buffalo). Maybe it's good that undergraduates today don't do as many drugs or have as much sex as we did in the Roarin' 80s, but it doesn't look like or seem like they're investing their freed-up time in academic pursuits. They're probably just watching cable.

But perhaps I should face the truth that the life of your run-of-the-mill undergrad never was that great. I recall a shameful night in 1980 when a handful of us climbed the scaffolding on a church that was being restored near campus. A local cop was waiting for us when we got down. "Geez," he said, in honest bafflement. "Is this what your parents pay *five thousand bucks a year* for?"

A preppy friend of mine lifted his head and—with the hauteur and mock seriousness we all seemed to receive with our registration packets—replied, "*Ten* thousand, sir."

God only knows what went through the cop's head at that moment.

**Christopher Caldwell**

## Politics and Sports

The participants in your symposium on politics and sports (Jan. 27) forgot one of the biggest sports stories over the last 10 years: the phenomenal growth of NASCAR racing and the loyalty of the drivers and their fans to the conservative cause.

NASCAR satisfies all four of Fred Barnes's criteria for conservative sports. First, it has violent wrecks and the drivers are all men. Second, the fans are fiercely conservative. Third, it is southern and has a tradition traceable to the '20s and Prohibition. Fourth, it is dominated by commercialism and lucrative team sponsorships.

But there are other reasons why NASCAR is conservative. First, winning is everything. There is only one winner out of nearly 40 drivers in each race. So much for the self-esteem-mongers. Second, NASCAR is totally unsafe for the environment. The cars are unbelievably wasteful in their high-octane gas, and their unmuffled exhaust systems spew fumes directly into the atmosphere. But the most important reason NASCAR is conservative is its sponsorship by R.J. Reynolds—a tobacco company.

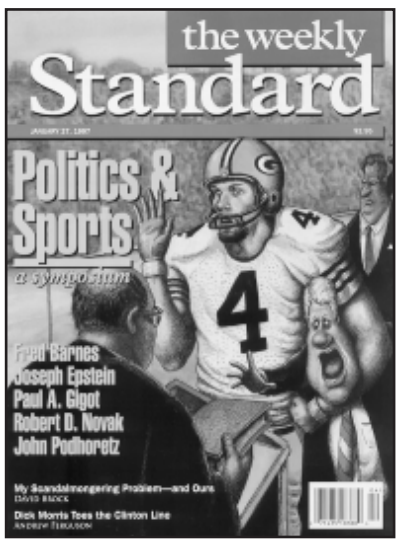
And let's not forget 1992. In July of that year, George Bush started the Firecracker 400. He was enthusiastically received with wild cheers. Then in September of that year, Bill Clinton started the annual Southern 500 at Darlington. He was unenthusiastically received with loud boos.

Bill Greene
Lusby, MD

This is the second time Fred Barnes has called football (being a real conservative, I won't use the word "soccer") a "liberal" sport, and I've had it ("My Sports Right or Left," Jan. 27). Part of Barnes's problem is that he thinks only in terms of his own world. Football transcends Barnes's neighborhood. For example, mention Bobby Thompson's "shot heard round the world" to anyone outside the United States, and you will be met with blank stares. But mention Gordon Banks's save off a Pele header in the 1970 World Cup or Maradona's "hands of God" goal against England, and you will have a conversation.

I'll spare you my feelings about American football, where you could watch an entire season and not see as much athleticism as in one professional football match. But if Barnes still thinks that footy is just for libs, he should meet the guys on my club team, most of whom are ardent right-wingers. Indeed, I remember the time when a new player made the mistake of wearing to practice a T-shirt with some left-wing sentiment about Central America. We almost threw him off the team (being a lib, he wasn't that good anyway).

If Barnes would like, I'd be glad to treat him to a good game at RFK. Now that the other team is getting a new stadium, RFK's beautiful field won't be desecrated by all those stupid lines.




Such a game would help Barnes understand the greatest, most conservative sport on earth.

Joseph J. Eule
Arlington, VA

While the premises that Fred Barnes uses to determine a right-wing from a left-wing sport or team are accurate, several of his conclusions are erroneous. First, the Super Bowl has become a very left-wing event. The Super Bowl puts a great deal of emphasis on the half-time entertainment (usually a liberal entertainer), the outcome is known prior to kickoff (the NFC representative will win), yet the AFC is invited so that both conferences are represented, and advertisers must appeal to both genders since a lot of women watch the Super Bowl even though they did not watch one regular-season game all year.

As for teams, Barnes, in a previous article, labeled the Detroit Red Wings a right-wing team because it hails from a tough city. This would be true if most of the players hailed from areas near Detroit. But a disproportionate share of players are of European (especially Russian) descent. In addition, their uniforms are red and white (very Russian), and they are usually satisfied with winning the most games in the regular season (a feel-good accomplishment) versus winning the Cup.

Henry J. Schumann, Jr.
Oviedo, FL

## No More Scandal Guilt

In "My Scandalmongering Problem—and Ours" (Jan. 27), David Brock says that excessive right-wing scandalmongering, such as "outlandish claims" about Vince Foster's death and inaccurate books like Gary Aldrich's *Unlimited Access*, have muddied the waters and allowed President Clinton to slip the noose on other, more credible charges.

What exactly are those outlandish claims? Chris Ruddy and Reed Irvine, whom Brock blames for circulating unfounded allegations about Foster's death, have never dabbled in conspiracy theories. They and a few others have raised serious questions about the circumstances of Foster's death, which four federal investigations have thus far failed to answer in any convincing way.

As for his feud with Gary Aldrich, Brock would have us believe that the focus of *Unlimited Access* was the questionable report that Clinton slipped away to the Washington Marriott for unseemly assignations. But as anyone who has read the Aldrich book knows, its central theme is that under this administration, the White House security apparatus has been deliberately and completely undermined.

It is unfortunate that Brock has now thrown in with his former media attackers, piling on other whistleblowers who report inconvenient stories. But if he believes that some of these accounts are truly unfounded, Brock

would do better to refute them on their merits—and leave the conspiracy theories about right-wing Clinton-haters to the White House.

CARL P. LIMBACHER
OYSTER BAY, NY

## CLUELESS CRONKITE

Reviewing Walter Cronkite's memoirs, Philip Terzian ("Anchor Steam," Jan. 27) certainly got it right when he wrote, "Cronkite's credibility is a sometime thing." Cronkite didn't understand what happened during the Viet-Cong's Tet offensive and then misled the whole country with his "editorial comments" about the war. His most notable recent work is an annual New Year's Day appearance extolling the glories of the Austro-Hungarian Empire on the Vienna Philharmonic PBS broadcast. The Vienna orchestra is also infamous in that it is the last world-class orchestra that doesn't employ women. Cronkite should be careful about that.

MORTON LURIE
RALEIGH, NC

## GOING NOWHERE WITH PAS

Your editorial on physician-assisted suicide was on target ("Constitutional Suicide," Jan. 20). On this topic there are two diverse groups of people who simply argue past each other because they are speaking different values.

One group, a majority, is composed of those with few if any religious beliefs: agnostics, atheists, and other non-Christians. They simply do not see any value in suffering and view a human being much as any other animal: When it suffers, we put it out of its misery. They see themselves determining their own destiny in freedom because they are their own god or higher authority. They answer to none but themselves.

The other group, a minority, views man as created in the image of God and sees as value in suffering (not all Christians hold this view, but most of those who do not have left the traditional beliefs of Christianity). This is a specific kind of theological view of suffering and of the end of life, as opposed to the philosophical holding of the majority.

Clearly there are secular dangers to physician-assisted suicide, as the editors pointed out, the major one being that doctors will become angels of death rather than angels of mercy. In addition, there is the example of what has actually happened in Holland: The slippery slope has resulted in the death of the comatose without their consent. I concede that these arguments are powerful enough for even a nonbeliever or an atheist to oppose physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia.

But fundamentally, the debate is about a value system: the meaning of death and suffering, the existence of a loving God, and the mystery of man's final destiny.

PETER J. RIGA
HOUSTON, TX

## SCI-FI INSANITY

J. Bottum and John Wilson's article "The Profound Hack" (Jan. 13) is a passable introduction to Philip K. Dick's life and work, but it includes numerous minor errors.

Bottum and Wilson claim, for instance, that Dick was "periodically hospitalized for mental problems and profoundly psychotic for the last eight years before his death." In fact, Dick was hospitalized only twice for mental problems, once in 1972 and again in 1976. Both stays were only for a few weeks and were as short as could be expected in such circumstances. Furthermore, "profoundly psychotic" has a simple medical definition, and Dick didn't remotely satisfy it.

Bottum and Wilson also speak as if Dick were entirely neglected during his lifetime and achieved the recognition he deserved only after his death. In fact, during most of his career, the science-fiction community considered him a solid, if not spectacular, writer, and in 1963 he won the Hugo award for his novel *The Man in the High Castle*. By the mid-'70s, though, Dick had started to acquire a cult following that transcended the science-fiction field. In 1975, for instance, an interview with Dick appeared in *Rolling Stone*. When he died in 1982, the movie *Blade Runner*, based on his novel, was just about to open. Dick was not an ignored writer whose works were suddenly discovered after his death. A more accurate statement is that his critical and popular esteem had been slowly but steadily growing for 30 years.

More bothersome is the artificial opposition Bottum and Wilson set up between their understanding of Dick and that of the people they call his "self-proclaimed children," the cyberpunks and readers of *Wired* magazine. This overestimates the current popularity of cyberpunk fiction and accepts *Wired*'s own inflated view of its influence. Cyberpunk was a style of science fiction that reached its high-water mark in the mid-'80s.

In any case, Dick was only one of the precursors of cyberpunk. And the cyberpunks are not the only ones who are fans of Dick's works.

Bottum and Wilson make a good case for an underappreciated aspect of Dick's writings—his insight into the fallen nature of the world. Was Dick then a crazed prophet, a paranoid with a brilliant perception about the conspiratorial nature of the world, an acute interpreter of American culture, or someone with a deep, intuitive understanding of the broken, inadequate nature of the human soul?

WENDELL WAGNER, JR.
GREENBELT, MD

**J. BOTTUM AND JOHN WILSON RESPOND:** ***Readers who wish to assess for themselves Dick's mental condition should read Lawrence Sutin's biography*** **Divine Invasions** ***followed by Dick's*** **Valis** ***and—if they are still unconvinced—selections from Dick's million-word*** **Exegesis.** ***Dick's reception by the science-fiction community is a long and interesting story but does not bear upon the point we were making.***

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the weekly Standard

# "We Have Not Made the Progress . . . I Had Hoped"

Once a year, and for only as long as the dutiful questioning of the press corps requires, the Clinton administration is nominally tough on Communist China. The State Department's annual "country reports" on international human-rights practices fall due. These reports follow a standard analytical format, established by law. More than most politically sensitive government documents, then, they must concern plain facts, without much interpretive color. So each year's report on China—as befits the world's ugliest nation—is unavoidably a story of unmitigated, brutal . . . ugliness.

The latest version of this ritual came and went last week. The new China report begins with the only summary judgment honesty will allow: The People's Republic continues to commit "widespread and well-documented human rights abuses, in violation of internationally accepted norms," and domestic repression has actually intensified these past twelve months. In fact, Beijing finally managed to quash "all public dissent against the party and government" in 1996, and "no dissidents were known to be active at year's end." There follows a comprehensive catalogue of horrors: torture, extra-judicial killings, arbitrary arrests, show trials, religious persecutions, censorship, forced abortions—the works.

> THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION'S DELIBERATE STRATEGY OF SINO-APPEASEMENT HAS TURNED OUT TO BE A MISERABLE DUD.

Since it all makes such a convincing portrait of things that almost couldn't be worse, an obvious question arises. Hasn't the administration's deliberate strategy of Sino-appeasement turned out to be a miserable dud? They're understandably touchy about this over at the State Department. During the January 30 press conference at which the most recent country reports were released, assistant secretary John Shattuck grudgingly acknowledged that there was a bunch of stuff "on the negative side" where China was concerned. But there was a "positive side," as well, he insisted, referring to some laughably superficial reforms of legal procedure underway in the Chinese provinces. In any case, Shattuck concluded, China won't change "overnight," and "keeping faith with the process" is what American policy is "all about."

Oddly enough, the president himself was considerably more candid in the White House East Room January 28. Yes, Clinton said quite clearly, the nearest he has ever come to a confession of major failure, "we have not made the progress in human rights that I think . . . that I had hoped to make." It's just that he cannot conceive of a single alternative China policy that would promise better results. It's a function of anthropology, the president instructs us: The Chinese "tend to look at things on a long time horizon." So he will, too, keeping faith with the process. And sooner or later, the process will work: The "spirit of liberty" will take hold in Beijing, "just as, eventually, the Berlin Wall fell." It is, he says, "inevitable."

This amazing pronouncement would no doubt alarm China's politburo were there any practical evidence that Clinton actually believed it. But Clinton's Berlin Wall analogy is inapt, offensive even. Cold War-era presidents did not spend 360-plus days a year bowing and scraping before Soviet communism, as this president now does with the Chinese, so as to secure U.S. corporate investment opportunities. Even at the height of détente, Moscow always retained a certain pariah status for American officialdom. Which cannot be said of the Clinton administration's attitude toward Beijing.

The status of Hong Kong, which will revert to Chinese sovereignty July 1 after 150 years of British dominion, is a case in point. That island colony's well-wishers are reluctant to draw the conclusion too vocally, for fear that any such prophecy will prove self-fulfilling, but reality cannot be disguised: It is becoming increasingly apparent that Beijing intends, despite its treaty commitment to the United Kingdom, quickly to extinguish Hong Kong's democratic legal system. China has already appointed a stooge provisional legislature to replace the freely elected one that now represents Hong Kong's 6 million residents. China has

appointed a stooge "chief executive," one Tung Chee-hwa, to run the place with sweeping powers. And the entire enterprise, though theoretically independent of Beijing, may do nothing that contravenes the Basic Law passed by the National People's Congress to govern its new "special administrative region."

At a meeting of its hand-picked Hong Kong "preparatory committee" on January 19, Beijing received a "recommendation" that twenty-five British-era colonial statutes were inconsistent with the Basic Law and must be fully or partially repealed at midnight on June 30. Among them are four ordinances establishing free electoral procedures, along with the operative titles of ordinances that codify a bill of rights and privacy protections. Also slated for repeal, and little noticed in the ensuing brouhaha, is Hong Kong's English Law Ordinance, which secures elemental liberties of common law like habeas corpus. Beijing means to allow the creation of a semi-autonomous Court of Final Appeals in Hong Kong. But there will no longer be any significant legal grounds on which the colony's criminal and civil defendants may make an appellate plea.

On January 21, U.S. State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said "it's important to note" that these are merely "recommendations" by a mere committee, and that a final decision in Beijing "has not yet been made." It is America's "strong hope," Burns announced, that these recommendations will be "reexamined." And if they are not? "I've said what I wanted to say about this issue."

Mr. Burns will have to think of something new to say right fast. China's foreign ministry has since flatly rejected all foreign criticism of the proposed statutory "reforms." Hong Kong's post-reversion laws, spokesman Shen Guofang proclaims, are "purely an internal affair of China." Tung Chee-hwa, for his part, has also publicly defended Beijing's pending abrogation of civil liberties in the colony. Mr. Tung was educated in the United States. We seem to have taught him nothing.

And some of us seem to have forgotten the relevant lessons ourselves. The Clinton administration is now before the First U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston seeking the extradition—for trial in a forthcoming, Beijing-dominated Hong Kong—of a man wanted for bribery in connection with an alleged cigarette-smuggling conspiracy in mainland China. The facts of the case are in dispute. What is not in dispute is the Clinton administration's central contention. Either the Senate will ratify a newly negotiated U.S.-Hong Kong extradition treaty, approved by Beijing late last year, before July 1. Or the existing extradition treaty—between America and Great Britain—will remain indefinitely in force. Either way, the extradition requests of Hong Kong's forthcoming, eviscerated legal system must be presumptively obeyed.

So says the Clinton administration. But the Congress should not permit this to be the policy of the United States. When the Senate ratified our existing extradition arrangements with the United Kingdom in 1986, it declared—Beijing obviously in mind—that no such treaty would be acceptable with "a totalitarian or other non-democratic regime." And the rest of the administration's argument is therefore immoral. Communist China will be sovereign in Hong Kong come July 1. When the United States enters an extradition treaty, it certifies before the world that it has confidence in the basic fairness of the foreign sovereign's legal practices.

Beijing does not qualify. If the Clinton administration sends a Beijing-sanctioned Hong Kong extradition treaty to the Senate for ratification before July 1, the Senate should reject it. If the Clinton administration attempts to implement the existing treaty after July 1, Congress should defund it—until such time as Hong Kong's civil liberties are once again convincingly guaranteed.

The British, at this point, apparently cannot do much to halt Hong Kong's agonizing slide into tyranny. President Clinton is apparently unwilling to pick up any of the slack. But Congress will have many opportunities to try *its* hand on Hong Kong's behalf these next few months. It must. Six million citizens of Hong Kong have almost nowhere left to turn. And 1.2 billion citizens of China could use some help, as well.

*—David Tell, for the Editors*

# A Cure for GOP Ennui

**by William J. Bennett**

INTELLECTUALLY DOMINANT for most of the last two decades and ideologically dominant for the last two years, the GOP is the *de facto* majority party in America. And yet these days, as the 105th Congress begins its work, it is clear that the faithful are paralyzed by ennui and the party is floundering. The sin is less one of commission than one of omission: What is missing is a focused, appealing, and philosophically coherent national agenda.

Republicans have been told so often that they tried to do too much too fast after the triumphant 1994 elections that they have over-corrected for past errors. In 1995, Washington rang out with excessive, unconservative rhetoric about "revolution," rhetoric that smacked of arrogance and overconfidence and that cost the party and the conservative cause dearly. The problem is that the GOP's tactical and rhetorical errors have now led the party into intellectual and moral bashfulness. Learning from your mistakes is one thing, but not if the lesson leads you to become hesitant, uncertain, and overly cautious. Think of a quarterback whose main thought is not how to throw a completion, but how to avoid throwing an interception: More often than not, such a strategy results in an incomplete pass, a humiliating sack, or the very interception he dreaded.

Why this profound loss of self-confidence and political aggressiveness? For one thing, Bill Clinton's continuing political success has Republicans flummoxed. One could argue that we have never seen a major political figure as unprincipled and chameleon-like as the president, qualities that lead many of us to disdain his political character. But his easy ability to embrace issues and ideologies he once opposed and go wherever the polls and his advisers tell him to go affords the president some serious tactical advantages over his political rivals.

> EVEN THE SPEAKER IS TORN BETWEEN ATTACKING HIS CRITICS AND HOPING TO FIND COMMON GROUND WITH THEM.

Clinton's central political insight after being visited by the devastation of the 1994 election was to embrace, with some modifications, a conservative agenda, particularly on cultural issues. Consider the text of this radio ad produced during the 1996 election:

"President Clinton: defending our values. The death penalty for drug kingpins. Three strikes and you're out. Longer jail sentences. One hundred thousand more police. A four-star-general drug czar. Supporting teen curfews. School uniforms to instill discipline." It was probably the most conservative ad of the presidential campaign, and it doesn't even mention the president's signature on the Defense of Marriage Act, his endorsement of the V-chip, and his support for Republican welfare legislation. (Indeed, Clinton's lasting contribution to American politics may well be the damage he has done to contemporary liberalism.)

Clinton hasn't just invaded conservative territory, of course. During the last two years, the president has successfully exploited tactical mistakes by Republicans (the shutdown of the federal government being chief among them) while at the same time skillfully advocating and employing "salami-slice" government—small-scale executive action intended to highlight certain popular issues and themes. Republicans have yet to find an adequate response to this clever tactic. Indeed, Republicans have had a difficult time finding an adequate way to describe conservative policy goals altogether.

That's due in part to the fact that House Republicans have had to expend a considerable amount of their capital, both moral and political, in defending Newt Gingrich. It is not simply that House Republicans have had their attention diverted toward arguing against one or another ethics charge against the speaker of the House. It is that Speaker Gingrich's political liabilities have engendered in Republicans a sense of timidity, uncertainty, and an unwillingness to take on the establishment for fear of provoking its scorn, anger, and retribution. It is clear to those of us who watch or work in politics that Gingrich is the object of a massive ideological effort to destroy him and discredit his party and his ideas. But to the rest of America, Newt Gingrich is *the* public face of the Republican party, and in one recent poll, his approval rating stood at *15 percent*.

Even the speaker is torn between attacking his critics and hoping to find common ground with them. When he talks about issues of race, for example, he reserves his greatest praise for Democrats like Charles Rangel and Eleanor Holmes Norton instead of colorblind Republicans like Ward Connerly. That's not just a problem for those of us who think the GOP should confidently and unapologetically oppose quotas and racial set-asides. It is a more general failure of sensibility, and it is a failing Republicans need to overcome, and soon.

But it is also the case that Republicans are unsure what to do now because many of the essential items on the national agenda simply cannot be effectively addressed by the House, the Senate, or the president. Both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue are becoming somewhat marginalized.

In a recent Wirthlin Poll, almost 70 percent of respondents said they thought the nation's problems were primarily moral and cultural, not political. As one might expect, these concerns are making their way into our national political debate. Issues that have become standard fare in our political discussions—say, the corrosive effects of popular culture, the growing incivility in American life, and the breakdown of the

family—were hardly spoken of in politics three decades ago.

Obviously, legislation can affect some of these issues for good or ill. But just as obviously—obvious for conservatives, anyway—politics and legislation are limited in what they can do to resolve deep-seated cultural problems. Most of what needs to happen on the culture front—in contrast to, say, defense and foreign policy issues, or monetary and tax policy—needs to happen in the sphere outside of the federal government, and often apart from local government. "Today," Jonathan Rauch has written, "government is increasingly beside the point; not because government has changed but because the problems have." Perhaps there is a growing sense among politicians of both parties that their work is not central to the alleviation of many of our problems. If so, it is a sign of maturity and a recognition of reality.

Of course, this is not a prescription for inaction or political somnambulism. Congress still has important work to do, and Republicans ought not to let Bill Clinton set the terms of the political debate. The president's pedestrian and completely forgettable inaugural address reminds us that he is far from an imposing public figure. We should remember, too, that during the Clinton era, the number of Republicans in the House has increased from 176 to 227; GOP senators from 43 to 55; governors from 18 to 32; and state legislators by over 500. Republicans are now the majority party on Capitol Hill and in state capitals. These are encouraging political facts, and they are worth building on.

There is no shortage of issues Republicans can tackle. As the defense of the citizenry is still the first responsibility of government, they should push hard for strategic missile defense. They should work against racial set-asides. They should rein in the out-of-control courts. They should propose a comprehensive anti-drug effort, with military involvement. They should reintroduce the ban on partial-birth abortions, renew efforts to strengthen private, faith-based charities, and recast the education debate toward standards and excellence as well as school choice.

The point is: Choose a few targets of opportunity, choose them well, pursue them in an intelligent and confident manner, and the ennui will be supplanted by purpose and good cheer.

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# What ABC Thinks of You

**by Richard Starr**

As is always the case following a jury verdict against a news organization, media critics have rushed to explain what precisely it meant last month when 12 women and men in Greensboro, N.C., ordered ABC to pay $5.5 million to Food Lion. Obviously the jury meant to punish ABC's *Primetime Live* for being deliberately dishonest when its reporters went undercover on a story accusing the supermarket chain of deliberately selling rotten meat.

But the critics want to look deeper than that. What, they wonder out loud, does it mean for journalism that the jury sided with a big corporation that acts only in the interests of its bottom line? How could the jurors have seen fit to punish the reporters, who (whatever excessive zeal they may have brought to the story) were only acting in the public interest? And what does all this mean for the future of the First Amendment?

It always comes back to the First Amendment—even when, as in this case, Food Lion did not sue on grounds of libel (though it insists the story was untrue) but over acts of fraud, trespass, and breach of loyalty. (ABC reporters falsified employment applications and did not properly do the jobs Food Lion had hired them to do.) No matter; the press is always sure that a public rebuke has constitutional implications. How could it not? After all, the case involves the media, and the media are afforded protection by the First Amendment. This explains why, no matter the reason for a court ruling against the press, somebody is bound to worry publicly about a "chilling effect" on the profession (this go-round it was *Time*'s Walter Isaacson).

Shining unmistakably through various invocations of the public trust and the common weal (*Newsweek*'s Jonathan Alter called the decision "scary" for "anyone who ever shops in a supermarket") is a media obsession with the profession's status and the way the public sees it. Media people spend an inordinate amount of emotional energy trying to decipher what the public really thinks of the press. At bottom, they are trying to answer what might be called the Kindergarten Question: Do the other boys and girls like me?

There is a time-honored response to the Kindergarten Question: You should spend less time worrying about what others think of you and more time worry-

ing about how you treat others. This is not only good advice in kindergarten, but it affords us a way of looking at ABC's Food Lion story that reveals exactly why, and in what way, the story was irresponsible.

For what really matters is not what the people Out There west of the Hudson and beyond the Beltway think of the media. What is at issue in the Food Lion case is what the media think of the people Out There. And what do the media think? They think the people Out There are either victims or weaklings or villains.

Let's put in the plainest possible terms the story that ABC says it went after, the story *Primetime Live*'s producers hoped to document by going undercover at three supermarkets in North and South Carolina with hidden cameras back in 1992. *Primetime Live*'s producers believed that people in rural and suburban America who worked for one of the country's largest supermarket chains were willing to risk poisoning their customers. They believed that people who worked in these stores—managers, supervisors, and line workers—were willing to countenance this risk, even though the customers at risk were their townsmen, their friends, even their family members. They believed these people managed somehow to fall asleep at night fully aware that deliberate inattention or even active measures (like bleaching old fish) might one day cause the illness or death of someone they knew.


Now, why would someone behave this way? Well, Out There in North Carolina, a job's a job. If you're just a worker, you gotta do what you gotta do. And if you're a manager, there are revenues to think about, and expenses—in other words, you also gotta do what you gotta do, especially when you're ambitious and your company competes by keeping prices low.

Nor is this all that these media professionals thought of the people Out There. It would seem that, despite a veritable army of food inspectors and public health officials at the federal, state, and local levels, genuine public servants who day in, day out, look for things like rodent infestation and spoiled meat (even in the delis of Manhattan where media professionals send out for lunch)—all that really stands between the people and food poisoning at the hands of their local supermarket are the selfless efforts of public-spirited investigative journalists. Does this sound like an overstatement? It certainly is one—unless, that is, you work for *Primetime Live* or ABC News, whose stars and chiefs contend that by broadcasting the Food Lion story they were performing an important public service that somehow eluded the people who earn their living trying to make sure that supermarkets aren't acting in ways that poison consumers. So not only are the Food Lion employees Out There putting the lives of others at risk, so are the public-health officials and meat inspectors Out There, who just can't be trusted to do their jobs without Diane Sawyer looking over their shoulders, keeping them honest, and saving the lives of some cracker bargain shoppers who wouldn't know good meat from bad until they were dying from it.

It's always possible, of course, that deep down these media professionals think better of their fellow Americans than it seems they do. The Food Lion investigation was questionable from the outset—an obvious put-up job by sources with an ax to grind and pitched to producers who couldn't smell a rotten story, much less rotten meat.

It's also possible that what these producers could smell was a ratings opportunity. They could sense a really effective 15-second spot about an investigation into rotten food at a well-known supermarket chain that might draw new viewers to the ratings-impaired *Primetime Live*, still a very shaky show back in 1993. What is more than possible—what is true—is that their motives were far lower than they would like to believe.

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# The "Inevitability" Cop-Out

**by Robert Kagan**

In the past two months, Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic has learned the hard way that flying in the American orbit can be dangerous to a dictator's health.

When he signed the Dayton peace agreement last year, Milosevic wanted to end a war his ethnic allies had begun to lose in Bosnia. But that goal was secondary to his chief priority in Dayton: winning his way into Washington's good graces. "As a pragmatist," one Serbian politician explained at the time, "Milosevic knows that all satellites of the United States are in a better position than those that are not satellites." Serbia's shattered economy needed a reprieve from international sanctions—the sanctions Washington had insisted on imposing. His country needed help from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank—the institutions controlled by the United States. And Milosevic himself needed an international seal of approval to bolster his shaky hold on power—approval only the United States could grant.

Michael Ramirez

**Slobodan Milosevic**

All this helps explain why U.S. envoy Richard Holbrooke succeeded where previous negotiators like Britain's David Owen had failed. Milosevic didn't care much about pleasing the British government, but he was desperate for the benediction of the world's sole superpower. Be careful what you wish for, goes the saying; you'll surely get it.

When municipal elections in November gave his opponents victories in 14 of Serbia's 18 largest cities, Milosevic first thought he could play by the old rules and simply ignore the results. But life in the U.S.-led international order is more complicated. When tens of thousands of Serbs took to the streets in Belgrade to demand the instatement of the victorious opposition politicians, Milosevic might simply have had the protesters mowed down by riot police. But as the protests persisted and found their way onto CNN, the prospect of a Balkan-style Tiananmen Square massacre caught Washington's attention and brought forth stern U.S. warnings against any violent action by the Serb government.

Milosevic had caught himself in a trap of his own devising. If he cracked down and offended Washington's sensibilities, he could be thrust back into the very isolation he had tried to escape at Dayton—only this time with 30,000 NATO troops nearby, policing the peace settlement in Bosnia. Before Dayton, Milosevic was poor and isolated, but he was holding the world hostage with his power and influence over the fate of Bosnia. In the aftermath of a crackdown, however, Milosevic would be poor, isolated, and impotent. And possibly dead, since rumblings in his own military raised doubts about its loyalty to him in the event of a cataclysm.

And so Milosevic has found it necessary to make some important if grudging concessions over the past few weeks. He allowed a group of European monitors to come to Serbia and declare the elections valid, then conceded the opposition's victories in several of the cities, though not Belgrade.

Milosevic is now resisting further concessions, and he may yet decide to abandon his search for Western approval and crush the democratic rebellion. But it is not unreasonable to imagine that with increased pressure from the United States and its allies, Milosevic could lose his grip on power altogether.

The administration is taking a tougher line on Milosevic. The newly installed secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, declared that the fulfillment of the Bosnian peace agreement did not depend on any one individual, and U.S. officials told reporters last week that they wouldn't be sorry to see Milosevic go. The administration is now offering some assistance to opposition organizations, if belatedly.

But the real pressure on Milosevic is the threat that the West will reimpose sanctions. Some of our allies are opposed to such action for fear that it would unsettle things in Bosnia, and so far the U.S. has been unwilling to press the point.

Rather than get into a scuffle with Europe, U.S. policymakers seem to be seeking justification for their inaction in a spanking-new doctrine the president himself seems particularly enamored of. Call it "the inevitability theory of history."

One State Department official inadvertently offers a good example of the theory. Milosevic is as good as gone anyway, he says; "it's a matter of when his era ends, not if, and how it does." In other words, no mat-

ter what the United States does, the course of history is running against Milosevic.

The new theory found its purest expression last week when President Clinton said it was "inevitable" that China would gradually and peacefully transform itself into a democracy—thus excusing himself and the United States from having to make any hard decisions or sacrifices to help bring about such an outcome.

It's easy to see why the inevitability theory is so alluring to the president, but to be fair, he didn't invent it. George Bush declared after the Gulf War that the fall of Saddam Hussein was inevitable. The inevitability theory gave Bush the justification for ending the Gulf War with Saddam still in power in Baghdad, and for standing by while the defeated Saddam turned around and crushed the internal uprisings that might actually have succeeded in toppling him.

Some people both in and out of policymaking circles seem to believe that the present international order is a self-regulating machine that magically dissolves dictatorships, convinces war criminals to turn themselves in, forestalls aggression, and preserves peace. They overlook the fact that most of the progress achieved on the international scene in recent years has come from the willingness of the leading powers, above all the United States, to use power and take risks.

When Washington leads effectively, the international system can work miraculous changes in allegedly intractable places like the former Yugoslavia. Recent events there refute the arguments of the cultural determinists who insisted that ethnicity was destiny and that the peoples of the Balkans were uniquely incorrigible, resistant to reason and order. Now the protests in Belgrade have unexpectedly sparked protests for reform elsewhere in the region—in Bulgaria, to be precise. When the world's most powerful democracy brings the full weight of its influence to bear successfully, it shifts the ideological scales in democracy's favor in ways it can't even anticipate.

With all that we have accomplished in the Balkans, this is no time for timidity. The new secretary of defense, William Cohen, seems eager to assure his former Republican Senate colleagues that the United States will withdraw from Bosnia on schedule this year. President Clinton is dithering about whether to use American troops to catch Serb war criminals. And in the case of Milosevic's tottering regime, the administration is hesitant to push too hard on the fragile European consensus. But the latest problems in the Balkans won't fix themselves, nor will the latest opportunities "inevitably" resolve themselves in our favor. Milosevic may have walked himself into this trap, but we still need to spring it.

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# THE TRENT 'N' BILL SHOW

## by Matthew Rees

BILL CLINTON AND TRENT LOTT, the Senate majority leader, are the two most important politicians in Washington, and, from all evidence, they *really* like each other. They've talked about ten times since the election—about the balanced-budget amendment, Medicare, tax cuts, and education. Twice, the president has called Lott specifically about a controversial chemical-weapons treaty. He also phoned on December 26 while Lott was home in Pascagoula, Miss., to talk about the budget and Newt Gingrich's ethics woes and to wish him a merry Christmas. Two weeks later, Lott was paged by the White House as he sat in the office of Senate minority leader Tom Daschle; he returned to his own office for a friendly conversation with the president.

This is a far cry from Clinton's testy relationship with Lott's predecessor, Bob Dole. Indeed, Clinton and Lott may share the coziest relationship of any president and opposition leader since Dwight Eisenhower and Sam Rayburn. While their talks aren't always substantative—"We're not writing a budget over the phone," says Lott—they are especially significant because the White House has problematic relations with House minority leader Richard Gephardt, a likely presidential opponent of Al Gore's in 2000. Also, the now-diminished Gingrich is a bitter Clinton foe.

The chemistry between Clinton and Lott may prove to be the basis for a center-right governing coalition that is likely to lead to an early budget agreement, some kind of tax cut, a crime bill, and perhaps some minor product-liability reform.

Dick Morris, the not-quite-disgraced consultant who has worked closely with both Clinton and Lott over the years, predicts a flurry of activity between his two former clients. The reason, Morris told me, is that they are both out to show that their respective parties

can be trusted. Lott wants to prove that Republicans aren't going to use Congress simply as a weapon with which to recapture the White House, and Clinton seeks to restore faith that a Democrat can be trusted to run the country. They have a real incentive to work together. Says Morris, "Their partisan interests will lead to bipartisanship."

Though they're ideologically and stylistically very different (Lott is a conservative who prizes order, Clinton is a chameleon who welcomes chaos), it shouldn't surprise anyone that the president and the majority leader have hit it off. Mike McCurry, the president's press secretary, explains that "the southernness of it all is very compelling. Lott knows the same kind of folks Clinton knows. . . . They're both in the business of trying to help people on the back roads of the South." But they are also career politicians (Lott was elected to the House in 1972) and share some painful family history, including alcoholism, divorce, and fathers killed in car accidents. "I feel very comfortable relating to [Lott] and I do like him, personally," Clinton told the *Wall Street Journal*. Lott told me he has "very informal, even social" relations with the president: "We can talk honestly with each other." But, he insists, that doesn't mean he will melt when the president comes calling: "We come from the same neck of the woods. It'll be harder for him to charm me."

Further bolstering relations is the appointment of Erskine Bowles, an investment banker of moderate political temperament, to replace Leon Panetta as Clinton's chief of staff. Lott clashed with Panetta, a left-liberal ex-congressman, and privately referred to him and other Clinton aides as "Sandinistas." Bowles is a different story. "I know we're going to be able to work with Erskine Bowles," Lott has said; "he's a good choice." After appearing together on the January 19 *Meet the Press*, Lott and Bowles remained in the studio for another thirty minutes, talking. And this Lott-related harmony isn't limited to the White House, either: Daschle, too, has nice words for the majority leader, saying he and Lott "have a very good relationship" in which they talk daily and "I pop into his office or he pops into mine."

So, the legislative machinery will run more smoothly in the next two years than it did in the pre-Lott era. When Dole left the Senate and Lott succeeded him, Congress was in gridlock. Democrats didn't want to hand Dole any victories, Dole didn't want to give Clinton anything to sign. Enter Lott. After being stymied in the opening weeks, he supervised the passage of much of the stalled legislation.

A test of Lott's dealmaking talents during this Congress will be how he resolves the impasse over a treaty that would ban the use of chemical weapons. The Senate was supposed to vote on the treaty last September, but the administration asked for a delay because of strong conservative opposition. Clinton has now made the treaty's ratification a top priority (it must be voted on by April 29 for the United States to participate in negotiations over its implementation). Lott's public posture has been that he's working with Clinton to iron out differences, but he warned at a January 28 press conference that if administration officials want cooperation on chemical weapons, they have "got to be a little bit more cooperative and forthcoming with us in other foreign policy, defense, and treaty-related issues than they have been."

If Lott is going to work any of his legislative magic on the treaty, he will have to stir Jesse Helms, the obstinate chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. Helms is adamantly opposed to letting the treaty onto the Senate floor for a vote. Lott won't say whether he's prepared to press Helms on the matter, but he has told administration officials that the treaty's status is not up to him and that they had better deal with Helms. This stance encourages the treaty's opponents, but they're still uneasy about the new majority leader.

Indeed, Lott's penchant for dealmaking has led to some distrust of him on the right, despite his reputation as a conservative ideologue. Lott himself did nothing to assuage the distrust when he told *Meet the Press*'s Tim Russert that "good government is good politics." Conservative guru Paul Weyrich has known Lott for thirty years and is a fan, but he contends that the majority leader "is at times too willing to strike a deal when he doesn't need to." In his book, Morris writes of Lott's frustration with House Republican freshmen during last winter's budget showdown: "Their refusal to compromise seemed to Lott to be a repudiation of what congressional and presidential government was all about."

While Lott's flexibility might be expected to cause him some trouble in the new and far more conservative Senate, it probably won't. Republicans of both houses now seem convinced they're better off passing less-than-perfect bills than holding out for the ideal: "I'd rather have 80 percent of something than 100 percent of nothing," Lott says. The bargaining will be made easier by Lott's close relationship with Gingrich.

The seriousness with which the White House treats its relationship with Lott was underscored by its response to a minor tiff last week. Lott had raised a question about the nomination of Alexis Herman to be labor secretary, and in response, McCurry suggested that Lott had been irritated by Herman's work encouraging black voter participation. This enraged Lott, which prompted the White House to go on red alert. An administration official rushed to soothe the majority leader. McCurry apologized to Lott's top aide, Dave Hoppe, and told reporters that Lott had

"good reason" to be angry. He also contacted Bowles to let him know McCarry was "in the Dutch oven" with Lott in case the president had to get involved. He didn't. "I consider the matter closed, McCurry says. " If Clintonites are lucky, Lott does too.

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# BAD GRADES; GOOD IDEA

**by Chester E. Finn, Jr.**

YOU DECIDE: Which is doing a better job of public education, Arizona or Kentucky? Similar numbers of children attend school in the two states. About a quarter of them live in single-parent families. Arizona has more minority youngsters, but Kentucky has more below the poverty line. On the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 1992 and 1994, the two states had nearly identical (low) scores. Yet Arizona spends a thousand dollars less per pupil on public education than Kentucky, an overall difference of some $400 million a year.

In any report card on state-level education performance, you might suppose that Arizona would fare better than Kentucky, at least earning a higher grade for efficiency. Arizona might also be lauded for its bold, shake-the-system "charter school" program, which in its second year already enrolls 2 percent of the state's youngsters in these innovative public schools, while a question could be raised about Kentucky's cumbersome, hyper-centralized reform plan, already in Year Six yet still reporting flat test scores in middle and high schools.

So one might suppose. But only if one were naive about the priorities of the education establishment, which on January 16 trundled out a bulky new "report card" on public education—*Quality Counts*—that conferred a grade of "B" on Kentucky, "C-" on Arizona.

This 238-page coffee-table-size tome—laced with ads from textbook publishers, computer firms, consultants, teacher colleges, and school reform projects (including my own Hudson Institute's)—was written by the staff of *Education Week*, the country's premier newspaper about K-12 schooling, with funding from two private foundations. Considerable fanfare attended its release, and elected officials throughout the land can expect to see the pages grading their states waved about by school lobbyists during the legislative sessions now beginning.

*Quality Counts* has all the trappings of objective social science. Statistics were gathered on "75 specific indicators." "Thousands of pages of data" were reviewed. *Education Week*'s own ample archives were plumbed. Experts were surveyed (me included). Teachers, principals, and superintendents were polled. And on and on.

The result of all this effort is three different kinds of measure for each state: achievement scores in 4th-grade reading (1994) and 8th-grade math (1992); six letter grades; and a several-page essay.

The achievement numbers, though lamentable, are solid, based on the widely respected National Assessment, and the authors deserve credit for resisting pressure to adjust those scores by race. As they rightly note, "We can no longer use the excuse of a student's background to justify low achievement." Indeed, when appraising the products of U.S. schools in hard-hitting language such as "rife with mediocrity," *Quality Counts* lives up to its title.

The test scores, however, are old news. It's the letter grades that are new, that have caught the eye of U.S. educators—and that will be dangled in legislative drafting sessions and budget hearings this winter. Moreover, because this is the first of a series of annual report cards, these letter grades are sure to be watched in coming years. Voters and taxpayers may reasonably wonder what is being graded.

The answer is mainly school "inputs," especially money. As if to make amends for its tough stance on pupil achievement, nearly all of the report card's other indicators buttress the school establishment's hoary assumptions and encourage its obsession with funding. Indeed, three of a state's six letter grades are tied directly to dollars:

• "Adequacy of resources" blends current per-pupil spending, its rise over the past decade, and the state's "relative fiscal effort," i.e., how heavily it taxes itself to support public schools. (Straight "A"s to New Jersey, West Virginia, and New York, a lone "F" to Bill Clinton's Arkansas.)

• "Allocation of resources" melds the portion of the state education budget that goes for instruction, the sums devoted to technology, and a measure of how many school buildings are falling down. (No "A"s here. "B"s to Georgia, Indiana, Tennessee, and Virginia. "F" for Alaska.)

• "Equity of resources" tracks the uniformity of per-pupil spending across the state's school districts.

(Hawaii, which is all one district, naturally gets an "A," as does West Virginia. The lowest marks are "D"s for California, Rhode Island, and Texas.)

All this despite decades of research and experience demonstrating how weak the link is between what goes into schools and what comes out. We have ample evidence that spending more—or more equally—does not mean more learning follows. (Real expenditures per pupil have tripled since the mid-1950s and doubled since the mid-1960s. Few claim that school performance has.) We also have clear signals from parochial and charter schools that great learning can take place in marginal facilities with lean budgets. Yet the school establishment prefers to think otherwise. So do the editors of *Education Week*, read mostly by educators who, the report card blandly notes, "in virtually every state worry about getting enough money to do the job." Rather than devising rigorous measures of efficiency or productivity, this report is content to signal that more is better. (As for its focus on technology spending, perhaps only a cynic would link that indicator to twenty-some full-page ads by IBM, AT&T, and other vendors of hardware and software.)

Two more grades are conferred chiefly on the basis of inputs and insider opinions. A state's mark for "Teaching Quality" hinges on features cherished by teacher educators and unions: whether all teachers are fully certified and their colleges duly accredited; whether the state belongs to something called the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium; how many weeks of practice teaching it requires; and whether it has an "independent professional-standards board" (usually a union pawn). Less than a third of the grade is tied to factors that laymen are apt to think vital, such as the fraction of high school instructors with degrees in the subjects they teach. (Kentucky and Minnesota lead this list with "B"s. Arizona and Hawaii anchor it with "D"s.)

The measure called "School Climate" is better: Only 35 percent is pure inputs (class size and teacher-student ratios). Other parts pertain to governance, regulatory waivers, safety, student and parent "roles," even (public) school choice. Yet only educators were surveyed. Almost half the grade is based on their "perceptions" of things like "student apathy" and "lack of parent involvement." Nobody asked the consumers what they think about their schools' climate—or the people working in them. (Vermont leads with "B+"; Mississippi, Florida, California, and Utah bring up the rear with "D-"s.)

The remaining grade is well intended. It purports to gauge states' success in instituting "high content standards in English, math, science, and history for all children and assessments that measure whether students meet the standards." But lacking criteria by which to judge which standards are high, the report-card writers settle for their mere existence. And lacking evidence on which tests are rigorous, they settle for certain types of test. Here great deference is paid to educators' ardor for "performance assessments," and states that employ standardized tests are marked down. This approach yields such bizarre results as a worse grade for Virginia, which has nationally acclaimed standards in place and tests under development, than for North Carolina, whose standards are notoriously low. Iowa, which paces the nation in college-entrance scores most years (and tracks its progress via a private testing program), earns a failing grade (along with Wyoming) in this category because it stoutly refuses to impose uniform standards or state tests.

As if this grading scale were not sufficiently slanted toward establishment preferences, the essays accompanying the state reports also reveal strong preferences for a particular, educator-endorsed strategy of school reform: centralized, uniform, and tightly controlled from above. Establishment leaders dub this approach "systemic reform"—President Clinton's controversial Goals 2000 program embodies the concept—and contrast it with the market-style strategies they despise: charter schools, private-contract management, and vouchers.

Never mind that there's no evidence of the "systemic" approach's producing better results. It's the strategy that preserves the old ground rules and power relationships, that maintains control and sops up money, and the report-card writers plainly favor it. Indeed—incredibly—they find the prospect of "alternative forms of education . . . to replace public schools as we have known them" as worrisome as erosion of "our democratic system and our economic strength." Lynn Olson, senior editor of *Education Week*, depicts as one of the great "obstacles" to serious reform the existence of "a vocal and determined group of reformers [who believe] that a better way to improve the schools is through competition."

No wonder Kentucky fares better than Arizona in such a grading scheme. The Bluegrass State hews to the party line, while the Grand Canyon State is striking out on its own. This report card is replete with similar misjudgments. Its central failure is not that it papers over the shortcomings of U.S. education—it's plenty critical. Rather, its fundamental error is that it turns the clock back thirty years to a time when quality was measured in dollars, payrolls, credentials, and elaborate bureaucratic schemes rather than the actual performance of students, schools, and educators.

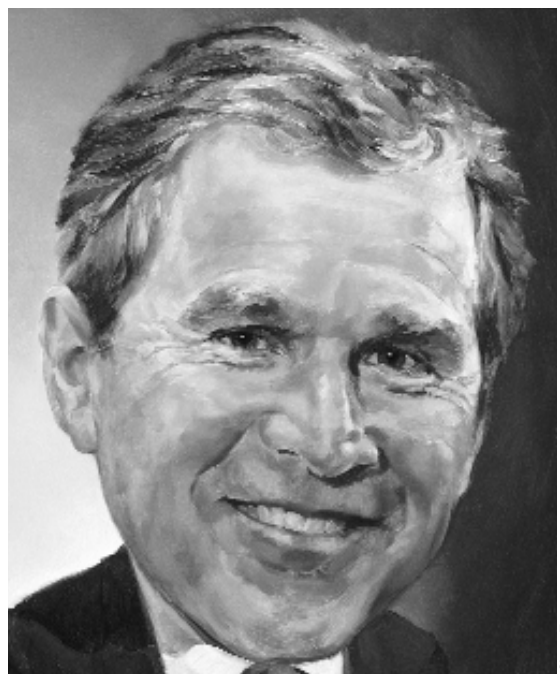
***Chester E. Finn, Jr., John M. Olin fellow at the Hudson Institute, is a former assistant U.S. secretary of education.***

# The Son Also Rises

## *A Focused, Disciplined, Socially Conservative Republican Politician Named . . . George Bush?*

**By Julia Reed**

I first met George W. Bush in 1976 at a very extravagant and fairly wild wedding in the Mississippi Delta. He was eight years out of Yale then and working in the oil business in Midland, Texas. His father was serving as director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and so the Bush name was not yet a huge deal—but when coupled with young George's bad-boy good looks, the total package was enough to send the many eligible twentysomethings into a collective swoon. In addition to his official groomsman getup of cream linen trousers, navy blazer, and flowered cotton tie, I recall that he wore Gucci loafers and was smoking an expensive cigar. He was cocky, charming, and he was clearly enjoying himself.



Chas Fagan

This was, Bush says now, his rambunctious period, when he was "drinking and carousing and fumbling around." A little more than twenty years later, he has stopped drinking, stopped smoking, married a librarian, had twin girls, and joined the Methodist church. He also has run a major-league baseball team that wins, become the governor of Texas in a race he was supposed to lose, and delivered one of the few good speeches at last summer's Republican convention, which he co-chaired.

The one-time carouser is now obsessed with the issue of personal responsibility and by the cultural decay he says was brought on in part by the "if it feels good, do it" standard of his generation. And he has sought to translate those concerns into public policy. In his two years as governor, Bush and the Texas legislature have toughened up the juvenile justice system, with punishment the focus instead of rehabilitation. (Four thousand new juvenile beds have been added to the system.) They have given local school districts much more authority to mind their own affairs and have also beefed up the way the state measures results, which should strengthen accountability. And they have imposed new requirements of welfare recipients—children must be immunized and pregnant women must identify the father for benefits to flow.

Given his patrician background and youthful rowdiness, Bush's priorities could, after all, have been as unambitious as his next drink of whiskey, his next hunting trip, or his next pair of Guccis. When the Yale football team "won the Ivy League championship against Princeton," recalls Donald Ensenat, his roommate in New Haven, "we tore down the goal post, and he was arrested." His father had just been elected to Congress, but that did not prevent George W. (who is not actually George II, but was erroneously known as "Junior" in the Bush White House) from behaving like a preppie scoundrel.

All of which is to say that there is something admirable when someone like George W. Bush actually grows up, if only because so many men like him never really do. And he is now being rewarded for assuming the mantle of responsibility by the Great Mentioner, who keeps placing him in the forefront of

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those who might battle for the Republican presidential nomination in 2000. Sam Donaldson put Bush's name at the top of his list a couple of weeks ago on *Larry King Live*, site of more than one campaign kickoff, but Donaldson is by no means the only one. Fund-raisers, strategists, party insiders—all the Republicans who stand to gain either power or employment from a presidential run—have been watching him since the moment he took the oath of office in Austin in January 1995.

Bush insists that the only business before him is the business of running Texas, and says he is "troubled by people who get too far of ahead of themselves in life." It is true that he was elected to public office for the first time a little more than two years at the age of 48.

He does willingly concede that "I am an obvious choice because I'm the governor of the second biggest state with a great political name." That very name may have something to do with his startlingly high ranking in the Republican preference polls (he routinely comes in fourth behind Jack Kemp, Colin Powell, and Dan Quayle, outdoing Steve Forbes and Lamar Alexander, among others). But it is worth remembering that his brother Jeb has the same last name—and Jeb lost the l994 governor's race in Florida he was supposed to win.

Actually, George W. may have enjoyed a perverse benefit from sharing his Christian name and surname with his father in his 1994 campaign. Throughout, his opponent, Gov. Ann Richards, never missed an opportunity to call him a "shrub" or a "jerk"; the woman who once famously accused his father of being "born with a silver foot in his mouth" portrayed her rival as a known-nothing spoiled rich kid. So when George W. actually showed up walking and talking at the same time—and doing it, as it happened, very well—it never failed to stun the crowds.

"In the beginning I remember being struck by the fact that he'd go into an audience—and I could tell they were skeptical, that they were stuck on the whole 'son-of' thing. And midway through, he'd win them over," says Don Sipple, the Republican media adviser who did Bush's ads. "When you can beat expectations, that's very important. It became the metaphor for the campaign."

Bush would like it to be the metaphor for his first term in Austin as well. His strategy so far has been to stay focused, do virtually no national media, damn sure don't talk about a presidential race or even a second term, and produce a solid record to show off in the end. As a candidate, Bush laid out "a few simple but profound tasks" and never quit hammering away at them. He talked about four specific things—juvenile justice reform, welfare reform, school reform, and tort reform—and after he was elected he shepherded all four through the legislature.

That displays a rare ability to stay "on message" for as long as it takes. He stays on message with journalists too. It has been said that to interview Elizabeth Dole is to interrupt her, and Bush is even harder to steer off course (though he is far more spontaneous in his delivery).

"The legacy I'd like to leave when it's all done," he says, "is: 'Here's a guy who came, he set clear and understandable goals, and he remained absolutely focused.'" Bush chose to "do a few things and do them well" during his first year in office "because I understand full well that government can't deliver everything to everybody."

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT TO INTERVIEW ELIZABETH DOLE IS TO INTERRUPT HER. THE DISCIPLINED GEORGE W. BUSH IS EVEN HARDER TO STEER OFF COURSE.

After getting his "few simple" tasks passed in 1995, Bush sought to elaborate and expand on them in 1996. (The Texas legislature meets every other year.) He has proposed an initiative that would allow cops to "stop and frisk" juvenile offenders as a condition of their probation or parole. He is working on a plan to integrate religious and charitable organizations into the welfare system, which would allow them, along with the state, to deliver services to recipients. He also wants to make the welfare system more efficient by moving the "easiest" people off the rolls first and then spending the savings on difficult cases (like girls who had children so early in life that they never went beyond elementary school).

His education goal is to have every child reading by the third grade. "Heard that one before?" Bush asks. Indeed I have; Bill Clinton appropriated the idea during his campaign train trip last summer at a library where a child read him *The Little Engine That Could*. Bush was, he says, "a little surprised" at Clinton's policy plagiarism, though he quickly adds that he was "glad President Clinton opted to give that in one speech. I would hope that he will do what I do, which is give it in every speech."

Bush has an interesting take on the man who brought down his father. "One of the roles of leaders is to create a highly hopeful environment as opposed to a

cynical environment," Bush says, "and if you promise all things to all people and deliver a few things to some people, you will have a cynical population on your hands. And a cynical population is a population that is incapable of solving problems." Pause. "Bill Clinton is the perfect president for the entitlement society because he is willing to promise things he can't deliver."

He goes in for another dig: "In order to be a good governor you have to solve problems in the framework of a set philosophy that does not vary. And that's another of my objections to our current president. He makes decisions based not upon philosophy but upon politics, which sends confusing signals. It must be difficult to be on his staff."

All Bush's accomplishments and plans so far fit into his core theme: "Laws must insist that people be held accountable for their behavior. . . . If you break the law, you will spend time marching in the heat. If you don't pay court-ordered child support, the state suspends licenses—fishing licenses, legal licenses, medical licenses. Local people will be responsible for seeing that their children get a quality education—no more excuses, no more blaming it on the TEA" (that's the Texas Education Association, the teachers' union that is a favorite conservative target).

Emphasis is placed on the individual. Children in the same grade are now allowed—encouraged, even—to read at different rates so that the better readers aren't held back. Bush wants to create "one-stop service centers" for welfare recipients so that "the individual who needs help is no longer the passive recipient of a handout but the proactive holder of a voucher that empowers that individual to choose from a range of services."

His critics charge that Bush has dedicated himself to uncontroversial issues—that when it comes to literacy and juvenile crime, he is only following an already established consensus rather than forging a new one. But that unfairly discounts Bush's ability to turn issues into concrete proposals and get them passed into law.

Austin political consultant Bill Miller, who works for both Republicans and Democrats, predicts the Bush model of a short and to-the-point agenda will become a blueprint for governors nationwide if he proves as successful in the new legislative session as he was two years ago. So far, he has worked the legislature like a seasoned pro, staying out of the spotlight and making allies of the Democrats who run the committees.

With an approval rating of 68 percent, Bush has a lot of political capital to play with right now. And he has just put forward a proposal so ambitious it seems intended to answer those who accuse him of an excess of caution. Bush wants the legislature to approve a massive restructuring of the Texas tax system, whose centerpiece is a $3 billion reduction in property taxes. That tax cut would be offset in part with a half-a-cent increase in the state's high (6.25 percent) sales tax and new levies on businesses (especially on doctors, lawyers and others who belong to professional partnerships).

The tax plan is Bush's major legislative effort this year, and it is a gamble. "He's got to manage this thing properly so he looks like a tax cutter and not a tax raiser," says one strategist close to Bush. "He's got to be artful about it, that's for sure." He's already met with each legislator individually to rally support.

> EVEN IF THE TAX PLAN CRASHES AND BURNS THE GOVERNOR STILL HAS ONE QUALITY TO FALL BACK ON: PIZZAZZ.

"What's at stake here," says a Republican political consultant in Austin, "is nothing less than Bush's credentials for the presidency. If he pulls this off, he's got a great issue to go around the country with and say, 'Hi, I'm the Governor of Texas who fixed this big, decades-old problem.' But if he lays this out and it doesn't happen, he's got a real problem on his hands."

Maybe, but even if the tax plan crashes and burns, he's still got one quality other Republican governors who are being talked up for the presidency seem to lack. That quality, which I saw him unleash on the guests at that wedding more than twenty years ago, is pizzazz.

In this, he resembles no one so much as Clinton. Last year, while reporting on the presidential election, I talked to disabled vets, lifelong Republicans, and Democrats who were mad about the welfare bill. They all hated something substantial in the president's character or record, yet they all gave the same answer when I asked why they were voting for Clinton anyway: "He's a people person."

Don Sipple saw this in Bush, so his ad strategy in 1994 was simple: He simply put the candidate in front of a camera and let him connect. If the eight percentage point gap between Bob Dole and Bill Clinton was all about "caring" and the ability to convey it, Sipple

says, "then George Bush has the potential to narrow that gap."

Bush says one of his primary roles as governor "is to use the bully pulpit," and he's a natural. He speaks of "a renewal of spirit in this country." He tries to explain how America has gotten itself trapped in a "culture of victimhood" and what can be done to change it, beginning with the laws he implemented regarding juvenile justice and welfare. "During the fifty years of my life I've seen the culture change," he says. "Therefore I know it can change again."

Though his themes and even his words are familiar from other Republican politicians, Bush brings rare passion to them. When he says "I'm an optimistic man," people believe it. And when he argues that "all of us instinctively know" that it is easier to pass along the tried-and-true values of "'work hard, don't lie, cheat, or steal, you're responsible for your behavior' in a two-parent family," you don't think you're listening to warmed-over Dan Quayle. Nor does he sound like Pat Robertson when he says, "The ultimate success of a cultural shift is going to be a return to spirituality, because the truth of the matter is that Judeo-Christian values—a sense of responsibility, loving your neighbor, a sense of right and wrong, of decency and indecency—become a real part of life when people turn toward something higher than themselves."

BUSH BRINGS RARE PASSION TO "THE VISION THING," AND YOU DON'T THINK YOU'RE LISTENING TO WARMED-OVER DAN QUAYLE.

Vision thing, anyone?

When I begin a question by pointing out that he is "different in style. . . ," Bush finishes the sentence for me: ". . . than my Dad, yeah." He has "two flippant answers to that," he says, "but I think there's some truth to them. One is he was educated at Greenwich Country Day and I was educated at San Jacinto Junior High in Midland, Texas. I am a Texan and a westerner and a southerner. The other thing is I would jest in the campaign that I've got my daddy's eyes and my mother's mouth. She's straightforward and she's got a wicked sense of humor and there's an irreverence to her. I think I've got a healthy skepticism toward certain things, and yet I've got an idealistic streak as well."

He does lose some of his eloquence when the subject turns to abortion. During the 1994 campaign, he refused to take an explicit stand on the matter, focusing instead on his support for mandatory waiting periods and parental consent. "I framed it the right way to frame it," he says now, "which is to challenge people to join me in reducing the number of abortions in this country."

He is much clearer about immigration, another so-called hot-button issue. Bush says that while "we have to do a better job of enforcing our border," he will tolerate no "immigrant-bashing." He vocally opposes California's Proposition 187, the 1994 initiative that sought to deny public services to undocumented immigrants, and lobbied against a Texas version of it.

"The desire to provide will never be squelched," he says. "I understand why these people are here." And he points out that "there are a lot of jobs people in Texas won't do—laying tar in August or chopping cedars. People argue that if we don't educate [immigrants] they'll go home, and that's not true. If we educate them, at least they can become more productive members of society. This is good public policy. I would be willing to defend this position as the best position not only for Texas, but for the nation."

According to a friend, young George's "deputy mom" was an immigrant housekeeper, and the issue "is almost Biblical with him," Sipple says. "He believes that the sins of the father shall not be visited on the sons."

Another friend says it was precisely the experience of watching his own father lose in 1992 that will propel him into a presidential race. "If you had lived through what he lived through," the friend says, "you would want it too."

Those who want him to want it make a strong case for his virtues as a candidate, beginning with his extraordinary discipline. When he gave up booze ten years ago, he says, "I just quit. I had had enough. And it's the best thing I've done in terms of seeking a meaningful life." The fact that he used to act up would give him a redemptive story to tell in a convention address, but he refuses to engage in talk about his future. He won't even announce until the legislative session is over this summer whether he will seek reelection as governor.

Most people who know him think he will run again, if for no other reason than the challenge. "Texans have a habit of voting out their governors," says a Texas political analyst. No governor of Texas has been elected to a second four-year term (four-year terms were instituted in 1972). "It [would not be] inconse-

quential to break the jinx."

Bush is very clear on what office he will never consider: "I'd rather do something else than be a U.S. senator," he says. "Having had the taste of being a CEO [of the Texas Rangers baseball team], of setting the tone, I'm not a good committee member. Let me put it to you that way. I respect the Senate, it just doesn't fit in my nature. I'm more entrepreneurial."

Austin is a small political town, and on the way in from the airport I ask the cabdriver what he thinks of his governor. "He's all right. He keeps a low profile. He wants to be president, but not yet. And he wants to be president—he don't want to be vice president."

How do you know all this? I ask him. "I drive a cab."

When I see Bush, I tell him the word around town is he wouldn't want to be vice president—and that, after all, his entrepreneurial nature would preclude it. He laughs, but then he fixes me with the very same blue-eye lock Bill Clinton uses to melt voters who want to resist him.

"I imagine I could adjust," he says. ♦

# Live from Washington, It's the Pollie Awards!

## *The Oscars for the Profession Everybody Hates*

**By Tucker Carlson**

The guests at the Washington banquet were just getting their dessert when the image of a woman named Sally Nungesser appeared on two enormous video screens. The videotape of Nungesser showed her standing at a podium making strange facial expressions—twitching her eyebrows, crinkling her nose, pursing her lips.

An ominous voice-over began: "Sally Nungesser wants to be insurance commissioner. But she was fired from her job at the Insurance Guaranty Association. *Why*? Because Sally Nungesser funneled more than half a million dollars in taxpayers' money to her *boyfriend*. Then she *physically attacked* her elderly secretary because the secretary wouldn't *destroy public documents*." Bold letters summed up Sally Nungesser's life so far: "**Lied**. **Fired**. **Out of Control**. The *truth* is, we can't trust Sally Nungesser to be insurance commissioner." As the lights came up on the smoking rubble of what was once Sally Nungesser, an appreciative silence gave way to prolonged applause from the several hundred people in attendance.

> THE MAKERS OF NEGATIVE ADS SHOW AN AWE-INSPIRING OBLIVIOUSNESS TO MODERN DECORUM. IT'S A LITTLE LIKE WATCHING SOMEONE LIGHT A CIGARETTE IN A HOSPITAL ROOM.

The occasion was the annual awards dinner of the American Association of Political Consultants, the 500-member organization made up of those who earn their keep getting other people elected to office. When a representative of the company that made the Nungesser ad ascended to the stage to accept her Pollie—a faux-crystal flame mounted on a piece of pine that is the political-consultancy equivalent of an Oscar—she didn't give a rambling speech thanking her hairdresser. Rather, she explained where and how she had found the unflattering footage of Sally Nungesser that went so well with the even more unflattering voice-over. The other ad-makers listened intently, then hooted with appreciation.

Spending an evening with the people who create political advertising is a little like watching someone light a cigarette in a hospital room: The obliviousness

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to modern decorum is awe-inspiring. Like smoking, negative campaigning is a vice that enlightened opinion has targeted for elimination. Hardly a day passes without the appearance of an op-ed somewhere decrying the incivility in the political process created in part by television ads.

But in the face of this onslaught, political consultants stand firm. Negative advertising is effective: Just ask Sally Nungesser, who finished up her 1995 race for state insurance commissioner of Louisiana with just 28 percent of the vote. (She later resurfaced as an official with the Dole-Kemp campaign.) And, as ad-makers never tire of pointing out, attack ads are every bit as truthful and informative as the positive variety, maybe more so.

Take the Pollie-winning ad that helped Republican Peter Frusetta beat heavily favored Democrat Lily Cervantes for a seat in the California Assembly. The spot opened with Cervantes giving a melodramatic address to a rally of supporters. "The violent young men who abuse guns—I have prosecuted these men," Cervantes declared, voice resonant with righteous anger. Her assertion was then challenged by the large type that filled the screen: "Lily Cervantes has never prosecuted a felony. She prosecuted 9 serious misdemeanors. She lost 5 of them. She bargained 3, including a repeat spousal abuser. She got one conviction. A K-mart shoplifter." Negative? Sure. And informative. In fewer than 30 seconds, its creators conveyed a number of pieces of useful information while resoundingly trashing an opponent who obviously deserved it.

Compare this economy of communication with one of the relatively few positive ads to win a Pollie, a 30-second spot produced for Gary Locke during his 1996 bid for governor of Washington state. "Nineteen years ago, my father was shot right here in our family's grocery store," says Locke, who is standing before a rack of canned goods. "Fortunately, he lived." Locke goes on to explain how the experience convinced him that criminals are bad. Yet by the end of the spot, the only person demeaned is Locke himself, who gives voters no reason to choose him over his opponent except for the fact that his father was once shot in a robbery. (Locke did win, though.)

A wickedly negative spot made for Democratic congressional candidate Ellen Tauscher of California did provide viewers with a real incentive to vote for her rather than her challenger, Bill Baker. Footage in the ad shows Baker moments after he leapt from a stage at a political rally to attack a heckler. Baker looks demented and dangerous. Tauscher won.


Sean Delonas

Even this year's winner for best "voter participation" ad turned out to be surprisingly sharp-edged. "My name is Angela and I think drugs should be legalized," began the 30-second radio spot, which ran last fall in Minnesota. "Just because a few people get high and go out and knock off a liquor store or kill somebody or something

doesn't mean I shouldn't be able to buy drugs. . . Besides, if drugs were legal, they'd be less expensive, probably. My name is Angela, and on November 5th I'm going to vote." A responsible male voice then intones: "If *you* don't vote, who will? Make *your* voice heard." When it comes to scaring the bourgeoisie into showing up at the polls, nothing works better than negative advertising.

Strangely, for all the zesty, bare-knuckled ads they produced, the consultants themselves came off as a fairly humdrum bunch: no Hawaiian shirts or Carville-like ranters in sight. The dinner capped a three-day conference sponsored by the American Association of Political Consultants, which had all the trappings of an industry trade show. Vendors in collapsible booths hawked schlocky tracts (*Phil Noble's Guide to the Internet and Politics*, a 37-page "book," went for $10). Minor political luminaries hosted predictably banal panel discussions ("As John Naisbitt said in *Megatrends* . . ." began consultant and pro-abortion agitator Ann Stone in one session on innovations in print advertising).

During the lunch break on the last day of the conference, a knot of people from a medical-device convention next door filed through the lobby of Washington's ANA Hotel. For a moment, the two groups merged. Without name tags, it would have been impossible to tell them apart—which ones were the political consultants and which the pap-smear salesmen?

The consultants may have been personally dull, but as the awards ceremony wore on, their ads seemed to get more vicious, though not necessarily more effective. Even the most cynical consultants acknowledge that the public can sense when an ad goes too far. Such, apparently, was the case with a spot produced on behalf of Sandy Hill, an incumbent Republican running for the Michigan state legislature last year.

The ad opens with a bearded convict sitting in a prison cell drinking a cup of coffee and composing a letter to Hill's opponent, Rose Bogardus. "Dear Rose Bogardus, Seems you and I have a lot in common. We're both for making the police weaker, but you actually did something about it when you slashed the Genesee County sheriff's budget. Nice work! We're both in favor of scamming off the taxpayers, so I applaud you for voting yourself a pay raise while the county was billions in debt. Good Job! So now you're running for the statehouse again. I hope you win. The state capitol is the perfect place for people like you and me. P.S. Thanks for the cable, Rose. Now I get to watch your negative political ads."

It's hard to think of a nastier 29 seconds. But in the end, the attack may have been too much even for "Oprah"-addled television viewers in Flint, Mich., to swallow. "Bogardus won anyway," sighs consultant Mark Pischea, who wrote the ad. Of course, the outcome of the race had nothing to do with the jury's choice; the ad won a Pollie by meanness alone. ♦

# The Internet Fetishist

## *No, the Times They Aren't A-Changin'*

**By Alan Ehrenhalt**

Thirty years ago, Bob Dylan issued a belligerent warning to the mothers and fathers of baby-boom America: "Don't criticize what you can't understand/Your sons and your daughters are beyond your command." It's hard to imagine a more chilling thing to say to the parent of an adolescent. Of course, not many parents were listening—the primary consumers of this record-album manifesto were the teenagers Dylan was encouraging to rebel. He knew perfectly well when he wrote "The Times They Are A-Changin'" that he was speaking to and for his own generation, and that was what gave Dylan's lyrics their odd sort of primitive power.

Had Dylan been 50 when he wrote those words, they wouldn't have sounded very dramatic; he would have seemed like a confused middle-aged man seeking to curry favor with his children. Still, every generation produces its share of older people who seek out roles either as Pied Piper to the young or as voice of doom to the old, or both. In retrospect, most of them come off as hyperbolic fools. If you want to see a good example, pick up an old paperback copy of Charles Reich's *The Greening of America*. "The new consciousness is sweeping the high schools, it is seen in smiles on the streets," Reich proclaimed in that bestseller, published in 1970. "Hardly anybody of the older generation, even the FBI or the sociologists, knows much about it, for its language and thought are so different from Consciousness II as to make it virtually an undecipherable secret code." How Reich managed to crack the code as a 42-year-old Yale law professor, he didn't bother to say.

It's not hard to understand why Pied Piperism attracts middle-aged writers like Reich who ought to know better. They have an opportunity in one stroke to identify themselves with the energy and idealism of adolescence, and to establish a posture of moral superiority to their stodgy contemporaries still standing in the doorway and blocking up the hall.

**Jon Katz**
***Virtuous Reality***
***How America surrendered discussion of moral values to opportunists, nitwits & blockheads like William Bennett***
Random House, 212 pp., $21

This is the opportunity that has been seized eagerly by Jon Katz, former newspaper editor and TV news producer, novelist, and current media critic for *Wired.* In his new book, *Virtuous Reality*, Katz makes almost the same claims for the youth culture of the 1990s that Bob Dylan and Charles Reich did for the youth culture of the 1960s. This time, though, the instrument of rebellion isn't primarily music, or drugs, or politics; it's the Internet. "Kids are moving out from under our pious control," he lectures his own parental cohort, "finding one another via the great hive that is the Net. . . . American kids now have the most diverse, sophisticated and interesting culture on the planet. They aren't going to give it up. Grasp this or pass into history."

Dylan's version was a little more colorful: "You better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone." But it's really only the medium that's different; the message has the same ominous tone to it. Katz believes that access to the Internet is giving young people a common language and a sense of generational solidarity that will forever set them apart from their elders. He celebrates this new consciousness as a genuine rebirth of free thought and expression in America. He thinks concerns about the offensive nature of Internet communication are exaggerated, and attempts to regulate it futile. He considers the would-be regulators to be narrow-minded modern incarnations of Anthony Comstock and the Society for the Suppression of Vice.

Of all the villains determined to spoil the young people's innocent fun, one in particular drives Katz crazy: William Bennett. Katz dislikes Bennett so much that he can't even wait for the introduction to start unloading on him: The book's subtitle dubs Bennett a "nitwit" and a "blockhead." And Katz keeps it up for much of *Virtuous Reality*'s 212 pages. Bennett is a shameless self-promoter who made millions of dollars packaging useless homilies into *The Book of Virtues*. Bennett was an incompetent public official whose

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failures as education secretary and as drug czar disqualify him as an authority on any aspect of public policy. "Bennett is not only a bully," Katz says, "but an especially cold-hearted one when it comes to children, for whom his concern is as selective as it is lucrative."

There is little doubt Katz is playing to an audience that exists in significant size in cyberspace: To information libertarians all over the country, young and old, Bennett has emerged as an icon for neo-Puritanism. But in devoting a significant chunk of his book to Bennett-bashing, Katz sets a tone of ad hominem pettiness that taints just about everything else he tries to say. The author's reverence for free and open debate does not deter him from dismissing as an ignorant dinosaur virtually anybody who happens to disagree with him about the Internet, cyber-culture, or its effect on adolescents and children. Merely to raise the issue of Internet or pop-culture content, in Katz's view, is to be a "Mediaphobe," and a Mediaphobe is not just mistaken but pathetically ignorant, "afraid for himself of what he doesn't know or is too intimidated to learn."

Charles Reich at least had an air of benign optimism that made him difficult to dislike, no matter how goofy his Pied Piperism sounded. Jon Katz has no such saving grace. Reading *Virtuous Reality* is like listening to a man shrieking at the top of his lungs for everyone else to calm down. It is hard to imagine any critic of the Internet or pop culture being more self-righteous in attacking it than Katz is in defending it.

The first error his enemies make, in Katz's opinion, is to assume that there is a great deal of filth in cyberspace to begin with. He cites studies that have found pornography constitutes less than one-half of one percent of all Internet messages, and says most offensive Internet material is actually available only to adults who pay for it with credit cards.

I don't question the numbers. On the other hand, a couple of weeks ago, wandering around the Internet at halftime of a Sunday afternoon football game, I managed in ten minutes to find Web sites or News Groups with the following titles: "Joey Loves Sheep," "B—busting Cockfights," "Best Rap Albums to Get Stoned To," "Hows and Whys of Amphetamines," and "F— the Skull of Jesus." Katz is no doubt correct that there are far more sites on the Web devoted to teaching physics than there are to promoting bestiality. That's not the point. The issue isn't quantity, it's access. If I can find that much trash that quickly, any intelligent 10-year-old with a prurient curiosity can find it too, and maybe faster than I.

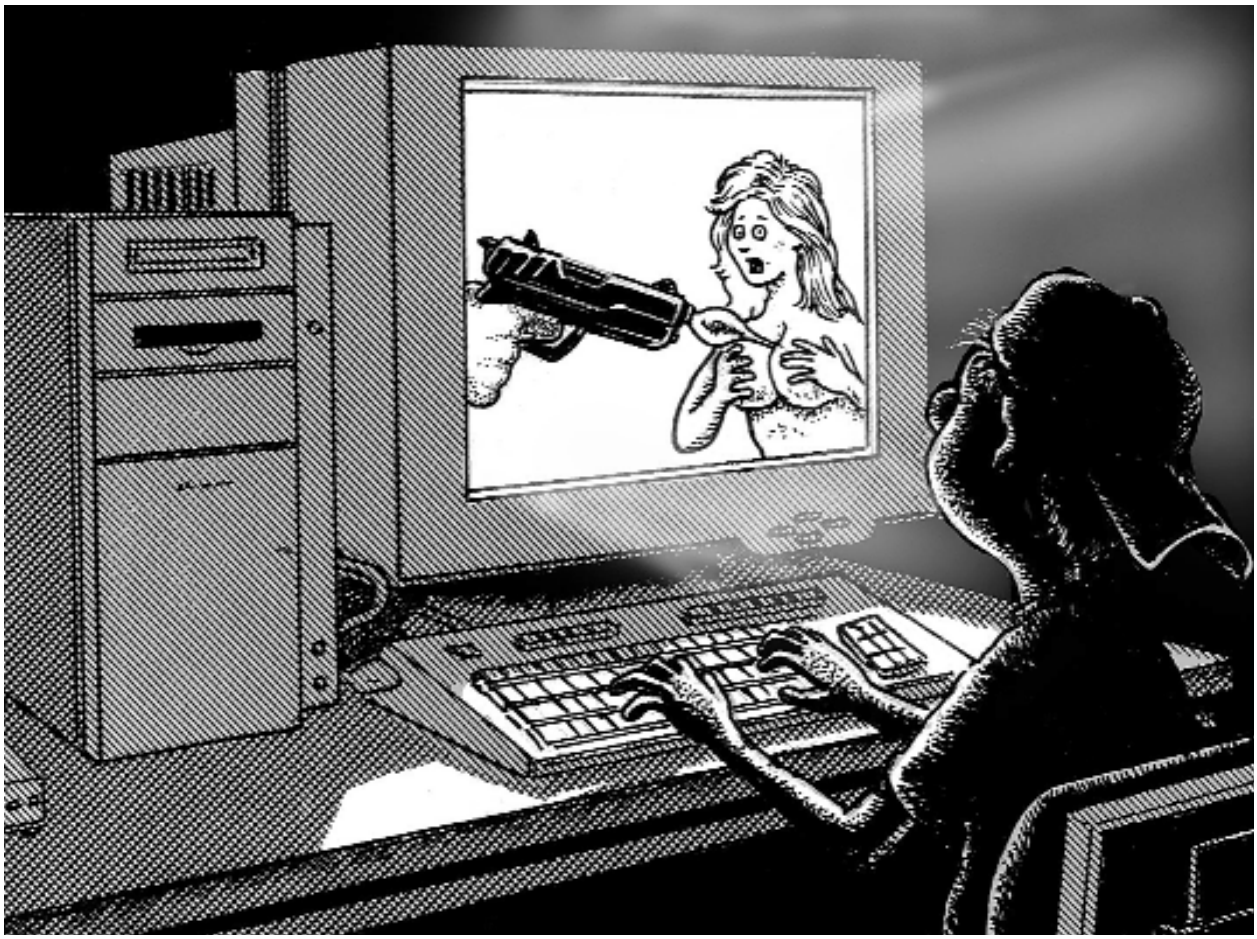
The real question is whether we need to be worrying about this. Katz believes it is foolish to be concerned about sex and violence on the Internet because they do not lead to violent behavior or irresponsible sexual activity in real life. "We know what's killing young people," he proclaims, "and it isn't lyrics, cartoons or computers." It's guns. Katz is a sort of National Rifle Association in reverse: People Don't Kill People, Guns Kill People. Or at least, people don't kill people as a result of anything they have read, watched, or discovered in the popular culture. He is sure beyond any measure of doubt that the daily consumption of brutality through the agency of pop culture has nothing to do with the problem of teenage violence. He says that, despite years of research and hundreds of studies, no statistical link has ever been demonstrated. He is equally certain that kids exposed to images of promiscuous sexuality are no more likely to experiment with it than anyone else.

And on the narrow question of proof, he is right. It will be monumentally difficult to demonstrate statistically to the entire society's satisfaction that rap lyrics or violent Web sites or cyber-pornography are responsible for individual instances of violent teenage behavior. Anybody determined to believe that brutal cultural images have no effect on the conduct of young people is going to believe it, and there's not going to be definitive social science to the contrary. But this claim is against all the evidence of common sense.

Katz not only believes it, he preaches it to the point of dogmatic absurdity. "Few serious students of child psychology," he declares, "think culture shapes the moral sense of children." I don't know who Katz's psychologists are—maybe he finds them in online chat rooms. But this is perhaps the silliest statement in a book that offers quite a large supply. If culture has nothing to do with the values of young people, what does? This is a question that Katz doesn't even seem to realize he is asking. As long as he can acquit the Internet, he has no interest in a serious search for other suspects.

For those stubborn readers who might be unimpressed by his arguments that Internet trash is both scarce and irrelevant to conduct, Katz is prepared to offer another one. Parents who raise their children decently needn't worry about the effects of pop culture. "If parents teach morals, live moral lives, discourage and punish immoral behavior and treat their children in a moral way," he assures them, "the children are much more likely to act morally as adults." Few Americans would disagree, but coming from this particular author, this suggests a few practical problems. At the moment he makes his proclamation, Katz has spent nearly 200 pages announcing that young people are living in their own world, speaking their own language, forming their own values, and are all but impervious to adult moralizing. If we don't even understand what our children are saying, how are we supposed to get through to them? Maybe we could borrow a decoder from Charles Reich.

However we might choose to talk to our children, Katz warns us in no



Sean Delonas

uncertain terms that it is pointless to try to restrict them or censor their channels of communication. V-chips, communications-decency laws, lobbying America Online to restrict access to obscenity—all are exercises in futility.

Not only that, they will cause young people to turn even more bitterly against their elders. "Parents who thoughtlessly ban access to online culture or lyrics they don't like or understand, or who exaggerate and distort the dangers of violence and pornographic imagery, are acting out of arrogance, imposing brute authority. . . . It is doomed, no more effective at stemming the great tidal waves of popular and technoculture than Cotton Mather was at banishing dancing, profanity, frivolity on the Sabbath, and general godlessness."

The analogy has a few holes in it. Just how successful Cotton Mather may have been in his crusade against godlessness I don't know, but when it came to dancing and frivolity, he won a lot more frequently than he lost. If Bennett does half that well against rap lyrics and pornographic Web sites, he will be one successful neo-Puritan.

Still, it's hard to deny that Katz has a point here. The really revolutionary aspect of sex and violence on the Internet is its almost entirely private character. For a teenager to have gotten his hands on anything this dirty in the past, he would have had to take some chances. Reading *Hustler* on a newsstand, sneaking into an X-rated movie, hiding dirty books under the bed—all of those experiments risked embarrassment at the least and serious punishment at the worst. That alone deterred most potential offenders.

Hardcore sex and violence on the Internet present no such problem. The eager consumer can have them for free with no need to ask an adult for them and very little risk of being caught in the act. And so Katz is right: No matter the controls society attempts to impose, American youth will, in the years to come, be watching and reading more material their parents consider offensive than young people in the past. That is a fact of life parents of the 21st century will have to deal with. But it is not an argument against establishing standards of decency and civility, and expressing those standards in the form of rules governing the things we want children to see and hear.

There are a few principles of a civilized society that the vast majority of Americans actually agree on. One is

the abhorrence of gratuitous violence. Another is the importance of expressing sexuality in lasting and meaningful relationships. There is no need to be embarrassed about expressing those values, or about imposing some discipline on a medium of entertainment that mocks them. Majorities have rights, too.

It's quite true, as Jon Katz says, that whatever rules we make, quite a few teenagers will find ways to evade. Adolescents like to rebel, as they did in Bob Dylan's generation and every other generation in history. There's nothing we can do about that. What we can do is make sure they have something to rebel against. ♦

BCA

# The Great Yeltsin Theory

## *Making the Case for a Russia Transformed*

**By David Aikman**

For scores of Russia specialists and international-relations experts on campuses across the United States, the collapse of communism was not entirely a cause for celebration. The need to understand Soviet behavior, and the Russian character, had created thousands of professorships from San Diego to Maine. And as long as the Soviet Union was in place, there were innumerable occasions for innumerable grants to peer into the riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.

The result was about four decades of Kremlinology that all too often treated Russians as a scarcely human species, an offshoot of homo sapiens distorted by the gene of totalitarianism. Whenever the Soviet Union was relatively stable—from, say, 1968 to 1985—Kremlinology was sometimes useful for determining who exactly was up and who was down in the party hierarchy, and which particular policies were in or out of favor. But Kremlinology proved itself utterly inadequate at grasping major cultural or sociological changes that changed the political nature of Russia far more than purges at the top.

Despite that failure, the Kremlinologists are still with us, and their thinking continues to dominate American writing about post-Communist Russia. If you read academic journals and the mainstream reporting that is affected by them, you might get the idea that nothing has really changed in Russia. Oh, the Soviet Union is gone and the gulag is no more. But isn't their nationalism still a bit mystical, and don't they all really long for the good old days of guaranteed jobs, triumphs in space, and great ballet at the Bolshoi?

**Dmitry Mikheyev**
***Russia Transformed***
Hudson Institute, 288 pp., $12.95

No, they don't. It is the primary contention of Dmitry Mikheyev's brilliantly argued and at times dazzlingly insightful *Russia Transformed* that Russia and Russians really have changed character. Russians may not yet be Rotarians or Shriners, but they have unequivocally decided that political democracy is infinitely preferable to authoritarianism, that the free market is a better system for creating and distributing wealth than state socialism, and that integrating the Russian national culture into the global culture is a wiser course than Slavophilic isolation.

Russia's ideological transformation was three decades in the making, beginning in 1956 with the Khrushchevite thaw and culminating in 1986 with the emergence of glasnost. The theoretical underpinnings of totalitarianism were washed away by the tide of heterodox ideas penetrating the country through radio, samizdat, and tourism. And those heterodox ideas have been absorbed not just by intellectuals but by *most* Russians.

Political change followed swiftly when Mikhail Gorbachev introduced a small but ultimately decisive smidgen of electoral freedom leading up to the vote for the Congress of People's Deputies in 1989. That dollop of democracy became the decisive ingredient in Boris Yeltsin's emergence as a major democratic leader and Russia's declaration of sovereignty within the Soviet Union in 1990.

Economic change came about in 1992, when price controls were relaxed on 90 percent of Russian consumer prices and privatization of the entire state economy was set in motion. Despite Russia's shaky economic foundation, Mikheyev argues, the country is now a net exporter of grain, its food supply is better than ever, and economic life for the average Russian is better than at any time in Russian history. "In 1996," Mikheyev writes, "Russia is an urbanized, industrialized, relatively homogeneous . . . secular, presidential republic, run by a technocratic elite, with private ownership and the free market, a free press and parliamentarism."

The principal explanation for this achievement, Mikheyev argues, is that at every pivotal moment, Boris Yeltsin stood in the forefront, unequivocally representing the emerging new culture rather than the old world of the nomenklatura. In the past ten years, Yeltsin has played a central (or *the* central) role in the collapse of the Soviet Union, the

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growth of Russian democracy, and the end of the Soviet empire. Mikheyev suggests Yeltsin will be the only leading figure of the anti-Communist revolution in Europe whom history will judge "both a hero and a great man."

Yeltsin, Mikheyev reminds us, has by turns been a star athlete, innovative engineer, efficient administrator, apparatchik, dissenter, popular hero, and Machiavellian political infighter. In one of the best sections of *Russia Transformed*, Mikheyev compares the background and upbringing of Yeltsin, viewed as a "buffoon" by George Bush's National Security Council, with those of Mikhail Gorbachev, the darling of the Council on Foreign Relations. Both were born to peasant families in 1931 at the very height of the Great Terror, both lost family members to Stalin's paranoia, and both had authoritarian parents.

But there the resemblance ends. Gorbachev learned to deal with the political terror by joining the Communist party machinery that directed it as soon as he could. Yeltsin, by contrast, didn't join the party until he was 30, when he could no longer rise in his professional career without doing so. Gorbachev could not quite grasp what was happening to the country and empire over whose self-destruction he was inadvertently presiding. Yeltsin followed the logic of his own ideological transformation after criticizing Gorbachev at a Politburo meeting in 1987. He quickly and naturally became a democratic activist. In two years' time, Yeltsin had run for a seat in the Congress of People's Deputies *against* the party nominee. And when Russia began to draft its own new (i.e., non-Soviet) constitution in 1990, he helped incorporate principles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Mikheyev does, at times, overstate the degree of change in Russia's culture in order to argue that Russia should now be given the benefit of the doubt as a member of the global community; there is a strong case to be made that the atavistic strains of nationalism involve not just the Communists and nationalists in the Russian parliament, but even some of the democrats, and that until they are overcome, Russia's neighbors may be forgiven for watching carefully for Russian developments in the next few years (and for wanting to join NATO).

But overall, Mikheyev makes an important case for Russia against the common assumptions of the academics, who seem to understand the situation about as well as Gorbachev did. "The prodigal son of European civilization," he says of Russia, "deserves a warm welcome, encouragement, and assistance from the community of civilized nations." The Prodigal Son, of course, showed genuine repentance. The measure of Yeltsin's achievement will be whether Russia's political and cultural change takes root after he is gone and whether, in the next century, Russia's national culture is indeed the reflection of a nation truly transformed. ♦

# GERRY RIGGED

## *The Crocodile Tears of an IRA Apologist*

**By Stuart Reid**

A year ago, Gerry Adams's comrades in the Irish Republican Army exploded a half-ton bomb outside my office in London's Docklands and scared the bejesus out of me. More to the point, they killed two young men—both, by cruel irony, Muslims—and signaled the end of an 18-month ceasefire. What little Adams has to say about the bomb in *Before the Dawn* speaks volumes. "As newsflash followed newsflash," he writes, "as the television pictures of Canary Wharf were shown, and as word of the casualties, and later the two fatalities, emerged, my sadness turned to sorrow as I thought of those who had died and been injured, and for their families." *My sadness turned to sorrow . . .* Was tautology ever more barefaced, more shameless, more brazen?

**Gerry Adams**
***Before the Dawn***
***An Autobiography***
Morrow, 356 pp., $25

Gerry Adams never apologizes, never explains. In the case of the Docklands bomb he admits that the IRA was responsible—but so does the IRA. That's the official line. Adams does not condemn the IRA, nor does he express outrage, or demand that the guilty men be brought to justice. As president of Sinn Fein he cannot do that. Sinn Fein is the political wing of the IRA, which makes the IRA the armed wing of Sinn Fein. Sinn Fein-IRA is a national liberation front. It is committed to ending British rule in Northern Ireland and to the creation of a single socialist state covering all of Ireland.

The nationalists have a case, at least historically. Over the centuries the Protestant English have robbed, beaten, and jailed the Catholic Irish. They have murdered them. They have subjected them to cruel and unusual punishments. Until very recently the Catholics in Northern Ireland were denied full political rights. When Adams was born in West Belfast in 1948 they were still an oppressed minority. In Derry, for example, where the majority was

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(and is) Catholic, gerrymandering ensured that the town council was run by Protestants. But the Catholics were not as oppressed as Adams would have us believe. It is true, as he says, that many thousands of poor Catholics throughout Northern Ireland had no vote in local elections, because they did not meet the property qualifications; but that was the case too with poor Protestants. The law did not discriminate.

The Adams family was certainly poor. Young Gerry was one of ten children. He knew what it was like to go without, and he makes the most of his disadvantages in *Before the Dawn*: The book's opening chapters are a cross between *Stand By Me* and those gritty English television dramas about working-class life in the industrial north. He writes of "our ma" and "our da" and grubby knees and freckled faces and first confessions ("I said 'frig,' Father. Father, I robbed an orchard, once. And me and my friends tied thread to oul' Ma Doren's door and we played 'kick the door' all night . . ." Penance: one Our Father and three Hail Marys). He lets you know that he loves dogs (not always a good sign) and folk music (always and everywhere a bad sign).

At times he is so transparent as to make you turn away in watery-eyed embarrassment. He recounts how he and his friends once caught a frog. One of his friends suggested that they should stick a straw up its arse and blow it up—the phrase makes you jump—like a football. But our Gerry would have none of it. Why, he took that frog from them right then and there and freed the little critter. On another occasion he shot a rabbit and was almost reduced to tears by its screeching.

You get the drift: Gerry Adams is a man of peace. The Brits—as he insists on calling the English—are the men of violence. The British Army is the brutal and brutalizing arm of the imperial power; there is routine torture of republican suspects; the loyalist Protestants conduct "pogroms" against the nationalist Catholics. In fact, the security forces have sometimes behaved abominably, but you would never guess from reading this book that the IRA had ever fired a shot, except in self-defense. You would never guess that of the 3,210 people killed in terrorist incidents in Northern Ireland since 1969, 2,260 were civilians, and that most of them were killed by


Michael Ramirez

republicans. You would never guess that three times as many Catholics have been killed by the IRA as by the Army and police. Adams's account of the Troubles is so one-sided as to be self-defeating. No honest man with wit enough to turn on a television set could be convinced by it.

That is not to say that the book is wholly without merit. There are powerful passages in it, and grim humor, too. But it is always tendentious, and often pernicious. There is a harrowing chapter on Bobby Sands's hunger strike in Long Kesh in 1981. Sands was a brave man, a man of principle; he was far from being the cowardly republican of English tabloid fantasy. It is impossible not to be moved by Sands's death, and Adams serves his friend well.

Yet it won't do to weep. Sands, who was serving 14 years for bombing a factory, died by his own hand. His suffering was freely chosen. At the time he died—for the supposed right of gunmen and bombers to be treated as political prisoners—Catholics in Northern Ireland enjoyed full civil rights. They were guaranteed freedom of speech, freedom of movement, freedom from arbitrary arrest, freedom of worship. There was nothing to die for—except for the IRA.

Bobby Sands did not die for Ireland; he died, poor sod, for the Irish Republican Army. The IRA, and Sinn Fein along with it, is fixated by death. In a gripping but loathsome passage Adams describes what goes through an IRA sniper's mind when he shoots a British soldier. As he waits for the Army patrol, the imaginary sniper—at least Adams insists that he is imaginary—asks himself whether it is right to kill. His answer: "It might or might not be right to kill, but sometimes it was necessary." Understandably, that line caused much bitterness when the book was published in England last year, but the idea that political killing is sometimes necessary is common to all cultures and all causes.

The IRA's killings, however, are clearly *unnecessary* even by terrorism's own forgiving criteria. Adams's comrades are killers without a cause. The conflict is now purely sectarian, tribal. There are no human-rights abuses in Northern Ireland, except when the gunmen and kneecappers (republican and loyalist) go to work. To be sure, there is a desire for a united Ireland among the Catholics in the north, but it is not a burning desire. They can wait. They suffer no disadvantages where they are. The border is open. They can live where they choose, and they choose to live in the north. The Ireland Adams wants—united, sovereign, socialist—will never come into being for the simplest of reasons: Nobody wants it. ♦

# Shut Up, I Explained

## *Unwelcome Interjections at the Multiplex*

**By John Podhoretz**

Tuesday, January 14. We complain a lot—who doesn't these days?—but it doesn't really take very much to entertain those of us who regularly go to the movies. If we really needed fascinating stories, sophisticated dialogue, and Aristotelian unities to satisfy us, would we be ponying up $7 a ticket to submit ourselves to torture once or twice a week? No, all it takes to keep us going back are a few good lines, a surprising performance in a small role, a touching moment. Moviegoers know far more about the medium than people who go only on occasion, and so we expect far less.

That's because we love the whole shebang: driving to the theater, arguing in the car about where to eat before or after, complaining about the lines and prices at the concession stand, searching for *le* seat *juste*, and sharing space with hundreds (sometimes dozens) of others in front of a huge screen in which you hope you might see something you can lose yourself in.

You pays your money and you takes your chances, the old saying goes, and these days one of the things you takes your chances on is who's watching with you. You want your fellow audience members to make noise as long as it's appropriate noise: laughter, sniffling, a frightened gasp. Increasingly, however, the noise is inappropriate.

There's no more obstreperous an audience than the one that shows up at a screening a few evenings before a movie's opening to generate some buzz, like tonight's showing of the new Eddie Murphy movie, *Metro*. In the audience: maybe a dozen local movie critics and about 500 teenagers who have come because they received special passes from a radio station. *Metro* is a paint-by-numbers San Francisco cop movie that seems intent on introducing today's teenagers to all the San Francisco cop-movie clichés the rest of us were already sick of 20 years ago. Cars fly through the air as they zoom down the city's hills; cars have high-speed chases as they approach Fisherman's Wharf. Everything else is familiar too. When we meet Dirty Eddie's best friend, another cop, we know he's going to be killed by a crazy mastermind criminal a few minutes later. And when Dirty Eddie lets the crazy mastermind criminal live about midway through, you can just bet the crazy mastermind criminal escapes from prison and kidnaps Eddie's cute girlfriend in the last reel.

Movie Diary

**Metro**
Eddie Murphy, Michael Wincott

**The People vs. Larry Flynt**
Woody Harrelson, Courtney Love

**Everyone Says I Love You**
Woody Allen, Julia Roberts

Actually, *Metro* isn't that bad—one of the chase scenes is pretty hair-raising, and Murphy has found new life as a movie actor after a long dry spell—but I will never be able to think about it fondly because of the guy three rows behind me who kept talking at conversational level throughout the movie. He was mumbling, so one couldn't actually hear what he was saying. And he was a big guy, clearly drunk or stoned or both, so even though he was annoying everybody in the place, nobody said a word.

Now, this is not a new phenomenon; you don't have to read stories about movie-theater violence to know that it may be injurious to your health to say "Ssssh" unless the talker is an overeager prepubescent or a yuppie. And '90s teenagers tend to be ill-bred louts who don't know to shut up when the movie starts. Usually, however, they quiet down after a few minutes because, being as ill-educated as they are, these kids have to pay very close attention to expository dialogue. Or the movie takes over even when the audience doesn't want it to.

Almost 20 years ago now, at a gruesome horror movie called *Mother's Day* at a dive theater in the Chicago Loop, I found myself sitting right behind a huge man who was delivering a long monologue about his recent release from Joliet. I felt I dare not move away, because I did not want to offend him, and so he kept right on talking—until the movie became genuinely disturbing, whereupon this parolee from a maximum-security prison put his head in his hands and began rocking back and forth, moaning, "Oh, my Lord! Oh, my Lord!"

*Metro* failed at this. Nor did nonconfrontational glances from fellow patrons distract the talker. He saw the glances, and they just seemed to spur him on. He wanted to talk. He wanted to disturb. He wanted people to know he was there. And he knew that because his was a threatening presence, we would suck it in—which is a humiliating experience.

What does such a gesture mean? I have long puzzled about this, but tonight an answer suddenly occurs to me: the *thymotic urge*! This is the term popularized by Francis Fukuyama in his book *The End of History and the Last Man* to describe the post-Communist political dynamic. It means the urge for recognition—in political terms, recognizing the rights of ethnicities to their own native lands most especially. It is the insistence that (to use the drippy phrase from *Death of a Salesman*) "attention

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must finally be paid." I guess at the end of history, the thymotic urge comes in many forms, including the rage of some moviegoer in Washington, D.C., that he is not Eddie Murphy, who commands $15 million a picture because he can honestly hold the attention of hundreds of people in the dark.

**Friday, January 17.** There's another kind of audience that can ruin a movie—one that brings with it a set of political or ideological assumptions and lets those assumptions be known by well-timed guffaws or snorts. These inappropriate noises are offered up as a sign of election—to prove that the audience member is in on the joke with the moviemaker.

That's what went on tonight at *The People vs. Larry Flynt*, a movie I feared seeing because I really didn't want to like it but suspected I was going to anyway. Reviews talked about how entertaining this portrait of the notorious pornographer and his run-ins with the law was, and any moviegoer who is also a conservative has long ago had to reconcile himself to the experience of enjoying movies he disapproves of.

Fortunately, *The People vs. Larry Flynt* doesn't put me to that test, because it's a dud; it's not only about the 1970s and photographed to evoke the look of an ambitious 1970s movie, but it feels as though everybody involved in the movie's creation fell asleep in 1976 and awakened in 1996 with every meretricious attitude and idea from the '70s intact. In the world according to *The People vs. Larry Flynt*, porn is actually surprisingly wholesome, as only an "anti-Establishment" business can be. But it's deserving of our scorn and amusement, too, because it's filled with a bunch of crackers and rednecks who seem to exist just to hand us superior folk in the audience a good laugh at their crudity and lack of taste. People who don't like pornography, on the other hand, are Victorian prudes all, who probably have deep sexual maladjustments.

The only thing taken seriously is "free speech," which is saved by the great men of the Supreme Court. The court is treated here with a reverence familiar to those of us who attended private schools where we were taught that the wildly irresponsible associate justice William O. Douglas was the greatest man of the century (even though the movie's version of Douglas is, of all people, Antonin Scalia, not the kind of person you expect to be canonized in a film produced by Oliver Stone).

*Three people who shouldn't sing*

*The People vs. Larry Flynt* is such a stiff, in fact, that it seems like nothing so much as a "snob hit"—William Goldman's term for a Broadway play that nobody really likes but everybody thinks he's supposed to like, in this case because Frank Rich wrote a column two months before the movie's release giving it the *New York Times* Op-Ed Page Good Liberal Seal of Approval. But as the movie progresses, I can tell by the noise in the theater that I'm wrong about the nobody-really-likes-it part. Every few minutes, *The People vs. Larry Flynt* sends out little cultural messages like Morse code, nothing very fancy or complicated. The movie's chief voice of unreason, a right-wing prosecutor, is played by James Carville. Some derogatory words about religion are issued in ringing voice by the movie's figure of honesty and conscience, Flynt's stripper-junkie-AIDS-suffering wife Althea. They are followed by a portrait of the evangelist Ruth Carter Stapleton as a brilliant seducer who uses sexual wiles to convert Flynt to born-again Christianity. Jerry Falwell, whose lawsuit against Flynt is the subject of the movie's last half, is played by an actor named Richard Paul who looks somewhat like Flynt and even more like the Pillsbury Doughboy.

What director Milos Forman is doing, in his very clever way, is dividing his audience in two: You don't have to like Larry Flynt (although why shouldn't you, given how cute Woody Harrelson is in the part?), but you certainly have no choice but to despise and be dismissive of his enemies. Rather like Frank Rich's favorite theatrical experience, Tony Kushner's embarrassingly awful six-hour play *Angels in America*, *The People vs. Larry Flynt* is a work of cultural shorthand. Just as Kushner expects his audience to laugh derisively along with him at the mere mention of "Ed Meese" and "Ed Koch," so does Forman's movie work by reinforcing the prejudices of his chosen audience. Pavlov couldn't have planned it better; liberals in the audience titter and murmur appreciatively, then leave the theater thinking they've had a thought-provoking experience.

**Saturday, January 25.** Sometimes you feel a bond with your fellow audience members because the experience you are sharing is so ghastly that, like passengers on the Andrea Doria, you know only this select few will ever understand what you went through. Thus it is this afternoon with *Everyone Says I Love You*, the new Woody Allen movie. Yes, it has received decent reviews, which only

proves that in New York, movie studios must require all journalists to undergo lobotomies before they are given critics' credentials.

It has long been a joke that if Allen made a snuff film, the *New York Times* critics would find something to praise about it. Well, *Everyone Says I Love You* may not be the moral equivalent of a snuff film, but if any cast member's career survives this debacle, it won't be thanks to Allen.

It is a musical, but one in which Allen did not cast singers or dancers, just movie actors who were then told to sing and dance. It is a disaster from the first moment, when the hapless Edward Norton (who's terrific in *Larry Flynt*) starts singing "Just You, Just Me" in a ghastly, froggy voice and is then joined by nannies on the Upper East Side, a bum panhandling for change, and dancing mannequins in the window of Madison Avenue's Yves Saint-Laurent store.

From then on until the closing credits, you sit in a state of anxiety, actually frightened that, at any moment, Norton or somebody else might begin singing. The worst scene features an obviously alarmed Julia Roberts, sitting beside a Venice canal moaning "All My Life" in a monotone reminiscent of the sound made when you blow into an empty Coke bottle.

Why would he do such a thing? Why would Woody Allen willingly make a movie that resembles nothing so much as *Springtime for Hitler*, the deliberately bad show at the center of Mel Brooks's classic comedy *The Producers*? The answer can be found in a small scene about twenty minutes into the movie, when an aging cast member turns from a window to whisper the lyrics to "I'm Through with Love." Who is the aging cast member? Why, none other than Woody Allen himself! Yes, it appears the man wanted to hear himself sing on screen and devised the only kind of movie in which such an act would be possible.

Does that seem unimaginable to you? It shouldn't; Woody Allen makes any movie he wants to, has total control over the movies he makes, and has arranged things so that his sister is his producer. No wonder he felt free to seduce his teenage stepdaughter; there's nobody around to tell him that he shouldn't spend $20 million on a movie just to hear himself sing like a frog.

A few months ago, critics had a field day making fun of Barbra Streisand for turning her movie *The Mirror Has Two Faces* into a vanity production in which other characters talked about how much they admired and envied the character Barbra plays. Streisand was a model of self-effacement compared with Woody Allen, a 62-year-old man who casts Julia Roberts as his own love interest and photographs a scene straight in which she goes on and on to her analyst about how sexy he is. Later, in the movie's final scene, Allen and Goldie Hawn (who play a divorced couple) sit beside the Seine while she tells him that he is the only man she ever really loved, and boy, the sex was great.

That is not the most offensive moment in *Everyone Says I Love You*. The most offensive moment occurs when a politically conservative character—the teenage son of limousine liberals who reads *National Review* and speaks eloquent words in defense of his beliefs, like "School prayer! The right to bear arms!"—is rushed to the hospital with an arterial blockage. Turns out that he wasn't really right wing, just delusional.

The audience sharing the theater with me in a mall in Wheaton, Md., greeted this jape with the same appalled silence that it did the rest of the movie. All but one fellow a few rows ahead of me, who did not talk back at the screen. He just grabbed his coat, stormed up the aisle, and left the theater. I wanted to shake his hand. ♦

# The Internet Fetishist

## *No, the Times They Aren't A-Changin'*

**By Alan Ehrenhalt**

Thirty years ago, Bob Dylan issued a belligerent warning to the mothers and fathers of baby-boom America: "Don't criticize what you can't understand/Your sons and your daughters are beyond your command." It's hard to imagine a more chilling thing to say to the parent of an adolescent. Of course, not many parents were listening—the primary consumers of this record-album manifesto were the teenagers Dylan was encouraging to rebel. He knew perfectly well when he wrote "The Times They Are A-Changin'" that he was speaking to and for his own generation, and that was what gave Dylan's lyrics their odd sort of primitive power.

Had Dylan been 50 when he wrote those words, they wouldn't have sounded very dramatic; he would have seemed like a confused middle-aged man seeking to curry favor with his children. Still, every generation produces its share of older people who seek out roles either as Pied Piper to the young or as voice of doom to the old, or both. In retrospect, most of them come off as hyperbolic fools. If you want to see a good example, pick up an old paperback copy of Charles Reich's *The Greening of America*. "The new consciousness is sweeping the high schools, it is seen in smiles on the streets," Reich proclaimed in that bestseller, published in 1970. "Hardly anybody of the older generation, even the FBI or the sociologists, knows much about it, for its language and thought are so different from Consciousness II as to make it virtually an undecipherable secret code." How Reich managed to crack the code as a 42-year-old Yale law professor, he didn't bother to say.

It's not hard to understand why Pied Piperism attracts middle-aged writers like Reich who ought to know better. They have an opportunity in one stroke to identify themselves with the energy and idealism of adolescence, and to establish a posture of moral superiority to their stodgy contemporaries still standing in the doorway and blocking up the hall.

**Jon Katz**
***Virtuous Reality***
***How America surrendered discussion of moral values to opportunists, nitwits & blockheads like William Bennett***
Random House, 212 pp., $21

This is the opportunity that has been seized eagerly by Jon Katz, former newspaper editor and TV news producer, novelist, and current media critic for *Wired.* In his new book, *Virtuous Reality*, Katz makes almost the same claims for the youth culture of the 1990s that Bob Dylan and Charles Reich did for the youth culture of the 1960s. This time, though, the instrument of rebellion isn't primarily music, or drugs, or politics; it's the Internet. "Kids are moving out from under our pious control," he lectures his own parental cohort, "finding one another via the great hive that is the Net. . . . American kids now have the most diverse, sophisticated and interesting culture on the planet. They aren't going to give it up. Grasp this or pass into history."

Dylan's version was a little more colorful: "You better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone." But it's really only the medium that's different; the message has the same ominous tone to it. Katz believes that access to the Internet is giving young people a common language and a sense of generational solidarity that will forever set them apart from their elders. He celebrates this new consciousness as a genuine rebirth of free thought and expression in America. He thinks concerns about the offensive nature of Internet communication are exaggerated, and attempts to regulate it futile. He considers the would-be regulators to be narrow-minded modern incarnations of Anthony Comstock and the Society for the Suppression of Vice.

Of all the villains determined to spoil the young people's innocent fun, one in particular drives Katz crazy: William Bennett. Katz dislikes Bennett so much that he can't even wait for the introduction to start unloading on him: The book's subtitle dubs Bennett a "nitwit" and a "blockhead." And Katz keeps it up for much of *Virtuous Reality*'s 212 pages. Bennett is a shameless self-promoter who made millions of dollars packaging useless homilies into *The Book of Virtues*. Bennett was an incompetent public official whose

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failures as education secretary and as drug czar disqualify him as an authority on any aspect of public policy. "Bennett is not only a bully," Katz says, "but an especially cold-hearted one when it comes to children, for whom his concern is as selective as it is lucrative."

There is little doubt Katz is playing to an audience that exists in significant size in cyberspace: To information libertarians all over the country, young and old, Bennett has emerged as an icon for neo-Puritanism. But in devoting a significant chunk of his book to Bennett-bashing, Katz sets a tone of ad hominem pettiness that taints just about everything else he tries to say. The author's reverence for free and open debate does not deter him from dismissing as an ignorant dinosaur virtually anybody who happens to disagree with him about the Internet, cyber-culture, or its effect on adolescents and children. Merely to raise the issue of Internet or pop-culture content, in Katz's view, is to be a "Mediaphobe," and a Mediaphobe is not just mistaken but pathetically ignorant, "afraid for himself of what he doesn't know or is too intimidated to learn."

Charles Reich at least had an air of benign optimism that made him difficult to dislike, no matter how goofy his Pied Piperism sounded. Jon Katz has no such saving grace. Reading *Virtuous Reality* is like listening to a man shrieking at the top of his lungs for everyone else to calm down. It is hard to imagine any critic of the Internet or pop culture being more self-righteous in attacking it than Katz is in defending it.

The first error his enemies make, in Katz's opinion, is to assume that there is a great deal of filth in cyberspace to begin with. He cites studies that have found pornography constitutes less than one-half of one percent of all Internet messages, and says most offensive Internet material is actually available only to adults who pay for it with credit cards.

I don't question the numbers. On the other hand, a couple of weeks ago, wandering around the Internet at halftime of a Sunday afternoon football game, I managed in ten minutes to find Web sites or News Groups with the following titles: "Joey Loves Sheep," "B—busting Cockfights," "Best Rap Albums to Get Stoned To," "Hows and Whys of Amphetamines," and "F— the Skull of Jesus." Katz is no doubt correct that there are far more sites on the Web devoted to teaching physics than there are to promoting bestiality. That's not the point. The issue isn't quantity, it's access. If I can find that much trash that quickly, any intelligent 10-year-old with a prurient curiosity can find it too, and maybe faster than I.

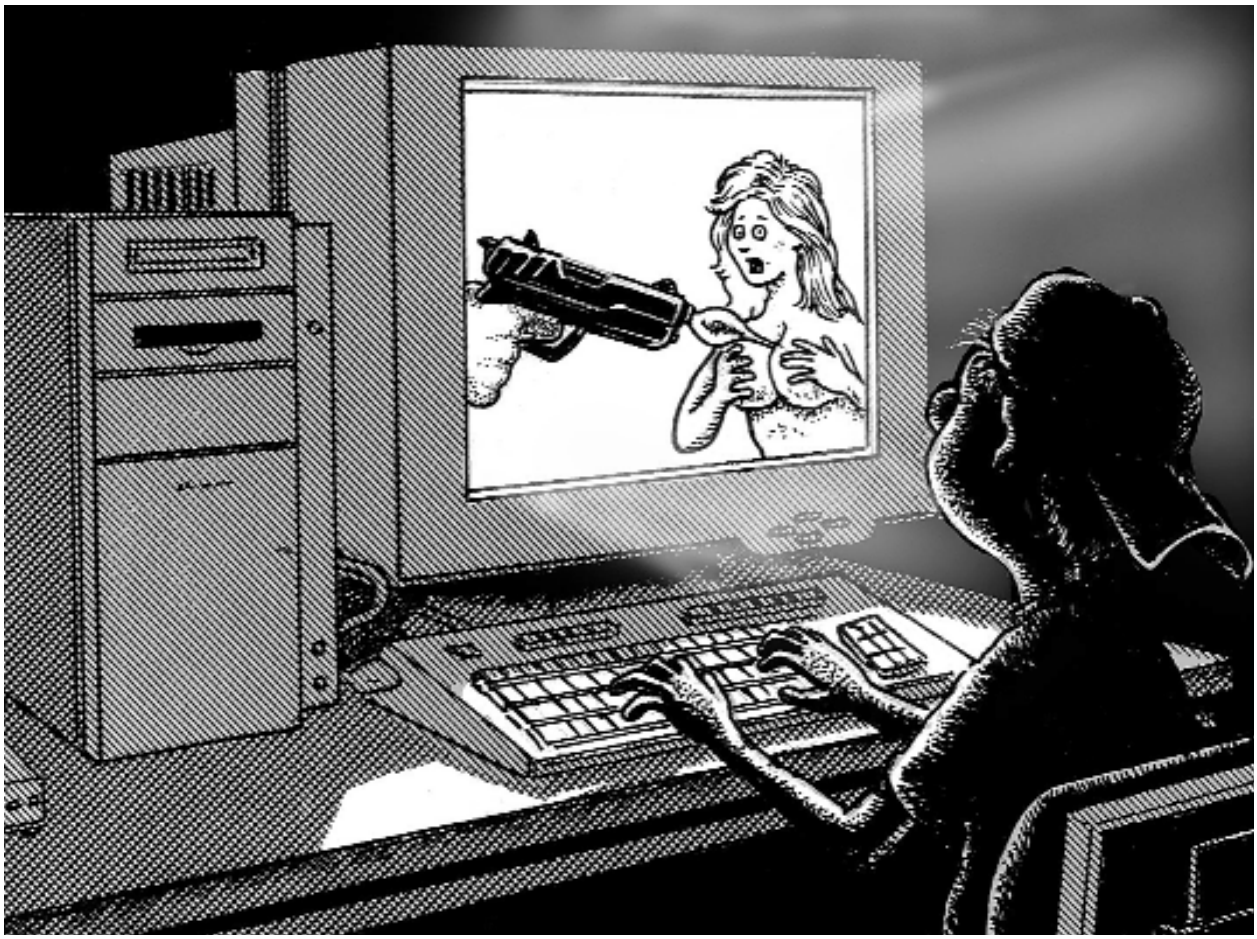
The real question is whether we need to be worrying about this. Katz believes it is foolish to be concerned about sex and violence on the Internet because they do not lead to violent behavior or irresponsible sexual activity in real life. "We know what's killing young people," he proclaims, "and it isn't lyrics, cartoons or computers." It's guns. Katz is a sort of National Rifle Association in reverse: People Don't Kill People, Guns Kill People. Or at least, people don't kill people as a result of anything they have read, watched, or discovered in the popular culture. He is sure beyond any measure of doubt that the daily consumption of brutality through the agency of pop culture has nothing to do with the problem of teenage violence. He says that, despite years of research and hundreds of studies, no statistical link has ever been demonstrated. He is equally certain that kids exposed to images of promiscuous sexuality are no more likely to experiment with it than anyone else.

And on the narrow question of proof, he is right. It will be monumentally difficult to demonstrate statistically to the entire society's satisfaction that rap lyrics or violent Web sites or cyber-pornography are responsible for individual instances of violent teenage behavior. Anybody determined to believe that brutal cultural images have no effect on the conduct of young people is going to believe it, and there's not going to be definitive social science to the contrary. But this claim is against all the evidence of common sense.

Katz not only believes it, he preaches it to the point of dogmatic absurdity. "Few serious students of child psychology," he declares, "think culture shapes the moral sense of children." I don't know who Katz's psychologists are—maybe he finds them in online chat rooms. But this is perhaps the silliest statement in a book that offers quite a large supply. If culture has nothing to do with the values of young people, what does? This is a question that Katz doesn't even seem to realize he is asking. As long as he can acquit the Internet, he has no interest in a serious search for other suspects.

For those stubborn readers who might be unimpressed by his arguments that Internet trash is both scarce and irrelevant to conduct, Katz is prepared to offer another one. Parents who raise their children decently needn't worry about the effects of pop culture. "If parents teach morals, live moral lives, discourage and punish immoral behavior and treat their children in a moral way," he assures them, "the children are much more likely to act morally as adults." Few Americans would disagree, but coming from this particular author, this suggests a few practical problems. At the moment he makes his proclamation, Katz has spent nearly 200 pages announcing that young people are living in their own world, speaking their own language, forming their own values, and are all but impervious to adult moralizing. If we don't even understand what our children are saying, how are we supposed to get through to them? Maybe we could borrow a decoder from Charles Reich.

However we might choose to talk to our children, Katz warns us in no



Sean Delonas

uncertain terms that it is pointless to try to restrict them or censor their channels of communication. V-chips, communications-decency laws, lobbying America Online to restrict access to obscenity—all are exercises in futility.

Not only that, they will cause young people to turn even more bitterly against their elders. "Parents who thoughtlessly ban access to online culture or lyrics they don't like or understand, or who exaggerate and distort the dangers of violence and pornographic imagery, are acting out of arrogance, imposing brute authority. . . . It is doomed, no more effective at stemming the great tidal waves of popular and technoculture than Cotton Mather was at banishing dancing, profanity, frivolity on the Sabbath, and general godlessness."

The analogy has a few holes in it. Just how successful Cotton Mather may have been in his crusade against godlessness I don't know, but when it came to dancing and frivolity, he won a lot more frequently than he lost. If Bennett does half that well against rap lyrics and pornographic Web sites, he will be one successful neo-Puritan.

Still, it's hard to deny that Katz has a point here. The really revolutionary aspect of sex and violence on the Internet is its almost entirely private character. For a teenager to have gotten his hands on anything this dirty in the past, he would have had to take some chances. Reading *Hustler* on a newsstand, sneaking into an X-rated movie, hiding dirty books under the bed—all of those experiments risked embarrassment at the least and serious punishment at the worst. That alone deterred most potential offenders.

Hardcore sex and violence on the Internet present no such problem. The eager consumer can have them for free with no need to ask an adult for them and very little risk of being caught in the act. And so Katz is right: No matter the controls society attempts to impose, American youth will, in the years to come, be watching and reading more material their parents consider offensive than young people in the past. That is a fact of life parents of the 21st century will have to deal with. But it is not an argument against establishing standards of decency and civility, and expressing those standards in the form of rules governing the things we want children to see and hear.

There are a few principles of a civilized society that the vast majority of Americans actually agree on. One is

the abhorrence of gratuitous violence. Another is the importance of expressing sexuality in lasting and meaningful relationships. There is no need to be embarrassed about expressing those values, or about imposing some discipline on a medium of entertainment that mocks them. Majorities have rights, too.

It's quite true, as Jon Katz says, that whatever rules we make, quite a few teenagers will find ways to evade. Adolescents like to rebel, as they did in Bob Dylan's generation and every other generation in history. There's nothing we can do about that. What we can do is make sure they have something to rebel against. ♦

BCA

# The Great Yeltsin Theory

## *Making the Case for a Russia Transformed*

**By David Aikman**

For scores of Russia specialists and international-relations experts on campuses across the United States, the collapse of communism was not entirely a cause for celebration. The need to understand Soviet behavior, and the Russian character, had created thousands of professorships from San Diego to Maine. And as long as the Soviet Union was in place, there were innumerable occasions for innumerable grants to peer into the riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.

The result was about four decades of Kremlinology that all too often treated Russians as a scarcely human species, an offshoot of homo sapiens distorted by the gene of totalitarianism. Whenever the Soviet Union was relatively stable—from, say, 1968 to 1985—Kremlinology was sometimes useful for determining who exactly was up and who was down in the party hierarchy, and which particular policies were in or out of favor. But Kremlinology proved itself utterly inadequate at grasping major cultural or sociological changes that changed the political nature of Russia far more than purges at the top.

Despite that failure, the Kremlinologists are still with us, and their thinking continues to dominate American writing about post-Communist Russia. If you read academic journals and the mainstream reporting that is affected by them, you might get the idea that nothing has really changed in Russia. Oh, the Soviet Union is gone and the gulag is no more. But isn't their nationalism still a bit mystical, and don't they all really long for the good old days of guaranteed jobs, triumphs in space, and great ballet at the Bolshoi?

**Dmitry Mikheyev**
***Russia Transformed***
Hudson Institute, 288 pp., $12.95

No, they don't. It is the primary contention of Dmitry Mikheyev's brilliantly argued and at times dazzlingly insightful *Russia Transformed* that Russia and Russians really have changed character. Russians may not yet be Rotarians or Shriners, but they have unequivocally decided that political democracy is infinitely preferable to authoritarianism, that the free market is a better system for creating and distributing wealth than state socialism, and that integrating the Russian national culture into the global culture is a wiser course than Slavophilic isolation.

Russia's ideological transformation was three decades in the making, beginning in 1956 with the Khrushchevite thaw and culminating in 1986 with the emergence of glasnost. The theoretical underpinnings of totalitarianism were washed away by the tide of heterodox ideas penetrating the country through radio, samizdat, and tourism. And those heterodox ideas have been absorbed not just by intellectuals but by *most* Russians.

Political change followed swiftly when Mikhail Gorbachev introduced a small but ultimately decisive smidgen of electoral freedom leading up to the vote for the Congress of People's Deputies in 1989. That dollop of democracy became the decisive ingredient in Boris Yeltsin's emergence as a major democratic leader and Russia's declaration of sovereignty within the Soviet Union in 1990.

Economic change came about in 1992, when price controls were relaxed on 90 percent of Russian consumer prices and privatization of the entire state economy was set in motion. Despite Russia's shaky economic foundation, Mikheyev argues, the country is now a net exporter of grain, its food supply is better than ever, and economic life for the average Russian is better than at any time in Russian history. "In 1996," Mikheyev writes, "Russia is an urbanized, industrialized, relatively homogeneous . . . secular, presidential republic, run by a technocratic elite, with private ownership and the free market, a free press and parliamentarism."

The principal explanation for this achievement, Mikheyev argues, is that at every pivotal moment, Boris Yeltsin stood in the forefront, unequivocally representing the emerging new culture rather than the old world of the nomenklatura. In the past ten years, Yeltsin has played a central (or *the* central) role in the collapse of the Soviet Union, the

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growth of Russian democracy, and the end of the Soviet empire. Mikheyev suggests Yeltsin will be the only leading figure of the anti-Communist revolution in Europe whom history will judge "both a hero and a great man."

Yeltsin, Mikheyev reminds us, has by turns been a star athlete, innovative engineer, efficient administrator, apparatchik, dissenter, popular hero, and Machiavellian political infighter. In one of the best sections of *Russia Transformed*, Mikheyev compares the background and upbringing of Yeltsin, viewed as a "buffoon" by George Bush's National Security Council, with those of Mikhail Gorbachev, the darling of the Council on Foreign Relations. Both were born to peasant families in 1931 at the very height of the Great Terror, both lost family members to Stalin's paranoia, and both had authoritarian parents.

But there the resemblance ends. Gorbachev learned to deal with the political terror by joining the Communist party machinery that directed it as soon as he could. Yeltsin, by contrast, didn't join the party until he was 30, when he could no longer rise in his professional career without doing so. Gorbachev could not quite grasp what was happening to the country and empire over whose self-destruction he was inadvertently presiding. Yeltsin followed the logic of his own ideological transformation after criticizing Gorbachev at a Politburo meeting in 1987. He quickly and naturally became a democratic activist. In two years' time, Yeltsin had run for a seat in the Congress of People's Deputies *against* the party nominee. And when Russia began to draft its own new (i.e., non-Soviet) constitution in 1990, he helped incorporate principles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Mikheyev does, at times, overstate the degree of change in Russia's culture in order to argue that Russia should now be given the benefit of the doubt as a member of the global community; there is a strong case to be made that the atavistic strains of nationalism involve not just the Communists and nationalists in the Russian parliament, but even some of the democrats, and that until they are overcome, Russia's neighbors may be forgiven for watching carefully for Russian developments in the next few years (and for wanting to join NATO).

But overall, Mikheyev makes an important case for Russia against the common assumptions of the academics, who seem to understand the situation about as well as Gorbachev did. "The prodigal son of European civilization," he says of Russia, "deserves a warm welcome, encouragement, and assistance from the community of civilized nations." The Prodigal Son, of course, showed genuine repentance. The measure of Yeltsin's achievement will be whether Russia's political and cultural change takes root after he is gone and whether, in the next century, Russia's national culture is indeed the reflection of a nation truly transformed. ♦

# GERRY RIGGED

## *The Crocodile Tears of an IRA Apologist*

**By Stuart Reid**

A year ago, Gerry Adams's comrades in the Irish Republican Army exploded a half-ton bomb outside my office in London's Docklands and scared the bejesus out of me. More to the point, they killed two young men—both, by cruel irony, Muslims—and signaled the end of an 18-month ceasefire. What little Adams has to say about the bomb in *Before the Dawn* speaks volumes. "As newsflash followed newsflash," he writes, "as the television pictures of Canary Wharf were shown, and as word of the casualties, and later the two fatalities, emerged, my sadness turned to sorrow as I thought of those who had died and been injured, and for their families." *My sadness turned to sorrow . . .* Was tautology ever more barefaced, more shameless, more brazen?

**Gerry Adams**
***Before the Dawn***
***An Autobiography***
Morrow, 356 pp., $25

Gerry Adams never apologizes, never explains. In the case of the Docklands bomb he admits that the IRA was responsible—but so does the IRA. That's the official line. Adams does not condemn the IRA, nor does he express outrage, or demand that the guilty men be brought to justice. As president of Sinn Fein he cannot do that. Sinn Fein is the political wing of the IRA, which makes the IRA the armed wing of Sinn Fein. Sinn Fein-IRA is a national liberation front. It is committed to ending British rule in Northern Ireland and to the creation of a single socialist state covering all of Ireland.

The nationalists have a case, at least historically. Over the centuries the Protestant English have robbed, beaten, and jailed the Catholic Irish. They have murdered them. They have subjected them to cruel and unusual punishments. Until very recently the Catholics in Northern Ireland were denied full political rights. When Adams was born in West Belfast in 1948 they were still an oppressed minority. In Derry, for example, where the majority was

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(and is) Catholic, gerrymandering ensured that the town council was run by Protestants. But the Catholics were not as oppressed as Adams would have us believe. It is true, as he says, that many thousands of poor Catholics throughout Northern Ireland had no vote in local elections, because they did not meet the property qualifications; but that was the case too with poor Protestants. The law did not discriminate.

The Adams family was certainly poor. Young Gerry was one of ten children. He knew what it was like to go without, and he makes the most of his disadvantages in *Before the Dawn*: The book's opening chapters are a cross between *Stand By Me* and those gritty English television dramas about working-class life in the industrial north. He writes of "our ma" and "our da" and grubby knees and freckled faces and first confessions ("I said 'frig,' Father. Father, I robbed an orchard, once. And me and my friends tied thread to oul' Ma Doren's door and we played 'kick the door' all night . . ." Penance: one Our Father and three Hail Marys). He lets you know that he loves dogs (not always a good sign) and folk music (always and everywhere a bad sign).

At times he is so transparent as to make you turn away in watery-eyed embarrassment. He recounts how he and his friends once caught a frog. One of his friends suggested that they should stick a straw up its arse and blow it up—the phrase makes you jump—like a football. But our Gerry would have none of it. Why, he took that frog from them right then and there and freed the little critter. On another occasion he shot a rabbit and was almost reduced to tears by its screeching.

You get the drift: Gerry Adams is a man of peace. The Brits—as he insists on calling the English—are the men of violence. The British Army is the brutal and brutalizing arm of the imperial power; there is routine torture of republican suspects; the loyalist Protestants conduct "pogroms" against the nationalist Catholics. In fact, the security forces have sometimes behaved abominably, but you would never guess from reading this book that the IRA had ever fired a shot, except in self-defense. You would never guess that of the 3,210 people killed in terrorist incidents in Northern Ireland since 1969, 2,260 were civilians, and that most of them were killed by


Michael Ramirez

republicans. You would never guess that three times as many Catholics have been killed by the IRA as by the Army and police. Adams's account of the Troubles is so one-sided as to be self-defeating. No honest man with wit enough to turn on a television set could be convinced by it.

That is not to say that the book is wholly without merit. There are powerful passages in it, and grim humor, too. But it is always tendentious, and often pernicious. There is a harrowing chapter on Bobby Sands's hunger strike in Long Kesh in 1981. Sands was a brave man, a man of principle; he was far from being the cowardly republican of English tabloid fantasy. It is impossible not to be moved by Sands's death, and Adams serves his friend well.

Yet it won't do to weep. Sands, who was serving 14 years for bombing a factory, died by his own hand. His suffering was freely chosen. At the time he died—for the supposed right of gunmen and bombers to be treated as political prisoners—Catholics in Northern Ireland enjoyed full civil rights. They were guaranteed freedom of speech, freedom of movement, freedom from arbitrary arrest, freedom of worship. There was nothing to die for—except for the IRA.

Bobby Sands did not die for Ireland; he died, poor sod, for the Irish Republican Army. The IRA, and Sinn Fein along with it, is fixated by death. In a gripping but loathsome passage Adams describes what goes through an IRA sniper's mind when he shoots a British soldier. As he waits for the Army patrol, the imaginary sniper—at least Adams insists that he is imaginary—asks himself whether it is right to kill. His answer: "It might or might not be right to kill, but sometimes it was necessary." Understandably, that line caused much bitterness when the book was published in England last year, but the idea that political killing is sometimes necessary is common to all cultures and all causes.

The IRA's killings, however, are clearly *unnecessary* even by terrorism's own forgiving criteria. Adams's comrades are killers without a cause. The conflict is now purely sectarian, tribal. There are no human-rights abuses in Northern Ireland, except when the gunmen and kneecappers (republican and loyalist) go to work. To be sure, there is a desire for a united Ireland among the Catholics in the north, but it is not a burning desire. They can wait. They suffer no disadvantages where they are. The border is open. They can live where they choose, and they choose to live in the north. The Ireland Adams wants—united, sovereign, socialist—will never come into being for the simplest of reasons: Nobody wants it. ♦

# Shut Up, I Explained

## *Unwelcome Interjections at the Multiplex*

**By John Podhoretz**

Tuesday, January 14. We complain a lot—who doesn't these days?—but it doesn't really take very much to entertain those of us who regularly go to the movies. If we really needed fascinating stories, sophisticated dialogue, and Aristotelian unities to satisfy us, would we be ponying up $7 a ticket to submit ourselves to torture once or twice a week? No, all it takes to keep us going back are a few good lines, a surprising performance in a small role, a touching moment. Moviegoers know far more about the medium than people who go only on occasion, and so we expect far less.

That's because we love the whole shebang: driving to the theater, arguing in the car about where to eat before or after, complaining about the lines and prices at the concession stand, searching for *le* seat *juste*, and sharing space with hundreds (sometimes dozens) of others in front of a huge screen in which you hope you might see something you can lose yourself in.

You pays your money and you takes your chances, the old saying goes, and these days one of the things you takes your chances on is who's watching with you. You want your fellow audience members to make noise as long as it's appropriate noise: laughter, sniffling, a frightened gasp. Increasingly, however, the noise is inappropriate.

There's no more obstreperous an audience than the one that shows up at a screening a few evenings before a movie's opening to generate some buzz, like tonight's showing of the new Eddie Murphy movie, *Metro*. In the audience: maybe a dozen local movie critics and about 500 teenagers who have come because they received special passes from a radio station. *Metro* is a paint-by-numbers San Francisco cop movie that seems intent on introducing today's teenagers to all the San Francisco cop-movie clichés the rest of us were already sick of 20 years ago. Cars fly through the air as they zoom down the city's hills; cars have high-speed chases as they approach Fisherman's Wharf. Everything else is familiar too. When we meet Dirty Eddie's best friend, another cop, we know he's going to be killed by a crazy mastermind criminal a few minutes later. And when Dirty Eddie lets the crazy mastermind criminal live about midway through, you can just bet the crazy mastermind criminal escapes from prison and kidnaps Eddie's cute girlfriend in the last reel.

Movie Diary

**Metro**
Eddie Murphy, Michael Wincott

**The People vs. Larry Flynt**
Woody Harrelson, Courtney Love

**Everyone Says I Love You**
Woody Allen, Julia Roberts

Actually, *Metro* isn't that bad—one of the chase scenes is pretty hair-raising, and Murphy has found new life as a movie actor after a long dry spell—but I will never be able to think about it fondly because of the guy three rows behind me who kept talking at conversational level throughout the movie. He was mumbling, so one couldn't actually hear what he was saying. And he was a big guy, clearly drunk or stoned or both, so even though he was annoying everybody in the place, nobody said a word.

Now, this is not a new phenomenon; you don't have to read stories about movie-theater violence to know that it may be injurious to your health to say "Ssssh" unless the talker is an overeager prepubescent or a yuppie. And '90s teenagers tend to be ill-bred louts who don't know to shut up when the movie starts. Usually, however, they quiet down after a few minutes because, being as ill-educated as they are, these kids have to pay very close attention to expository dialogue. Or the movie takes over even when the audience doesn't want it to.

Almost 20 years ago now, at a gruesome horror movie called *Mother's Day* at a dive theater in the Chicago Loop, I found myself sitting right behind a huge man who was delivering a long monologue about his recent release from Joliet. I felt I dare not move away, because I did not want to offend him, and so he kept right on talking—until the movie became genuinely disturbing, whereupon this parolee from a maximum-security prison put his head in his hands and began rocking back and forth, moaning, "Oh, my Lord! Oh, my Lord!"

*Metro* failed at this. Nor did nonconfrontational glances from fellow patrons distract the talker. He saw the glances, and they just seemed to spur him on. He wanted to talk. He wanted to disturb. He wanted people to know he was there. And he knew that because his was a threatening presence, we would suck it in—which is a humiliating experience.

What does such a gesture mean? I have long puzzled about this, but tonight an answer suddenly occurs to me: the *thymotic urge*! This is the term popularized by Francis Fukuyama in his book *The End of History and the Last Man* to describe the post-Communist political dynamic. It means the urge for recognition—in political terms, recognizing the rights of ethnicities to their own native lands most especially. It is the insistence that (to use the drippy phrase from *Death of a Salesman*) "attention

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must finally be paid." I guess at the end of history, the thymotic urge comes in many forms, including the rage of some moviegoer in Washington, D.C., that he is not Eddie Murphy, who commands $15 million a picture because he can honestly hold the attention of hundreds of people in the dark.

**Friday, January 17.** There's another kind of audience that can ruin a movie—one that brings with it a set of political or ideological assumptions and lets those assumptions be known by well-timed guffaws or snorts. These inappropriate noises are offered up as a sign of election—to prove that the audience member is in on the joke with the moviemaker.

That's what went on tonight at *The People vs. Larry Flynt*, a movie I feared seeing because I really didn't want to like it but suspected I was going to anyway. Reviews talked about how entertaining this portrait of the notorious pornographer and his run-ins with the law was, and any moviegoer who is also a conservative has long ago had to reconcile himself to the experience of enjoying movies he disapproves of.

Fortunately, *The People vs. Larry Flynt* doesn't put me to that test, because it's a dud; it's not only about the 1970s and photographed to evoke the look of an ambitious 1970s movie, but it feels as though everybody involved in the movie's creation fell asleep in 1976 and awakened in 1996 with every meretricious attitude and idea from the '70s intact. In the world according to *The People vs. Larry Flynt*, porn is actually surprisingly wholesome, as only an "anti-Establishment" business can be. But it's deserving of our scorn and amusement, too, because it's filled with a bunch of crackers and rednecks who seem to exist just to hand us superior folk in the audience a good laugh at their crudity and lack of taste. People who don't like pornography, on the other hand, are Victorian prudes all, who probably have deep sexual maladjustments.

The only thing taken seriously is "free speech," which is saved by the great men of the Supreme Court. The court is treated here with a reverence familiar to those of us who attended private schools where we were taught that the wildly irresponsible associate justice William O. Douglas was the greatest man of the century (even though the movie's version of Douglas is, of all people, Antonin Scalia, not the kind of person you expect to be canonized in a film produced by Oliver Stone).

*Three people who shouldn't sing*

*The People vs. Larry Flynt* is such a stiff, in fact, that it seems like nothing so much as a "snob hit"—William Goldman's term for a Broadway play that nobody really likes but everybody thinks he's supposed to like, in this case because Frank Rich wrote a column two months before the movie's release giving it the *New York Times* Op-Ed Page Good Liberal Seal of Approval. But as the movie progresses, I can tell by the noise in the theater that I'm wrong about the nobody-really-likes-it part. Every few minutes, *The People vs. Larry Flynt* sends out little cultural messages like Morse code, nothing very fancy or complicated. The movie's chief voice of unreason, a right-wing prosecutor, is played by James Carville. Some derogatory words about religion are issued in ringing voice by the movie's figure of honesty and conscience, Flynt's stripper-junkie-AIDS-suffering wife Althea. They are followed by a portrait of the evangelist Ruth Carter Stapleton as a brilliant seducer who uses sexual wiles to convert Flynt to born-again Christianity. Jerry Falwell, whose lawsuit against Flynt is the subject of the movie's last half, is played by an actor named Richard Paul who looks somewhat like Flynt and even more like the Pillsbury Doughboy.

What director Milos Forman is doing, in his very clever way, is dividing his audience in two: You don't have to like Larry Flynt (although why shouldn't you, given how cute Woody Harrelson is in the part?), but you certainly have no choice but to despise and be dismissive of his enemies. Rather like Frank Rich's favorite theatrical experience, Tony Kushner's embarrassingly awful six-hour play *Angels in America*, *The People vs. Larry Flynt* is a work of cultural shorthand. Just as Kushner expects his audience to laugh derisively along with him at the mere mention of "Ed Meese" and "Ed Koch," so does Forman's movie work by reinforcing the prejudices of his chosen audience. Pavlov couldn't have planned it better; liberals in the audience titter and murmur appreciatively, then leave the theater thinking they've had a thought-provoking experience.

**Saturday, January 25.** Sometimes you feel a bond with your fellow audience members because the experience you are sharing is so ghastly that, like passengers on the Andrea Doria, you know only this select few will ever understand what you went through. Thus it is this afternoon with *Everyone Says I Love You*, the new Woody Allen movie. Yes, it has received decent reviews, which only

proves that in New York, movie studios must require all journalists to undergo lobotomies before they are given critics' credentials.

It has long been a joke that if Allen made a snuff film, the *New York Times* critics would find something to praise about it. Well, *Everyone Says I Love You* may not be the moral equivalent of a snuff film, but if any cast member's career survives this debacle, it won't be thanks to Allen.

It is a musical, but one in which Allen did not cast singers or dancers, just movie actors who were then told to sing and dance. It is a disaster from the first moment, when the hapless Edward Norton (who's terrific in *Larry Flynt*) starts singing "Just You, Just Me" in a ghastly, froggy voice and is then joined by nannies on the Upper East Side, a bum panhandling for change, and dancing mannequins in the window of Madison Avenue's Yves Saint-Laurent store.

From then on until the closing credits, you sit in a state of anxiety, actually frightened that, at any moment, Norton or somebody else might begin singing. The worst scene features an obviously alarmed Julia Roberts, sitting beside a Venice canal moaning "All My Life" in a monotone reminiscent of the sound made when you blow into an empty Coke bottle.

Why would he do such a thing? Why would Woody Allen willingly make a movie that resembles nothing so much as *Springtime for Hitler*, the deliberately bad show at the center of Mel Brooks's classic comedy *The Producers*? The answer can be found in a small scene about twenty minutes into the movie, when an aging cast member turns from a window to whisper the lyrics to "I'm Through with Love." Who is the aging cast member? Why, none other than Woody Allen himself! Yes, it appears the man wanted to hear himself sing on screen and devised the only kind of movie in which such an act would be possible.

Does that seem unimaginable to you? It shouldn't; Woody Allen makes any movie he wants to, has total control over the movies he makes, and has arranged things so that his sister is his producer. No wonder he felt free to seduce his teenage stepdaughter; there's nobody around to tell him that he shouldn't spend $20 million on a movie just to hear himself sing like a frog.

A few months ago, critics had a field day making fun of Barbra Streisand for turning her movie *The Mirror Has Two Faces* into a vanity production in which other characters talked about how much they admired and envied the character Barbra plays. Streisand was a model of self-effacement compared with Woody Allen, a 62-year-old man who casts Julia Roberts as his own love interest and photographs a scene straight in which she goes on and on to her analyst about how sexy he is. Later, in the movie's final scene, Allen and Goldie Hawn (who play a divorced couple) sit beside the Seine while she tells him that he is the only man she ever really loved, and boy, the sex was great.

That is not the most offensive moment in *Everyone Says I Love You*. The most offensive moment occurs when a politically conservative character—the teenage son of limousine liberals who reads *National Review* and speaks eloquent words in defense of his beliefs, like "School prayer! The right to bear arms!"—is rushed to the hospital with an arterial blockage. Turns out that he wasn't really right wing, just delusional.

The audience sharing the theater with me in a mall in Wheaton, Md., greeted this jape with the same appalled silence that it did the rest of the movie. All but one fellow a few rows ahead of me, who did not talk back at the screen. He just grabbed his coat, stormed up the aisle, and left the theater. I wanted to shake his hand. ♦

**JUST BEFORE PUBLICATION** of Katharine Graham's memoir *Personal History*, extensive excerpts appeared in both *Newsweek* and the *Washington Post*, the two publications controlled by Graham and her family. *—News item*

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