the weekly
Standard

HISTORIANS AND THE REAGAN LEGACY
JAMES PIERESON

SEPTEMBER 29, 1997 $2.95

David Aikman

The LAOGAI Archipelago

China's Repressive Labor Camps

The World's Largest Prison System

the weekly Standard

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 3 • SEPTEMBER 29, 1997

Books & Arts

The Weekly Standard (ISSN 1083-3013) is published weekly, except for the first week of January and the first week of September, 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.

The Dianne Feinstein Appease-China Award

Dianne Feinstein regained top honors in our Appease China Sweepstakes last week—and put in a bid for the Moral-Equivalence Lifetime Achievement Award as well. At a Senate hearing, California's senior senator noted that some 300 million Chinese have taken part in village-level elections, in which there are no opposition parties and the overwhelming percentage of available candidates are selected by the ruling Communist oligarchy. Why, she exclaimed, "More people vote in China today than do in the United States!"

But wait, there's more. Feinstein also expressed her view that Beijing would not take steps toward democracy when "they're preached to by others [i.e. Americans] who don't always practice it themselves." This is reminiscent of her ludicrous comparison of the Tiananmen square massacre to Kent State—the display of moral equivalency, readers will recall, that inaugurated The Scrapbook's Appease-China Sweepstakes earlier this year.

And finally, in an exchange with assistant secretary of state Stanley Roth, Feinstein again managed to out-appease the State Department by suggesting that China's brutal crackdown on dissent—or as she put it, their "human rights posture"—might be necessary for maintaining stability during economic reform. As China throws millions into unemployment, in other words, who can blame its dictators for wanting to make sure these poor souls keep their mouths shut and their fannies out of Tiananmen Square? To his great credit, Roth replied that even if Chinese leaders were thinking this way, "It's not an argument that I think we should be particularly receptive to."

Well, not most of us, anyway. Feinstein, on the other hand, is a special case. So special that The Scrapbook herewith renames our ongoing sweepstakes the Dianne Feinstein Appease-China Award. Congratulations, Senator!

Notorious Z-B-I-G

It was neck and neck there for awhile. Appearing together on PBS's *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* on September 12, Zbigniew Brzezinski and James Baker competed ferociously to see who could pile up the largest number of anti-Israel clichés and moral-equivalence fallacies in the briefest amount of time. Normally, Baker is unbeatable at this sort of thing, but suddenly, heading down the stretch, Brzezinski pulled ahead and cruised to victory.

Benjamin Netanyahu's "concept of peace," Brzezinski said, "is essentially a very close equivalent of what the white supremacist apartheid government in South Africa was proposing at one point for the Africans—a series of isolated lands, broken up, not contiguous territory, essentially living in backward villages, surrounded by white islands of prosperity. This is the Likud image of a solution for the Palestinian problem."

Baker looked slightly stunned at this masterly display of what is, in truth, his own specialty of Israel-bashing. All he could say was, "I think Zbig was right on. . . ." The Scrapbook thinks they should both be ashamed of themselves.

Don't Tell the Truth

University of Texas law professor Lino Graglia, a distinguished scholar, caused an uproar a few weeks ago at his school. In response to efforts to recruit minorities after the *Hopwood* case outlawed UT Law School's affirmative action program, Graglia said that blacks and Hispanics "are not academically competitive with whites." The school's Faculty of Color Caucus condemned him, state legislators called angry press conferences, a member of the university's board of regents called for his suspension, and presidential spokesman Mike McCurry said, "Those kind of remarks don't go down well with the president, period."

A fitting example of the old Washington adage which states that a gaffe occurs only when you tell the truth, not when you tell a lie. Papers released as part of the *Hopwood* case include numerous memos that show

Scrapbook

virtually the whole of the Texas faculty in agreement with Graglia. Take for example, the private March 10, 1989 memo from Mark Gergen, one of the professors involved in the admissions process. "It is impossible to make meaningful distinctions between Black and MA [Mexican-American] applicants without some sort of quota as a reference, for compared to our Anglo applicants, virtually none would get in," Gergen wrote. "In prior years I could rationalize what I did as admitting all who had a decent chance of succeeding in law school. Experience proves many of those I voted for could not compete."

Given that Gergen was one of the racial "good guys" actually *administering* Texas's affirmative action program, isn't it arresting how similar his language ("could not compete") is to Graglia's ("are not academically competitive")? Don't wait for an apology. Graglia, for his part, has sent a conciliatory letter to the school to try and quiet things down.

LULAC Time

Two years ago, House Republicans sought, unsuccessfully, to place restrictions on the lobbying carried out by non-profit groups that receive federal funds. But Republicans might want to set their sights on another target: the Intergovernmental Personnel Act, which allows federal employees to work for non-profit groups—and have their salaries paid with taxpayer dollars.

Thank Douglas Holt of the *Dallas Morning News* for bringing this issue to light. He found, for example, that Belen Robles, the national president of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)—a group that burned the Contract With America at its 1995 Texas convention—is paid an annual salary of nearly $67,000 with federal money. Seems Robles took leave from the U.S. Customs Service to lead LULAC and then used the Intergovernmental Personnel Act to preserve her Customs paycheck.

This program might not be so objectionable if federal employees were engaged in charitable endeavors. Instead, it looks like just another way to politic on the public dime. Among the 711 groups the Office of Personnel Management has deemed acceptable for this federal subsidy are the Brookings Institution and the NAACP. Conservative groups, needless to say, don't pass muster with OPM.

Masthead Notes

We note the publication of, and the ecstatic reviews for, contributing editor David Gelernter's new book *Drawing Life: Surviving the Unabomber* (Free Press). In other media developments, Jonathan Last, our research associate, is moonlighting as editor-in-chief of a new webzine called *Squire: The Magazine for Washington's Water Carriers*. You can read it yourself at *www.squiremag.com*.

Casual

Out for a Read

I have become a more attentive driver than heretofore. I used to be dreamy, listening to classical music, hoping that some phrase or formulation pertinent to whatever it was I was writing at the moment would pop into my mind. Over the past decade, I have been driving BMWs, and they give a nice feeling of protected enclosure, a perfect atmosphere for such digressive dreaminess.

In this state, the mind floats, recalling odd bits, old anecdotes, scraps of information from the past. Driving along, I not long ago recalled the story I heard about a lecture that C. Wright Mills, the radical sociologist, once gave at Columbia. During the question and answer session after the lecture, a student is supposed to have asked: "Professor Mills, in your lecture you attacked the West and the East, you attacked communism and capitalism, you attacked the family, the church, and organized religion generally, you attacked the past and held out no hope for the future. Professor Mills, is there anything at all you believe in?" Mills replied, "Yes, one thing." The student rejoined, "And what is that?" Mills, pausing briefly, leaned into the microphone and whispered, "German motors."

I, too, believe in German motors and have indeed required them to keep me out of accidents both in my dreamy driving stage and in my new, more attentive phase. I pay no more attention to the road than before, but I have become very alert to license plates and bumper stickers. As I drive along Chicago streets, and especially on the city's beautiful Outer Drive, my mind is nowadays usually engaged in reading the license plates—the vanity plates—of passing cars. Wit, pretension, unfathomable obscurity is to be found there in profusion. Yesterday I came upon a license plate that read LP FAITH. What can it mean? Does the man still have faith in his old long-play records? Or is Faith his family name, Lawrence and Peter his first and second names? Another car, heading toward me on Sheridan Road, had a license plate that read RR TIES. RR, I assume, stands for railroad. Does this guy have railroad stock? Mystery again, as mysterious as the out-of-state plate—from Pennsylvania—that read MYSTIC 1.

As for pretension, there is a van in this city carrying the license plate GOETHE and a Cadillac with L OPERA. For years I have noted an older, yellow Rolls Royce bearing a plate reading SNOB. Snob, as I learned a year or so ago when I finally saw the car's owner get into it in a downtown parking lot, is a small, older Jewish woman who might be your Aunt Sylvia.

In Illinois, vanity plates cost $75 above the normal charge and an additional $10 above the regular fee every year thereafter. People are apparently willing to pay for their little jokes, which reminds me that a woman who parks in the same garage I do has a plate that reads MISHUGA. Someone in the license plate division of the Illinois Secretary of State's office must have to serve as censor, for no profanity on license plates is allowed. Censors exist, of course, to be eluded, and so, occasionally, is our man in the license plate division. The other day a Mercedes passed me on the right whose plate read BATESOME, which is an old Chicago high school slang word, perhaps no longer in use, for the male sexual reproductive unit.

License plates are the big-print version of car literature. Bumper stickers present more of a problem of the kind suggested by the sticker that reads, "If you can read this you are too close." Many have philosophical pretensions: "Question Authority" is by now, I suppose, a golden oldie. "Change the Paradigm" is rather more recondite. One day, in my own neighborhood, I found myself following an ancient Volvo station wagon, driven by an aging hippie, a fuzzy, perfectly Korenesque character, on whose sticker-crowded bumper I noted "Prevent Circumcision." Some sort of deeper vegetarian reasoning, perhaps.

Among bumper stickeristas, dialogue of a sort goes on. Or at least some people seem to feel the need to reply, bumperistically, to earlier stickers. The long-established "Visualize World Peace," the other day I saw answered by a produce firm with "Visualize World Peas." The mawkish "Have You Hugged Your Child Today?" has been met with "Have You Hugged Your Motorcycle Today?" On the subject of religious debate, conducted on a lower level than Cardinal Newman and T.H. Huxley might have done, perhaps the oldest of bumper stickers, "If You Love Jesus, Honk," has been riposted, a friend in Colorado reports, with "If You Are Jesus, Honk."

What does it all mean, this strange need to express oneself through the vehicle, so to say, of one's vehicle? "The truth is out there," written in small white letters on the black T-shirt of a young man who passed me near my apartment only last evening, may be the slogan of the age, but, in this instance, the truth is less likely to set you free than get you in a car wreck.

Joseph Epstein

Friendly Fascists in Latte Towns

David Brooks's "The Rise of the Latte Town" (Sept. 15) ended with an interesting suggestion: A portion of the Left has reconciled the cultural contradictions of capitalism with a new ethos of "environmentalism, healthism, and eglitarianism," thereby providing the self-restraint that previously was generated by the "old puritanical" code. Brooks suggests that this reconciliation will enable latte towns to "thrive" and "spread."

Myself, I'm skeptical. People dedicated to the principles of zero population growth and public acceptance of homosexuality are going to have a tough time growing in number. I also have a tough time seeing restraint in waitresses with 19 ear, nose, lip, and navel rings. The latte towns may be significant because of their wealth, but that may fall over time as their populations dwindle.

Further, the moral code of the latte town is inferior to the "old puritanical" code. The old way sought to limit people's inherent licentiousness—a limit that made them better fathers, mothers, neighbors, and citizens. The code of the latte town, on the other hand, is to remake the world. In other words, it is fascism with a human face.

Robert S. Stein
Arlington, VA

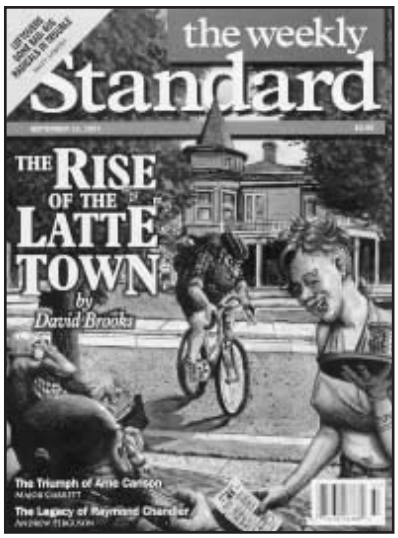
I have never been to any of the other latte towns that David Brooks writes about, but I lived in Boulder, Colorado, for 18 years. It's too bad your magazine doesn't sell well there. Brooks's description of Burlington fits perfectly the self-image of Boulder. Much has been written lately about the extremes of political correctness on college campuses. Boulder is an entire city just like that. One's right to be offended takes precedence over the First Amendment.

Health and fitness enthusiasts and struggling artists abound in Boulder, as do drug users and all manner of conspicuous consumers. Yuppies are alive and well, and self-fulfillment is the noblest pursuit. The "squishy" liberal politics are enforced with a heavy hand. The result is a large number of the most self-centered and intolerant people imaginable. Step carelessly into the street in Boulder and you risk being run down by a new BMW with a pro-environmentalism sticker on the bumper.

Because of federal dollars and the presence of the University of Colorado, Boulder need not concern itself with the realities of private-enterprise economics. The city council is free to impose growth-control measures that have pushed the median price of a single-family home to over $260,000 and forced businesses to move elsewhere. It is the stated goal of the city government to reduce the number of jobs in Boulder so as to reduce automobile traffic.

Boulder a latte town? Maybe, provided the latte is caffeine-free, nonfat, and laced with Napoleon cognac.

Scott Clouston
Longmont, CO



I thoroughly enjoyed David Brooks's piece. Most articles on Burlington end up sounding as ethically correct as Burlington would like to be portrayed. Brooks's story looks at it with that classic Weekly Standard mix of humor and cynicism that can make your magazine such a fun read.

While Brooks did not have any luck finding the *New Republic* or The Weekly Standard at the local bookstores, had he traveled to Burlington's public library he would have found both titles prominently displayed. Obviously, conservative magazines such as yours do not sell in Burlington; maybe a brown paper wrapper would help your circulation. Nevertheless, I am a firm believer in the old—and sometimes forgotten—liberal tenet, which is: We may not agree with what conservatives believe, but we do believe that you have a right to be heard.

Robert Coleburn
Burlington, VT

David Brooks's article was splendid! However, his pronouncement that cows are pacifists reflects a very sad misconstrual of our bovine population. I know this because I was raised on a farm in north-central Indiana in the 1930s. Of all the dairy farmers I knew, there wasn't a single one who didn't have on his body a scar courtesy of one of these gentle animals. Cows are actually mean and sneaky. Brooks is just writing what city folks think. Still, it was a great story.

Bruce F. Merkle
Vienna, VA

Brooks almost got it right. Since he is a visiting "flatlander" (i.e., he didn't come from these mountains), he missed several key points.

The main point is how Burlington fell victim to the latte crowd. They're all newcomers. You will find few native sons and daughters in their midst. Almost all of them are flatlanders, folks from New York and Boston who began to move here in the '70s to escape the evils of urban living. The Green Mountains are an extraordinarily beautiful alternative to messy city problems. Having escaped, they have the leisure to ponder diversity and social responsibility.

They also came because they believed—rightly, as it turned out—that a small state like Vermont would provide a stump for their "progressive" (read: socialist) politics. In New York, they're merely one group among many. In Vermont, they figured they could swing the power base.

Contrary to Brooks's observation, the progressives aren't here to concentrate on local politics and small-scale activism. They want to run the state of Vermont, and after that, who knows?

Matthew T. Sternberg
Rutland, VT

The Birth of Tragedy

Matt Labash's "Leftovers Gone Bad" (Sept. 15) further demon-

Correspondence

strates the decline in educational standards at American universities that began in the 1960s.

The New Left always had a problem with reading comprehension. How else to explain Ira Einhorn's "Nietzschean elasticity"—except to note his incomplete understanding of his mentor.

Nietzsche was acutely aware of ideological distortion. He wrote, "Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster."

Holly Maddux paid with her life—in part because Einhorn was a poor student of the philosopher. It's a chilling reminder that education which is permeated with ideological distortion leads not only to serious errors, but to tragic results.

H. Camp Gordinier
Lenox, MA

Sanctifying Gay Marriage

As reported by Mark Tooley ("Same Sex, Same Marriage," Sept. 15), the analogy between civil rights and gay rights put forward by President William Chase of Emory University is misdrawn.

The civil rights movement has devoted itself to fighting invidious discrimination, not issues involving sexual morality. It has been based on the premise that all men and women should be treated equally in their citizenship, not that all lifestyles be accorded equal treatment.

University officials (including my own) know that recognition of same-sex partnerships can only add to the social decadence of America. But it continues to be done in the guise of political liberalism.

Robert Lyon
Philadelphia, PA

Reading Mark Tooley's article was painful for me, still a member of the United Methodist Church. The terrible thing is that when it comes to rejecting the doctrinal standards of Methodism, Emory University is by no means an isolated case.

I hope Tooley's article will open the eyes of church members who prefer to keep them closed. I urge The Weekly Standard to tell the rest of the story and to assess the extent of the moral crisis within the United Methodist Church.

Elizabeth Richman
Alsea, OR

Double-Agent Lugar

Your seeming ridicule of Sen. Richard Lugar regarding his plan to enlarge NATO (Scrapbook, Sept. 15) is very curious for a magazine with such talent for truth-telling and self-examination.

Just two months ago, your editors courageously put forward the case for NATO expansion ("NATO: The More the Merrier," July 21). You wrote that NATO expansion is the most consequential foreign-policy decision since the Gulf War and that "the opportunity is ours. We should gladly seize it." Now Sen. Lugar, who has championed the growth of freedom in Europe for years, is seeking to forge the broad consensus necessary to obtain NATO-expansion approval from his Senate colleagues. He recognizes, as do you, the importance of this, and he is doing whatever it takes to get the votes.

It may include circumventing Sen. Jesse Helms, who is not nearly as enthusastic about NATO's enlargement. Your recent enthusiasm for Sen. Helms notwithstanding, dedication to ideas and principles—not personalities—should be your guide. How, then, can you chastise Sen. Lugar for consorting with the enemy, President Clinton?

"As an encore," you conclude, "maybe Lugar should apply for a job at the White House." Unless you are offering Sen. Lugar your endorsement for the top job at the White House—which I would welcome—I am surprised to have read such a cynical, and contradictory, account concerning a subject about which you have staked out so bold and clear a position.

Bret T. Swanson
Alexandria, VA

Slow Minds at Fast Speeds

Stephen Moore might be misinterpreting the statistics to reach his conclusion that higher speed limits have not resulted in significantly more highway deaths ("Untrue at Any Speed," Sept. 15). I've heard local high-speed proponents cite figures that pertain only to the interstate highways, which indeed are designed to be safely motored at 75 miles per hour.

But fatalities on non-interstates are *up*. Why? I suspect it's because drivers psychologically cannot slow down from 75 mph when they exit the four-lane superhighway.

If so, raising the speed limits on the interstates is indirectly responsible for the increase in accidents on secondary roads.

Also, relying on figures that reflect low fatality rates only for supposedly *speed-related* accidents can be highly misleading. For example, many fatalities might be attributed by a patrolman to improper passing, not speeding. But why was the driver passing? Because he thought he wasn't going fast enough, right? I've noted a whole lot more dangerous passing going on since the limits were hiked.

I would be in favor of the higher speed limits if you could convince me that the average American motorist is competent to handle a two-ton machine hurtling down a narrow strip of asphalt at more than a mile a minute. The sobering fact is that each year this country kills on highways nearly as many people as died in the Vietnam war. Clearly, something is wrong.

Perhaps along with the 75 mph speed limit we should require a minimum IQ of 75 before a driver's license is granted. From my observations, this would take nearly half the motorists off the road.

Jay Ford
Colorado Springs, CO

The Weekly Standard
welcomes letters to the editor. Letters will be edited for length and clarity and must include the writer's name, address, and phone number. All letters should be addressed:
Correspondence Editor
The Weekly Standard
1150 17th St., NW
Washington, DC 20036.
You may also fax letters: (202) 293-4901.

the weekly Standard

Hunger Hokum

Vice president Gore wants you to know that the executive branch he represents is the finest, best intentioned, most effective in history. Gore is a proud man. But he is a thoughtful man, too, a teller of unpleasant truths. So he must remind us, as he did at a special "summit" meeting in Washington on September 15, that despite four-plus years of Clintonite achievement, it remains sadly the case that "all is not right with America." Why, on any given evening—here "amid our amber waves of grain and our fruited plains" (and our million-dollar DNC soft-money fund-raising galas)—there are American children who lie awake in bed, tormented by a "sore pain." The sore pain is hunger.

In fact, there are "millions of Americans," the vice president reports, "who are simply not getting enough to eat" because they cannot "figure out how to make ends meet, how to get food on the table." This is "appalling," a "tragedy," a "blight on our nation's soul." And Al Gore will . . . not . . . tolerate it: "*We cannot stand by and let people in this nation starve*." Yes: "starve."

Now, we know what you're thinking. You're thinking that hard evidence of this American starvation-through-poverty crisis is curiously missing from all the established statistical tables.

You're thinking that the Centers for Disease Control's annual "Births and Deaths" report for 1996 has American life expectancy at an all-time high and American infant mortality at an all-time low (considerably less than half what it was in 1970). You're thinking that CDC's "National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey" has found no significant protein, calorie, vitamin, or mineral deficiency in any major segment of the nation's population. You're thinking that Americans in every economic category are able to spend ever lower percentages of their income on food—to the point where groceries are less a budgetary burden on the poorest Americans than they are on middle-income Europeans.

You're also thinking that far from wasting away, Americans at all levels of income are growing markedly obese. The most recent data, reported by CDC in March, describe an impressive expansion of the U.S. waistline since the late 1970s. The percentages of children and adolescents who are overweight have roughly doubled. A full 35 percent of American adults are now overweight—up from 25 percent. And other federal statistical instruments consistently establish the following link between personal income and portliness: The *less* money you earn, the *more* likely you are to be fat.

Every year, to be sure, there are circumstances of more than incidental hunger—medically observable malnutrition—in our population of 260 million. But they are extremely rare, almost statistically undetectable. And they are most commonly and directly associated not so much with poverty, but with alcoholism, drug addiction, mental illness, child abuse, or comparable individual or family pathology. There is otherwise no serious evidence of endemic and persistent American hunger. No one in the United States, tonight, tomorrow, or the next day, for reasons of finance, faces a measurable danger that he will "starve."

So what in the world is the vice president talking about? What, for that matter, can Clinton agriculture secretary Dan Glickman possibly mean when he says that one in three American children "live in families that do constant battle with hunger" and are "at constant risk of malnutrition and the lifetime of chronic illness that can accompany it"?

In simplest terms, they are referring, very loosely, to some nifty new numbers jointly baked up by the departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services—what Gore is pleased to call "the first-ever baseline study of the scope of hunger in America." Only it turns out this "cornerstone" research isn't really about *hunger* per se. The survey's own authors point out that clinical measurements of the "physical sensation caused by a lack of food" do not provide "sensitive indicators" of any problem as it is "primarily experienced in the U.S. context." In other words, you could walk from sea to shining sea and never find much hunger, which result would make for a very dull vice presidential announcement, indeed—dull even by standards primarily experienced in the Al Gore context.

So instead, the government has asked a representative sample of U.S. households 58 questions largely designed to measure certain "characteristic affective states"—anxiety and uncertainty—involving food budgets and consumption. At some point in the last 12 months, did you worry that the refrigerator would go empty before you could restock it? Did you ever eat "less than you felt you should," or a nutritionally unbalanced or low-cost meal, for purposes of economy? Every household responding yes to at least three such catchall queries has been officially designated at risk, or "food insecure."

The Clinton administration administered this survey in 1995 during the one calendar week average Americans are most panicked about money: April 16 through April 22, right after tax time. So you will not be surprised to "learn" that there are a whopping 11.9 million "food insecure" U.S. households, comprising 34.7 million people. Or that 4.2 million of these households (11.2 million people) are now assumed by our government to be living with actual "resource-constrained hunger." You will not even be surprised to "learn" that among these chronically "hungry" Americans are 185,000 households—with almost 700,000 individual members—who have annual incomes exceeding $40,000.

Washington Post

The technical term for this kind of social-science project is: garbage.

That's not what's most interesting about it, though. Politicians have been exaggerating civic needs, and then proposing to meet them, since time began. The Left, for its part, has traditionally made crude appeals to the American heart with Dickensian fantasies about current conditions of poverty. And until recently, Democratic-party liberalism has always encouraged such sentimentality in order to advance some hard-boiled, real-world design—some new or expanded social program or entitlement.

But those good old days are clearly over, and something hard and cold with calculation has taken their place. Think, for a moment, what it would mean if almost one in seven Americans truly *were*, as the vice president ludicrously suggests, at serious risk of starvation. It would be a genuine national emergency. The president—any president, liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican—would be obliged to place full federal power behind a rescue. Just for starters, you would expect the president to call out the National Guard for distribution of bread and soup. At the very least, you would expect our current president, Bill Clinton, to demand an immediate expansion of federal food-aid spending, which now stands at $35.6 billion a year. You would expect him to do something appropriate to scale.

But you would expect wrong, and that's the kicker. The Clinton administration is happy to pretend that more than 11 million American stomachs are growling for lack of nourishment. It is happy to pretend that little children with distended bellies will shortly begin wilting in our streets. But the only practical response our ostentatiously "concerned" vice president can muster is a public service announcement featuring folk-music retreads Peter, Paul & Mary on something called food-waste "gleaning." This land is your land, it is supposedly choking with privation, and the Clinton administration politely suggests that you should donate your half-eaten sandwich to a local community kitchen.

The whole little episode makes such a neat, pathetic commentary on the emptiness of second-term Clintonism in general. It's become a fixed routine. This White House wildly and cynically hypes—or outright fabricates—a domestic-policy "crisis." It asks the public to love and admire how much the president "cares." And it hopes, all the while, that no one notices how little his administration

actually dares to *do* about anything.

Messrs. Clinton and Gore are now surviving on the very barest minimum daily allowance of ideological nutrients. Quick: Someone "glean" these boys a half-eaten idea. They're starving.

—David Tell, for the Editors

God and Sex at Yale

by Charles Krauthammer

We've had the Chicago Seven. We've had the Camden Eight. Make way now, fellow fin-de-siècclers, for the Yale Five.

The Yale Five are orthodox Jewish students who are challenging Yale's rule that they must live in campus dormitories. The Five want out because they find the mixed-sex, free-for-all, condoms-on-demand atmosphere of the dorms repellent to their own code of sexual modesty and abstinence. They are not seeking to change anyone else's behavior. They simply want to be relieved of the requirement that they live in an atmosphere that they compare, with considerable scriptural support, to Sodom.

The Yale administration has not taken kindly to this expression of exclusivity. It has told the students: Take it or leave it. No dorm, no Yale.

Oh, how far we've come. In the early '70s, I lived in what was at the time the only coed dorm at Oxford. True, it was a long way from the mixed-sex communal shower of today—one wing of my dorm was for the St. Anne's ladies, the other for the Balliol boys—but it did offer possibilities.

And more than possibilities. Seven marriages came out of Hollywell Manor that year (including my own). But not before a lot of, well, fun. So much fun, in fact, that the master of Hollywell Manor—call him Professor Grayson—felt compelled to call a student meeting to protest all the "fornication" going on under his nose.

We were amused by his concern, charmed at his use of a word seen only in print, and positively giddy at his proposed compromise: fornication restricted to the hours of nine a.m. to five p.m. .

Working hours! Today, a man of Grayson's negotiating creativity would be chairing some peace process or other. At the time, however, we just thought he was nuts. I was tempted to suggest punch clocks. My future wife stayed my hand, however, and, astute as ever about affairs of the heart, stood up to point out the perverse logic of the Grayson compromise: Nine-to-fivers were surely less likely to be engaged in committed and serious relationships than the rest of us. (I paraphrase.)

The master seemed flummoxed by the distinction. His concern was obviously not with the moral hierarchy of fornicators, but with their efficiency and with appearances. In retrospect, it was the beginning of the end of the universities' age-old role of enforcing (what was then known as) morals. It was only 1971, and the grownups' resistance was already half-hearted and hollow.

Of course, Grayson failed. He was already, as we used to say at the time, on the wrong side of history. Oxford, and the rest of the academic world, quickly gave up and gave in—so that today, all incoming Yalies claim as their birthright a sexual ease that we, their pioneer forebears of the '60s, could only have dreamed of.

And dream we did. Hence the campus popularity in the '60s of the now (justly) forgotten novel *The Harrad Experiment*, a fantasy about sexual utopia: a university (Harrad = Harvard + Radcliffe) at which free love is the rule. At the time, it seemed as outrageously futuristic as *1984*.

Well, the future is now, and it is a riot of role reversals. It is now students, acting *in loco parentis*, who are carrying the banner of modesty. And it is the old fogies who are resisting. Complained one history professor, "The university would be in chaos if it bent over backwards to accommodate everyone's sensitivities." Indeed, the masters of Yale seem barely able to contain their exasperation with the sensitivities of these quaint sectarians. If the Yale Five had sought special dispensation to perform voodoo in the common room, they might have gotten a less condescending reception.

The further irony, of course, is that the Yale Five, wedded as they are to an outworn morality, *are* a quaint sect. If they were not, their story would not be splashed across the newspapers; their cause would not be a cause célèbre. The fact is that out of the 1,700 Yale underclassmen required to live in the dorms, exactly five are saying: Let me out of here.

Yale is willing to tolerate their exotic practices, but certainly not to make any special dispensation to accommodate them. Why? Here Yale appeals to the universality of rules: Every unmarried, under-21 freshman and sophomore is required to live in campus dorms. Rules are rules.

The revolutionary Five point out that this appears to be the *only* rule governing dormitory life at Yale. Once in the dorm, says Elisha Dov Hack, "anything

goes." Students sharing rooms, showers, beds. Corridors with kids in various states of undress. The "freshperson" issue of the *Yale Daily News* introducing newcomers to the rituals of dormitory life, acquaints them with the term "sexile": a person exiled from his room while his roommate is having it off. In short, a nirvana—a Gomorrah (take your pick)—of sexual deregulation.

But no, protest the fogies. The residency rule is not just a rule; it is a rule with a reason. The new students are required to live together to ensure that they are immersed in the "community of scholars" that is the university. Somehow (and looking back) I find it hard to imagine the shower as a place where a lot of Kierkegaard is transacted.

Contributing editor Charles Krauthammer is a syndicated columnist.

Derailing Fast Track

by Fred Barnes

Republicans finally have President Clinton right where they want him. He's desperate for their support and willing to make concessions to get it. The issue is fast track, the authority Clinton needs to win ratification of new free-trade agreements without Congress amending them to death. Since most Democrats don't like free trade, Clinton needs Republicans to get fast track, just as he did in passing the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1993. But there's no public pressure for fast track or for extending free trade to Chile now and perhaps later to Argentina and Brazil. So Republicans can demand exactly the fast-track bill they want. Time is on their side. No government shutdown looms for Clinton to exploit. This time, the president wants the whole matter over as quickly as possible because it puts him sharply and bitterly at odds with organized labor and congressional Democrats, his party base. Republicans, enjoying the Democratic fratricide, can afford to wait.

In preliminary talks between the White House and Republicans, the role reversal has been total. This summer's budget negotiations saw Republicans falling all over themselves to offer concession after concession. Now Clinton and his minions are the supplicants. When GOP representative Bill Archer, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, spotted a small technical flaw as officials privately previewed the fast-track bill for him on September 16, Clinton aide Jay Berman instantly agreed it should be fixed. That same day, Clinton's chief of staff, Erskine Bowles, gave Senate majority leader Trent Lott a background briefing. Lott cited specific qualms, and Bowles said the White House would try to ease them. And when Republican senator Phil Gramm complained at a Senate Finance Committee hearing on September 17 about a potential loophole in fast-track legislation, trade representative Charlene Barshefsky said: "I see what you're saying, and certainly we need to look at this."

The White House wasn't always so accommodating on fast track. In 1995 and 1996, Archer met repeatedly with Mickey Kantor, then Clinton's special trade rep. They got nowhere because the White House wanted it both ways—a bill acceptable to Republicans and House Democratic leader Richard Gephardt. Gephardt's goal was a bill that allowed tough environmental and labor requirements to be imposed on trade partners. Republicans insisted, correctly, this would thwart trade, not expand it. But Kantor persisted. When Archer rejected proposed language for the bill and offered alternatives, Kantor would invariably respond, "I can't sell this to Gephardt." Running for reelection last year, Clinton wasn't willing to buck Gephardt and his labor allies.

After the election, Clinton's tune changed. Archer conferred one-on-one with the president just after Christmas for more than an hour, and they touched on fast track. Now, Clinton professed eagerness to move ahead, even if it meant clashing with Gephardt and labor. "The president understands, to his credit, the importance of exports and competing in the world marketplace," says Archer. "It was clear to me he had a very strong commitment to free trade." Archer urged him to dispatch fast track legislation as quickly as possible. Clinton said he would.

He didn't. First, Barshefsky's confirmation as trade rep was delayed, and the White House didn't want to move without her, especially given her popularity with Republicans. By last spring, Archer was getting antsy. He called publicly for Clinton to send up a fast-track bill so it could be enacted before the budget talks took center stage. Again, the White House wouldn't move. Clinton knew he'd anger congressional Democrats and labor in the budget deal and was leery of crossing them before that. "He didn't want to compound his problems," says a Clinton aide. In any event, says Archer, "it was a lost opportunity."

Having dawdled, the White House undercut the notion that fast track is needed immediately. Nonethe-

less, Clinton trotted out precisely that argument when he announced his plan for fast track at an East Room ceremony on September 10. Potential markets in Latin America and Asia are growing, and European countries are rapidly getting a leg up in exporting to them, he said. "Their economies are on a fast track. They are not waiting for us to pass a bill. And we have to face that." Eight Republicans, including Archer, declined invitations to the ceremony because Clinton hadn't sent Congress a bill yet. He was still trying to soothe the feelings of Democrats opposed to fast track.

For once, Republicans seem disposed to use the advantage that circumstances have given them. True, Clinton came a long way in their direction by adopting Archer's idea that only labor and environmental matters "directly related to trade" should be part of trade agreements. "From our perspective, it is an extremely constructive and encouraging start," says Archer of Clinton's fast-track proposal. Wisely, though, Archer is prepared to ask for more. Any loopholes—Ways and Means lawyers are "scrubbing" the bill to find them—will have to be eliminated. Senate Republicans were tougher. Lott had gotten a draft of the bill before Bowles arrived to brief him, and he dwelled on several parts that troubled him. At the finance committee, the treatment was rougher still. Chairman Bill Roth joined Lott and Phil Gramm in telling Clinton aides the bill was unacceptable as written. Lott wants the labor and environmental provisions scrapped entirely. At this point, the White House probably has no choice except to go along with Lott—or else no fast track.

Republicans have another card to play: the legislative schedule. Archer told White House aides they must round up 90 Democratic votes in the House to compensate for GOP defections. Dozens of the 228 Republicans oppose giving Clinton anything. "I'm a free trader at heart, but I'm cautious about turning the [trade] authority over to the president," says Rep. Joe Scarborough of Florida. He'll vote no on fast track. So, if the White House hasn't recruited enough Democrats and altered the bill to satisfy every Republican complaint, there are grounds for postponing a vote until 1998. Archer, for one, isn't inclined to delay. Lott only says fast track will be "dealt with," no necessarily passed. Some Republicans see a big plus in delay. With fast track on the table in early 1996, the AFL-CIO will be busy lobbying against the bill. Too busy, in other words, to concentrate on trashing Republicans seeking reelection to the House and Senate.

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

THE SKYLINE TAX

by Diana Furchtgott-Roth and Kevin Hassett

SUPPOSE YOU'RE THE HARD-WORKING HEAD of a household of four. Should you put more energy into earning? The decision will hinge partly on how much of any new income you will keep after paying taxes.

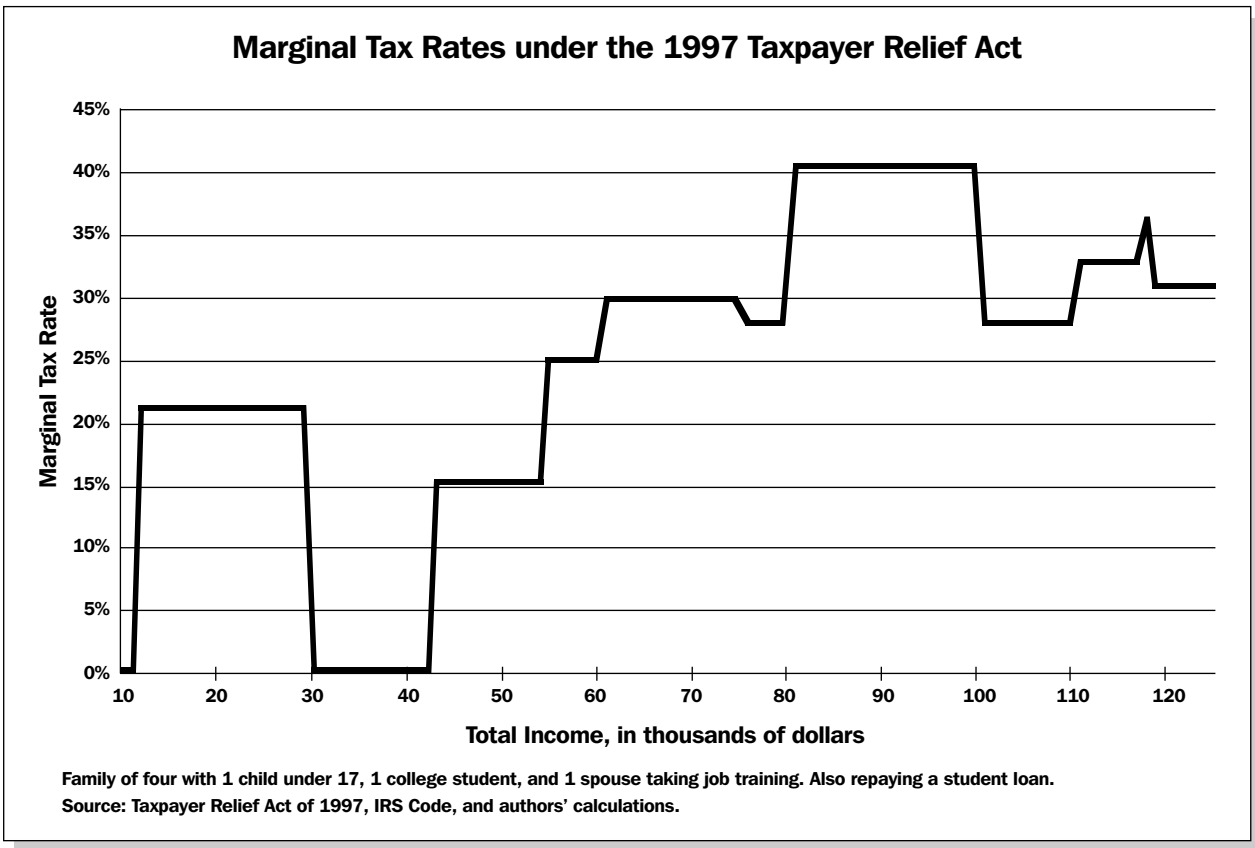
Which depends on your marginal tax rate—the percentage of the last dollar earned that must be paid in tax. Low marginal income-tax rates encourage effort and earning. By contrast, the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997 creates a crazy-quilt of marginal tax rates that only an accountant could love.

The graph on the next page shows marginal tax rates under the new tax bill. Taxpayers are typical families of four with one child in college, making between $10,000 and $120,000. The graph bears a striking resemblance to the New York City skyline, with many peaks and troughs. Now, some people want a flat tax and some want progressive taxes. There are even those who favor regressive taxes (on tobacco, alcohol, and gasoline). But no one has ever argued for a New York City skyline tax.

This bizarre arrangement is a result of the way various tax breaks kick in and phase out. The earned income tax credit (EITC), the new child and education credits, and the new savings incentives are available to taxpayers over different income ranges. Next year's $400 child credit, for example, phases out between $110,000 and $118,000 of income. And each of the phaseouts will require a different worksheet in the tax return, increasing headaches—and reliance on professional preparers.

It's true that marginal tax rates have never been uniform. The price we pay for our social safety net is higher marginal tax rates at income levels where entitlement programs are deemed unnecessary. And one example of anomalous marginal tax rates is already familiar: the "bubble" created by the 1986 Tax Reform Act when the tax rate rose from 28 to 33 percent, then dropped back to 28 percent. But the Taxpayer Relief Act raises such distortions to a fine art.

Consider some highlights. At an income level of $20,000, a family of four faces a 21 percent marginal tax rate, as its EITC phases out. At $30,000, the new credits cancel out any tax liability and the income-tax



Family of four with 1 child under 17, 1 college student, and 1 spouse taking job training. Also repaying a student loan.
Source: Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997, IRS Code, and authors' calculations.

rate drops to zero. The rate then rises rapidly thanks to phaseouts of the deductible IRA and the student-loan deduction. It reaches a high of 40.5 percent at $80,000, when the education credits phase out. At $100,000 the rate falls to 28 percent, before rising again with the phaseout of the child credit.

When our typical family of four is making $80,000, each new dollar earned is taxed at a basic 28 percent. But suppose the family is taking advantage of the Hope Scholarship and the Lifetime Learning Credit, which phase out between $80,000 and $100,000. The family's tax credits will decrease by 12.5 cents for each extra dollar earned. Thus, its effective marginal tax is 12.5 cents plus 28 cents—for a marginal tax rate of 40.5 percent. If the family were lucky enough to have three children in college, it would face a marginal rate of 53 percent—more like 66 percent when typical state and payroll taxes are added.

Whatever the particulars of their situation, almost all families will face one view or another of the New York City skyline, as they pick and choose from a kaleidoscope of tax preferences. High tax rates resulting from the phaseouts will blunt the incentive to move up the income scale.

While this constellation of tax rates is so absurd it is almost humorous, one group most assuredly is not laughing. Second earners, most of them women, fare very badly under this allegedly family-friendly bill. With a husband earning $70,000, a working wife will quickly push the family into a higher tax bracket. If the wife earns $20,000, her family's marginal tax rate will exceed 40 percent—54 percent with payroll and state taxes. This rule is family-friendly only to the extent it keeps women in the kitchen cooking dinner.

It's obvious that more careful thought has gone into the marketing of these tax provisions than into the provisions themselves. Elected officials may get some speechmaking advantage from the Hope Scholarship Credit, but they are sacrificing sound policy for soundbites. With higher rates, people think twice about investing their energy in extra work. Yes, some gain from the new provisions, but everyone would be better off if the new provisions were eliminated and we had lower, flatter, rates—not a New York City skyline tax, but a seashore tax.

Diana Furchtgott-Roth is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and a member of the advisory board of the Independent Women's Forum. Kevin Hassett is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.

The Laogai Archipelago

By David Aikman

"I have spent 33 years of my 64-year-old life in Chinese prisons and Laogai labor camps in Tibet. During those years I yearned for a moment such as this one." Palden Gyatso, a Tibetan nationalist who escaped from Tibet in 1992, finally got his moment two years ago. He was testifying, along with other survivors of Laogai—China's Gulag—before a hearing of the House Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights in Washington in the spring of 1995. Gyatso described being suspended in the air and having icy water thrown on his body, being beaten repeatedly, being shackled for months at a time in leg irons, being burned with boiling water and given shocks by that unique creation of Chinese Communist technology, the electrified police baton. (This implement is sometimes misleadingly labeled a cattle prod, but it was designed solely to inflict pain on human beings and is unobtainable in China for non-police use.)

He explained how inmates of Tibet's Drapchi Prison in April 1991 had tried to present to U.S. ambassador James Lilley, visiting the prison, a petition protesting the torture and barbaric conditions. With Lilley still in the prison, the petition was snatched out of their hands. After he had gone, all of those who had tried to present it were subjected to brutal beatings. For Gyatso, that was almost routine. The year before, a Tibetan prison guard had asked him why he was back in prison. Gyatso told him his crime had been to put up posters calling for Tibetan independence. "I will give you Tibetan independence," the guard replied, prodding Gyatso's body several times with the electric baton and finally jamming it into his mouth, knocking out most of his teeth and causing Gyatso to pass out.

Other former Laogai inmates told similar stories at the hearings. There was Cai Zhongxian, a Roman Catholic priest ordained in 1940 who was held without trial in the Shanghai Detention Center for seven years after his arrest in 1953. Finally sentenced in 1960 to a 15-year Laogai sentence, Cai survived starvation largely by being able to catch and eat frogs, snakes, and rats. But his sentence, plus the seven years prior to that in detention, was not enough for the Beijing authorities. Like the overwhelming majority of Laogai inmates on their release during the first 30 years or so of Communist rule in China, he was compelled to stay on as a *jiuye*, or "forced-job-placement" worker, at a factory in Nanchang. Another 11 years.

That still wasn't the end of Cai's Laogai troubles. Arrested yet again, he was sentenced to another 10 years for trying to fulfill his pastoral duties as a priest. It was only when the Communist authorities decided on a "goodwill" gesture to Cardinal Jaime Sin, who was visiting China in 1988, that Cai was released for the last time. This dangerous international counter-revolutionary was now 81 and had spent 33 of those years either in detention, in a Laogai camp, or in the imprisonment without end of forced-job-placement. Finally permitted to leave China, Cai retired to New York and recently died at the age of 90.

Laogai. The term doesn't exactly trip off the tongue, the way Gulag now does. Ask even a well-informed American what it means, and he probably won't have a clue. Ask a Beltway insider and he or she may recall merely that it has something to do with China. But Laogai not only has something to do with China—it has everything to do with China. In the view of Harry Wu, founder of the Laogai Research Foundation and the foremost U.S. campaigner against Laogai, it is "the central human rights issue in China today." And yet it is more than that too. "Laogai," says Wu, "is not simply a prison system, it is a political tool for maintaining the Communist party's totalitarian rule."

Like the Russian word "Gulag," Laogai (rhymes with "Mao Sky") is an acronym. It stands for *laodong gaizao*, or "Reform Through Labor." Laogai is a vast system of camps, detention centers, reeducation-through-labor institutions, and prison factories throughout China. There are, according to Wu, an

David Aikman is a veteran foreign correspondent.

estimated 1,100 of these institutions in which prisoners are compelled to work under conditions, essentially, of slave labor. He estimates that over five decades about 50 million Chinese have been through the Laogai. Today Wu estimates the Laogai population at 6-8 million.

The system was set up by the Communists in the early 1950s, primarily to deal with the millions of real and suspected opponents of China's newly established regime. It had two main objectives. One was identical to that of the Soviet Gulag: the use of coerced labor for ambitious state projects for which ordinary workers could never have been found. In the 1950s much of Manchuria was reclaimed for agriculture and industry by the labor of Laogai inmates, and in other parts of the nation coal mines were developed, canals dug, and railroads carved out of mountainsides by whole brigades and divisions of Laogai workers.

But the second objective, often cited by the Communist authorities as more crucial than the first, was actually far more sinister. It was not enough, the Chinese Communists believed, for a prisoner to admit his guilt. He (or she) had to be morally and spiritually broken down through "thought reform" (often referred to as "brainwashing")—sessions of relentless interrogation, orchestrated emotional bullying by fellow-inmates, and sometimes the torture of sleep deprivation—to the point where he actually felt guilty for the crimes attributed to him by the regime. According to Jean Pasqualini, a Corsican-Chinese whose 1973 book *Prisoner of Mao*, the first of its type, remains a classic account of the Laogai experience, the aim of the prison authorities was "not so much to make you invent nonexistent crimes, but to make you accept your ordinary life, as you led it, as rotten and sinful and worthy of punishment." Mao Zedong's police, Pasqualini noted, became extraordinarily adept at inducing such pitiful emotional breakdowns in their prisoners. In fact, the handful of American GIs who defected to China after having been prisoners during the Korean War had all experienced the brainwashing experience of "thought reform."

In Mao Zedong's increasingly paranoid hunt for political oppositionists within China during the 1950s and '60s, one cruel political campaign followed another: against "counterrevolutionaries" or "rightists" much of the time. Probably the most dramatic increase in the Laogai population came between 1958 and 1960, when hundreds of thousands of suspected rightists, sometimes simply students who had criticized something the Russians had done, were rounded up and subjected to "thought reform," then to the nightmare without end that constituted the Laogai system. Many of them simply perished in the camps, part of a Laogai death toll that by Wu's calculations may have reached 15 million since 1949. Others survived, but remained in legal limbo for the rest of their lives.

Unlike Gulag inmates, most of whom were permitted to go free if they survived their terms, many Laogai survivors never actually go home. Until Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1978, about 90 percent of all Laogai inmates who completed their terms were compelled to work for the rest of their lives in locations and at jobs assigned to them by the authorities. One of the few improvements in the Laogai system in the past few years, according to some sources, has been the reduction of forced-job-placement, which now reportedly affects fewer than half of Laogai inmates.

Much of our knowledge of Laogai is due to the work of Wu Hongda, or Harry Wu, as he likes to be called in the United States. Born to a wealthy Shanghai banking family in 1937, Wu had no interest in politics at all, but was rash enough to criticize the Communist authorities at student-organized political meetings. For that he was denounced as a rightist in 1960 at the age of 23 and packed off to 12 different Laogai camps for the next 19 years. After his release and return to Shanghai, he spent four years demanding a passport from the authorities and trying to secure a visa from skeptical U.S. consular authorities to enter the United States. By chance, an article by Wu about a French geological drilling device had been translated into French in Paris and read by an American who taught at the University of California at Berkeley. The professor invited Wu to Berkeley as a visiting lecturer in the fall of 1985. Wu was 48 years old.

He arrived in California with $40 in his pocket and was so poor that for a while he slept at night on benches in People's Park or in bus stations. But providence seemed to be with him. People kept wanting to know more about his Laogai experiences, so he told them, astonishing American-born Chinese who apparently had never heard the term. In 1988 the Hoover Institution got him started with a grant to study the topic, from which came his first book, *Laogai: The Chinese Gulag*, in 1991.

Criss-crossing China with a U.S. passport from 1991 to 1994 while posing as a U.S. businessman, Wu not only documented, on videotape and in photographs, innumerable Laogai camps, detention centers, and other locations, he also confirmed what others had long suspected: Chinese corporations, in their lust to break into the lucrative U.S. market, were often

contracting directly with Laogai labor to produce export products. Working at times with a BBC crew and with hidden cameras, Wu documented on-the-record admissions of slave-labor export from Chinese traders and officials.

He also uncovered a practice, approved by the Chinese government, even more grotesque. Some Chinese hospitals were operating a thriving business selling the body-organs of just-executed convicts. Wu tape-recorded a phone conversation between a Canadian Chinese and an administrator in a hospital in Zhengzhou, where the administrator described driving a surgical van directly to the execution site to pick up kidneys and other organs. "Everything is approved," the administrator went on. "From the legal point of view, once a prisoner has been shot, he no longer exists as a human being." The cadavers would be cremated, the administrator explained, and all that the family would get would be "an urn of ashes." To ensure the smooth running of this lucrative business, police and other officials would have to be wined and dined, he added, to secure their help lifting the just-executed corpses into the surgical van. The hospital administrator insisted that information about the organ transplants be "kept secret from foreigners."

Harry Wu

The watchtower of Zhejiang No. 1 prison, where 2,500 prisoners produced chain hoists for export.

Certainly it should be kept secret from Wu, who is so effective in publicizing both the horrors and the banality of the Laogai—where else but in China would prisoners be engaged in manufacturing everything from chain hoists to plastic flowers for export to advanced countries?—that he has embarrassed both Republican and Democratic administrations into confronting the Chinese government repeatedly over Laogai-produced exports. Wu can mix acid with his tears, too. Appearing at a hearing on Laogai before the House Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights in May, he rattled off instance after instance of American corporations' importing Laogai items with neither U.S. protest to China nor legal penalties on the American side of the deal. Referring to the 1992 Memorandum of Understanding between the United States and China, under which China agreed to put an end to Laogai exports to the United States and to permit, supposedly, U.S. Customs officials to visit Chinese prisons and Laogai camps for inspection purposes, Wu dryly noted: "Not only are we allowing the Chinese government to ignore the binding agreements, we are failing to enforce our own laws."

Wu's brashness got him into serious trouble in 1995, when he was caught trying to slip back into China via Kazakhstan. He was held for 66 days before being summarily tried, convicted, and sent packing on the next plane out of the country. Providence, it seemed, was on his side here too, for it may well have been the Chinese eagerness to have Hillary Clinton attend the U.N. Women's Conference in Beijing that forced their hand in giving up Wu.

Many U.S. corporations heavily engaged in the China business detest Wu for his perennial urge to complicate U.S.-China trade relations by raising matters like the rule of law, common decency towards prisoners, and frankly, morality, justice, and truth. Some genuine China scholars have also sniped at Wu for the mistakes and exaggerations in some of his early reporting. Amazingly, some have even tried to excuse the brutality and lawlessness of China's Laogai on the ground, supposedly, that it works. When *Washington Post* international economics reporter Paul

Blustein argued last May that even in a few U.S. prisons inmates help manufacture export items (true: but they are paid for this, not forced to produce them, and don't have to work up to 20 hours a day), he quoted Georgetown University professor of Asian Legal Studies James Feinerman as saying of the Chinese system, "They have very low rates of recidivism. Who are we to argue with their choices?"

And if the Germans voted for Hitler, who are we to argue with them either?

The essence of the Laogai system is obviously not the mere fact that prisoners are required to work, a phenomenon that occurs in prison systems throughout the world. It is that Laogai from the very beginning of Communist rule in China has been a hideous, ruthless instrument for keeping in power a regime that no one elected, for propping up by force a 19th-century philosophical myth that nobody believes in, and for frightening into silence any individual inclined to speak the truth about these things or anything else that has happened during China's last five decades.

A 1994 Chinese government document tacitly acknowledged what an ugly resonance the term Laogai was beginning to carry around the world by officially replacing it with *jianyu*, meaning simply "prison." This terminological change, the document indicated, would be "favorable in our international human-rights struggle." The system itself, though, would operate exactly as before. Given China's propensity for furiously trying to suppress any discussion of its record on human rights at international conferences on the ground that its internal policies are no one else's business, one wonders why it bothers with name changes. But of course, appearances always count.

Those who would argue that China's Laogai is no longer at its very worst, or that outsiders should not bother about how common criminals are treated, forget, of course, the cowed people of Tibet. But brutality, torture, sadism, and arbitrariness are no more appropriate for human beings convicted of genuine criminal acts than for those we would consider political idealists.

And it does appear that in some parts of China, the Laogai system is growing—because it is a profit center for the Communist country. At last May's hearings, Wu provided a Chinese document that discussed the economic development of Jieyang Prison in Guangdong Province. Originally, this Laogai establishment dabbled in tea, fruits, and quarrying (an old convict standby). After Deng Xiaoping's "Open Door" economic policies of the early 1980s, however, the prison diversified into chinaware, rosaries (yes, rosaries), watchbands, mineral water, and artificial Christmas trees. The prison population grew from 700 in 1982 to 3,900 in 1995. Profits soared also. Perhaps following zealously Deng's slogan that "to get rich is glorious," the prison made its first net profit in 1994, and by 1995 it had a net income of $14,000. What to do with all of these economic benefits? For the warden, the answer was self-evident: Build seven more prisons with the earnings.

SOMEHOW THERE ALWAYS SEEMS TO BE A CHRONOLOGICAL GAP BETWEEN THE CREATION OF A THUGGISH APPARATUS AND THE REALIZATION ELSEWHERE OF WHAT IS GOING ON.

Somehow there always seems to be a chronological gap between the creation in one part of the world of a thuggish apparatus of tyranny and the realization by the rest of the human race of what is going on. The Soviet Gulag began as early as the 1920s; it was merely refined in brutality by Stalin during the following decades. Only when Solzhenitsyn published the first volume of *The Gulag Archipelago* in the West in 1973 did the structure that kept Soviet power in place acquire a name distilling its very identity. What complicates the situation in China is that there are many more basic freedoms today than there were during the Orwellian nightmare of the 1966-76 Cultural Revolution. Perhaps, then, we should just let people go on getting richer in China and the Laogai will simply wither away, much as Marx predicted the Communist state itself eventually would.

That is almost certain not to happen for at least one reason: If Laogai ceased to exist, the authorities in Beijing would no longer be able to suppress the Chinese people's access to historical truth. And if there were freedom of expression, thought, and research in China, the Communists would not remain a day longer in power than it took to organize genuinely free elections. Meanwhile, as the Gulag was in the USSR, Laogai is now home to the true heroes of their country—men like Wei Jingsheng, a Beijing Zoo electrician who got 15 years in 1978 for advocating democracy and criticizing Deng Xiaoping. Wei was released in 1993, then slapped with another 14 years

for having the temerity to hold to his earlier opinions about freedom and truth.

Prisons, of course, there will always be, and they will surely be worse in some parts of the world than in others. But they do not have to be operated with leg-irons, with thumb-cuffs, with mandatory workshifts that sometimes go almost around the clock, or with an execution rate that is by far the highest in the world. Nor do executions have to be public, as they still frequently are in China, in order to keep recidivism at bay.

If and when Harry Wu returns to his motherland, as he longs to do, he hopes to build a museum dedicated to the Laogai as a remembrance and a warning. "Sometimes people ask me," Wu has said, "'What are you fighting for?' And my answer is quite simple. I want to see the word 'Laogai' in every dictionary of the world. I want to see Laogai ended." ♦

Historians and the Reagan Legacy

By James Piereson

Last winter, the *New York Times Magazine* published a study ranking the American presidents. Authored by historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., the study represented the latest chapter in a project started by his father, the respected Harvard historian, 50 years ago.

For the recent poll, Schlesinger selected a jury of 32 scholars, nearly all of them liberal historians or political scientists, such as James MacGregor Burns, Alan Brinkley, Walter Dean Burnham, Eric Foner, Doris Kearns Goodwin, William Leuchtenburg, and Henry Graff. Also on the panel were two politicians known more for their liberal politics than for historical scholarship—former New York governor Mario Cuomo and former Illinois senator Paul Simon—included presumably because both had written books on Abraham Lincoln. Their presence gave the reader a clear sense of the jury's ideological disposition.

It hardly came as a surprise, then, when the results of the study fell along predictable ideological lines. Among 20th-century presidents, for example, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was ranked as "great," and his fellow Democrats John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, who sought to extend FDR's achievements, were rated "high average." By contrast, Ronald Reagan, our most conservative president and the one who did the most to undo those achievements, was rated "low average"—the same as Jimmy Carter, whose presidency was a failure by any objective measure. The study rated President Clinton "average" through his first term, though Schlesinger noted that Clinton could easily move up if in his second term he promoted liberal causes, including campaign-finance reform, more spending on urban problems and infrastructure, health-care reform, and environmental activism.

Rather than a reliable ranking of presidents, the study was in fact just one more elaboration of the central assumptions of modern liberalism—namely, that progress can only be achieved through an interventionist federal government that sponsors programs to redistribute income and promote equality. Liberal presidents who promoted such policies were therefore rewarded with high rankings (FDR, JFK, and LBJ), while conservatives who contradicted them were punished with low rankings (Ronald Reagan), regardless of their actual accomplishments.

Now, however, a new study has appeared that offers a strikingly different perspective on our presidents. Recently the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, an educational organization that promotes traditional approaches to the liberal arts and American history and government, surveyed 38 scholars with a broad range of expertise in American history, the presidency, and the Constitution. They included historians Donald Kagan of Yale, Forrest McDonald of the University of Alabama (also a panelist in the Schlesinger study), and Aileen Kraditor of Boston University, political scientists Harvey Mansfield of Harvard and Charles Kesler of Claremont McKenna College, and constitu-

James Piereson is executive director of the John M. Olin Foundation.

tional scholar Betsy McCaughey Ross, lieutenant governor of New York.* The ISI study was supervised by political scientist Gary Gregg, author of *The Presidential Republic*.

As in the Schlesinger study, the panelists were asked to place each of the presidents in one of six categories from "great" to "failure." Presidents William Henry Harrison and Zachary Taylor were excluded from both studies because both men died shortly after taking office, leaving 39 presidents to be evaluated.

When the results of the two polls are compared, one finds some clear areas of agreement. Both panels, for example, were nearly unanimous in ranking Washington and Lincoln as "great" presidents. In the ISI study, all 38 panelists judged Washington "great," and 29 gave Lincoln the same rating (though two panelists thought Lincoln a failure). It is encouraging to see that, despite all the historical revisionism that has taken place since the 1960s, both of these great men have emerged with their reputations intact among historians and politicial scientists of different points of view.

The consensus extends from the founding of the Republic down to the First World War. For example, the two panels were in agreement in ranking Jefferson, Jackson, and Theodore Roosevelt in the "near great" category, just below Washington and Lincoln. The reputations of almost all of our other presidents from 1789 to 1914 also appear to be quite settled.

But the consensus breaks down when it comes to 20th-century presidents starting with Wilson. Understandably, the most recent presidents are those whose reputations are most in dispute. In addition, however, the debate over the modern presidents mirrors the national argument over the role of the federal govern-

Schlesinger vs. ISI Survey Rankings

	Schlesinger Survey	ISI Survey
Great	Washington, Lincoln, F.D. Roosevelt	Washington, Lincoln
Near Great	Jefferson, Jackson, Polk, T. Roosevelt, Wilson, Truman	Jefferson, Jackson, Reagan, T. Roosevelt, F.D. Roosevelt, Eisenhower
High Average	Monroe, Cleveland, McKinley, Eisenhower, Kennedy, L.B. Johnson, J. Adams	J. Adams, J.Q. Adams, Cleveland, McKinley, Taft, Coolidge, Truman, Polk, Monroe
Low Average	Madison, J.Q. Adams, Van Buren, Hayes, Arthur, B. Harrison, Taft, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton	Madison, Van Buren, Ford, B. Harrison, Hayes, Garfield, Arthur, Bush
Below Average	Tyler, Taylor, Fillmore, Coolidge	Tyler, Fillmore, Wilson, Kennedy, Nixon, Hoover
Failure	Pierce, Buchanan, A. Johnson, Grant, Harding, Hoover, Nixon	Buchanan, Grant, Harding, L.B. Johnson, Carter, Clinton, Pierce, A. Johnson

*The other members of the ISI Panel are: William B. Allen, Michigan State University; Martin Anderson, Hoover Institution; Larry Arnn, Claremont Institute; Ryan J. Barilleaux, Miami University of Ohio; Herman Belz, University of Maryland; Richard S. Brookhiser, National Review; George W. Carey, Georgetown University; James Ceaser, University of Virginia; Marshall L. DeRosa, Florida Atlantic University; Charles W. Dunn, Clemson University; Burton Folsom, Mackinac Center for Public Policy; Paul Gottfried, Elizabethtown College; Phillip G. Henderson, Catholic University of America; Robert David Johnson, Williams College; Stephen M. Krason, Franciscan University of Steubenville; Peter Augustine Lawler, Berry College; Leonard Liggio, Atlas Economic Research Foundation; Wilfred McClay, Tulane University; Walter A. McDougall, University of Pennsylvania; Sidney M. Milkis, Brandeis University; James Nuechterlein, First Things; John Pafford, Northwood University; Paul A. Rahe, University of Tulsa; Ellis Sandoz, Louisiana State University; Peter W. Schramm, Ashbrook Center; Barry Alan Shain, Colgate University; Edward S. Shapiro, Seton Hall University; Bernard Sheehan, Indiana University; C. Bradley Thompson, Ashbrook Center; Bradford Wilson, National Association of Scholars; Jay David Woodward, Clemson University.

ment in our society, a philosophical and political contest that has been waged between the parties for the greater part of this century.

This explains some of the differences between the Schlesinger and the ISI panels. The ISI study, as noted earlier, demotes FDR from "great" to "near great" and Wilson and Truman from "near great" to "high average." Kennedy is similarly reduced from "high average" to "below average," and Lyndon Johnson, rated "high average" in the Schlesinger study, is judged a "failure" by the ISI panel. Reagan and Eisenhower, on the other hand, are elevated to the "near great" category.

It is worth emphasizing, however, that despite their reservations about FDR the ISI panelists acknowledge his lasting influence and historical importance. If Roosevelt is judged somewhat more harshly in the ISI study, it is because his legacy, which seemed secure just a few years ago, now seems less steady, with the partial unraveling of the American welfare state. As historian William McClay wrote, "FDR redefined the presidency in ways that need to be revisited. But there were elements of greatness in him, especially in foreign policy and in his persona."

During the 28 years from 1933 to 1961, the United States had just three presidents—FDR, Truman, and Eisenhower—who led the nation through the depression, World War II, and the early and most dangerous years of the Cold War. Each was reelected, served at least two terms in office, and (at least in the cases of FDR and Eisenhower) ended his presidency on good terms with the American people. All three, moreover, continue to be admired by historials and by the public generally.

In the 36 years since 1961, by contrast, we have had eight presidents, none of whom faced challenges as difficult as those confronted by Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower. Of these eight, one was assassinated (Kennedy), two were driven from office (Johnson and Nixon), and three were defeated for reelection (Ford, Carter, and Bush). Only Reagan was reelected and served two full terms, though Clinton may do so as well.

In the judgment of the ISI historians, Ronald Reagan was the only genuinely successful president in this entire period. As panelist James Nuechterlein noted, Reagan "recreated his party and reinvigorated the office. [He was] a magnificent personality and the most successful 'public' president of all time. His only flaw was a too frequent dissociation from policy formation and process." Several other panelists emphasized Reagan's role in building up America's defenses—over the united opposition of Democrats and intellectuals—and thus helping bring the Cold War to an end.

What of Bill Clinton? How will historians judge him in the future? He reportedly discussed his place in history with his advisers during the 1996 presidential campaign, speculating that historians might rank him in the same class as Thomas Jefferson or Theodore Roosevelt if he had a successful second term. But, of course, greatness cannot be conferred by historians, pollsters, or even the voters.

While Clinton could take some comfort from Schlesinger's speculations, which mirrored his own self-assessment, the ISI panel came to a different conclusion. Twenty panelists rated Clinton "below average," and 10 judged him a "failure." The panel's pessimism about the Clinton presidency derives from the avalanche of scandals that has buried his presidency, any one of which might eventually discredit him, as well as his failure so far to take the difficult steps required to keep our old-age entitlement programs solvent. As far as the ISI panel is concerned, Clinton will be hard pressed to achieve even an "average" ranking.

But Clinton, to be sure, can claim some accomplishments. His term has coincided with a generally prosperous economy and a stock market that has more than doubled during his nearly five years in office. Though his health-care scheme went down in flames, he has worked with Congress to reduce the federal budget deficit and to reform the welfare system. By coopting Republican themes (made popular by Reagan) in the areas of crime, welfare, and fiscal responsibility, he has brought the Democratic party nearer to the political center and has sown dissension and confusion in Republican ranks.

Clinton, then, despite his talk of change during the 1992 campaign, has been essentially a status quo president, riding a strong economy and a bull market in stocks and putting off some especially tough issues for his successors. In so doing, he has confirmed and consolidated Ronald Reagan's contribution, while moving his own party toward the center to blunt the advances made by Republicans from 1980 through the congressional elections of 1994.

In this sense, Clinton's main tasks have had less to do with the presidency than with saving his party and its favored programs from destruction at the hands of the Republicans. Though he has so far succeeded in these limited tasks, such a defensive formula does not make for greatness in a president. If Clinton gets through his term without any great debacles, he will in all likelihood be viewed by future historians as an "average" president, like McKinley or Taft, who was fortunate to govern during good times. If he is undone by scandal or a failing economy, he may do worse. ♦

The Arc of the Covenant Marriage

By Christopher Caldwell

Supporters of Louisiana's new "covenant-marriage" law compare it to Ulysses' command that he be lashed to the mast of his ship to avoid being lured into the shoals by the singing of Sirens. Think of Ulysses as a husband or wife, and divorce as the shoals. Acting on the belief that America's rate of marital shipwreck is causing special damage to children, and laying at least part of the blame on the ease with which a divorce can be obtained, Louisiana has just become the first state in the nation to offer newlyweds the option of strapping themselves to the conjugal mast.

The state's covenant-marriage act—which went into effect in mid-August after being passed 98-0 in the Louisiana House and 37-1 in the Senate—allows couples to choose a "high-test" version of marriage. Couples who want a covenant marriage must receive counseling before marriage, and—knock wood—before seeking divorce. No-fault divorce is available only after a two-year separation, as against six months under existing state law. Divorce can be granted sooner for the traditional "fault" grounds, which the new law revives—adultery, abandonment, physical or sexual abuse, and conviction of a capital crime.

So Louisiana's covenant marriage does not, as some of its detractors have claimed, put an end to no-fault divorce. If you want to get married in Louisiana the very same way you could six months ago, no problem. But the new law does send an unmistakable message that the state—one state at least—has an interest in intervening to shore up what it sees as an embattled institution.

Though few couples have yet said "I do" under the new dispensation, friends and foes of Louisiana's innovation believe it is portentous. Indeed, similar legislation is pending in Indiana and California, not to mention bills in half a dozen other states (all of them thus far unsuccessful) to either restrict no-fault or add counseling requirements before marriage or divorce. And extravagant claims abound on both sides, with critics charging that covenant marriage represents a secret offensive by the religious Right, and some optimists predicting that the rollback of America's divorce culture is underway.

The intellectual roots of covenant marriage are prosaic by comparison: The concept has been elaborated in the academic work of certain law professors—most notably Elizabeth Scott of the University of Virginia and Margaret Brinig of George Mason University—who have cast about for a legal framework to strengthen marriage. Both focus more on reinforcing the solemnity of marital vows than on eliminating no-fault divorce. Says Scott, "What I like about the Louisiana law is its required two-year separation, which is beneficial to a divorcing couple's ability to make a thoughtful decision. What I *don't* like about it is the inclusion of fault grounds." Brinig, who has consulted with legislators from Michigan, Iowa, and Virginia who hope to draft their own marriage-strengthening legislation, has similar worries. "I'd be concerned that young people, teenagers, might fall in love, get into a covenant situation, and not be able to get out of it," she says.

If its intellectual originators are modest in their conception of what covenant marriage can accomplish, its political sponsors use similarly understated rhetoric. "This is not about eliminating divorce," says Tony Perkins, the 34-year-old Republican state legislator who sponsored Louisiana's new law. "The goal is to strengthen marriage." Perkins, who ran the 1996 Senate campaign of Republican Woody Jenkins, says he would prefer an end to no-fault divorce "in an ideal world" and hopes that social pressures will eventually result in 50 to 60 percent of marriages being of the covenant type.

Feminists and civil libertarians worry aloud that any stiffening of divorce requirements will keep women in abusive relationships—particularly those involving "mental abuse," which is not among the recognized grounds for "fault" divorce. But their underlying gripe is that the covenant-marriage movement strengthens the hand of anti-feminist elements in the religious Right. "Just look on the Internet," says

Christopher Caldwell is senior writer of The Weekly Standard.

Louisiana NOW president Terry O'Neill. "'Covenant' and 'covenant marriage' are terms with a very specific meaning in the Christian community."

There is indeed huge sympathy for the measure among the religious. One of the best indicators is the announced willingness of clergymen to use the state law as a test of the seriousness of affianced couples. Several Episcopal and Baptist ministers have already gone on record as saying they will grant church marriages only to those who are serious enough to undertake a covenant-marriage commitment. Tom Finney, spokesman for the Catholic diocese of New Orleans, says, "The covenant-marriage idea is certainly closer to the Catholic idea of marriage"—although he adds the church will seek assurances that the "counselors" who intervene in a crisis will not be biased in favor of divorce.

Kent Lemon

Tony Perkins

Perkins, a father of two girls who is active in the Promise-Keepers movement, makes no bones about his own Christianity. Yet he and the Louisiana lawmakers who voted with him—and more so the supporters of the movement outside of politics—cannot be dismissed as Bible-thumpers. There is a distinctly non-sectarian side to the covenant-marriage movement, one best expressed by strong supporter Amitai Etzioni, founder and director of the Washington-based Communitarian Network, who says, "One can be deeply concerned with strengthening the commitment of marriage without favoring traditional or hierarchical forms of marriages or denying women full equal standing." Perkins, in fact, far from seeing his legislation as an attempt to undo the legacy of feminism, notes that it actually *expands* the grounds for fault-based divorce, making Louisiana the only state outside of West Virginia that admits child abuse as a rationale. And against the complaints of NOW that a lengthened waiting period will keep women in abusive relationships, covenant-marriage partisans cite a 1991 Justice Department study showing that current husbands/fathers account for only 9 percent of abuse cases—the rest of the perpetrators being ex-husbands, boyfriends, and other nomadic partners of the divorce culture. Just as it amazed onlookers to see the ease with which a masterful pol like Bill Clinton could turn traditionally "liberal" issues like gun control into "family values" issues, Perkins has stunned Louisiana's political establishment by courting feminists with hard evidence that traditional marriage favors even untraditional women.

That leaves detractors like O'Neill of Louisiana NOW hard-pressed to specify just what it is that so irks them. "I'm on the same page with Perkins on some issues," she says. "He says no-fault divorce has harmed women and created a 'trophy-wife' problem. He's absolutely right, I absolutely agree. And you stand on the sidelines and see the havoc divorce wreaks on kids and you want to wring these people's scrawny necks. But the couples know that, and it tears them apart. I have never seen a man or a woman who wasn't totally traumatized by divorce. This law is just a way of punishing them. Let's try something other than hellfire and brimstone."

Perkins meanwhile, is not above a little gloating. "It shows the true colors of some of these groups, the radicalism of their agenda. We're offering a choice, and they're rejecting it. How can they say they're not anti-marriage now?"

For all its conservative associations, it's not certain that the Louisiana statute serves an idea of marriage that conservatives will want to claim as their own. Even the most ardent family-values advocates have seldom cited insufficient state policing as the primary cause of the current rotten record of marital permanence. Back when marriage was well policed, it was policed—and not always prettily—by gossips and priests and violent older brothers. Today, that kind of minding of other people's business has not only been discredited but even made illegal. In an era of laws protecting, for instance, gays from housing or job discrimination, there is no real possibility of informal discrimination to enforce heterosexual fidelity; the

first employer who decides he wants only covenant-marrieds working in his plant will wind up on the losing end of a Supreme Court decision. Whether the work of constructive bullying, or "tough love," can be done by a bunch of counselors and bureaucrats in some Department of Happy Marriages in the state capital 180 miles away is open to question.

The Louisiana covenant-marriage law is bound to face modifications and legal challenges. Justices of the peace, uncertain of whether they can provide one-stop pre-marital counseling as part of the covenant-marriage package, have asked for an opinion from the state attorney general. While the opinion has not yet come down, Perkins expects it will mandate some kind of licensing for both secular and church counselors. And there will surely be litigation on privacy and illegal-contract grounds—although as Kevin Hasson, an attorney who is president of the Washington-based Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, puts it, "It will be an uphill struggle to say that what marriage has always been until recently has always been unconstitutional."

In the meantime, what Perkins and his allies have served up is a heady Clintonite cocktail, composed in equal parts of minor legislation, the rhetoric of choice, education (or counseling) as a pain-free means to social improvement, the protection of children as a first imperative, and all of it based on a proposition—that marriage is an institution that's worth defending—with which no one could possibly disagree.

The result is a reversal of roles that ought to be heartening to the GOP. For once, it's Republicans who are arguing on behalf of "common sense" solutions for those who work hard and play by the rules. Democrats, meanwhile, repair to abstract, destroy-the-Department-of-Education-style libertarianism of the sort that has proved a consistent loser in the politics of the last three years. No matter what the outcome, something very significant has happened in Louisiana: the first Republican defeat of Clintonism on Clintonite turf. ♦

The Best Staffer in the Senate Is a Senator

Meet Paul Coverdell, Who Hasn't 'Grown' in Office

By Matthew Rees

A few years ago political advisers to Paul Coverdell, the Republican senator from Georgia, thought he should attend an Atlanta Braves baseball game to show he was a regular guy. But when they went to pick Coverdell up at his house on the outskirts of Atlanta, he was wearing a suit and tie—keep in mind summer temperatures in Georgia—and carrying a briefcase. He managed to feign interest in the game until the third inning, at which point he opened his briefcase and began wading through paperwork. He kept working till the end of the game.

Paul Coverdell is no hail fellow well met. He's wonkish and workaholic. He doesn't care much for one-on-one campaigning and is far from smooth on the stump. A Coverdell speech conjures up someone imitating Dana Carvey imitating George Bush. Coverdell, in other words, is atypical in the polished world of Washington politics. Yet he's one of the most influential senators outside of Trent Lott and Tom Daschle, the Senate's Republican and Democratic leaders.

In a little less than five years in Washington, Coverdell has emerged as a behind-the-scenes force in the development and implementation of the Republican agenda. Yet he's remained so low profile that, asked for a comment about him, even Norman Ornstein—the American Enterprise Institute's legendary congressional quote machine—is left speechless.

Coverdell's influence springs from many sources, but one stands out: He spends more time working to advance GOP causes and stymie Democratic progress than any other member of the Senate. "I don't know if he does anything other than politics," says Rep. John

Matthew Rees is a staff writer for The Weekly Standard.

Linder of Georgia, who served with Coverdell in the state legislature and has been a friend for over 20 years.

With a wife who's a flight attendant, no kids, and no hobbies to speak of, Coverdell has lots of time for work. And it pays dividends. Back in 1993, it was he who organized the massive coalition of companies and interest groups that helped defeat the Clinton health-care plan. Recently he's been active on education, the balanced-budget amendment, and U.S. policy toward Mexico. House speaker Newt Gingrich jokes privately, "Republicans don't need an agenda. We have the Coverdell agenda."

Coverdell's influence is not limited to public policy. He's also among the most respected Republican strategists on Capitol Hill, one of the few people who have the ear of both Gingrich and Lott. He has known Gingrich for 20 years. "Paul is one of Newt's trusted advisers," says Linder, a member of the speaker's inner circle. Most recently, Gingrich has been making a high-volume pitch for a Coverdell measure—educational savings accounts, or, as he calls them, "Coverdell accounts."

Coverdell also regularly meets with Lott. He's a member of Lott's elected leadership team and is one of six senators on the Council of Trent, an informal group the majority leader consults on policy and politics. "Paul is a hard worker and has good judgment about the politics of the Senate," Lott told me. When confronted with a seemingly intractable problem, Lott will gesture toward Coverdell and say, "Let Mikey handle it"—a reference to the kid in the Life cereal commercials who's always ready to eat something new. Coverdell's influence with Lott is mostly behind the scenes, though his very public opposition to William Weld's confirmation as ambassador to Mexico helped cement Lott's support for that position. A further link between the two senators was Coverdell's hiring last year of Kyle McSlarrow, an adroit, all-purpose aide who had served as deputy chief of staff for Lott and Bob Dole.

The irony in Coverdell's success is that he came to the Senate in 1992 as a moderate, reputedly pro-choice and close to George Bush. He endorsed Bush in 1980 and 1988 and spent nearly three years as Bush's director of the Peace Corps.

But no one who looked at his record in the Senate would call Coverdell a Bush Republican. He's one of the few elected officials to become *more* conservative after arriving in Washington. He is "the mirror image of someone who 'grows' in office," says Ralph Reed, former executive director of the Christian Coalition and a Georgia native. "He came to town perceived as a Bush/Ford-style moderate but has become one of the most reliable conservative champions in the Congress."

Indeed, on votes scored by the American Conservative Union during the past four years, Coverdell's annual average is 97 out of 100. This year he's pleased conservatives with his vote against the Chemical Weapons Convention and his opposition to Weld. Linder says, "The only thing that separates Paul from Ralph Reed is that he's not completely pro-life." Yet if Coverdell opposes a constitutional amendment to ban abortion, he is also against federal funding of abortion and has received a perfect score from the National Right to Life Committee all four years he's been in the Senate.

Coverdell says he hasn't become more conservative, only "more concerned about government's intrusion into our lives." Either way, conservative support was key in getting him elected. After winning a two-stage Republican primary in 1992, in both rounds of which he was the moderate alternative, Coverdell trained his sights on Wyche Fowler, the incumbent Democrat. He finished 35,000 votes behind Fowler on election day, but Fowler only took 49 percent of the vote, necessitating a runoff election under Georgia law (a law the Democratic legislature has since changed).

Coverdell's relative moderation had kept most conservative groups from working on his behalf, but in the runoff they mobilized. Groups such as the National Right to Work Committee, the Christian Coalition, the National Federation of Independent Businesses, and the National Rifle Association sent out mailings, ran ads, set up phone banks, and dispatched campaign experts to the state. Many of these groups had never before campaigned for Coverdell, and some had opposed him. He also got a boost from Phil Gramm, who chaired the Senate Republican campaign committee and committed over $550,000 to the runoff election. Coverdell credits both Gramm and the conservative groups for his narrow victory over Fowler, and he hasn't forgotten them. He was an early and enthusiastic supporter of Gramm's presidential bid and since the runoff has been loyal to the conservative coalition.

The Clinton health-care plan was a defining issue for Coverdell, and by the time the battle ended there was little doubt about his ideological identity. Senate Republican moderates criticized the Clinton plan (except Jim Jeffords of Vermont, who was a cosponsor) but sympathized with its objectives. Coverdell attacked the Clinton proposal as "one of the greatest assaults on a free people" he had ever seen. At one memorable meeting of Senate Republicans in the fall of 1993—before Dole's position on the issue was clear—Coverdell said, "Think of this as 1939. We have

to choose whether we are Chamberlain or Churchill."

It wasn't just empty rhetoric: Coverdell began organizing meetings of all the groups and companies with a stake in the potential overhaul of health care. Before long the meetings were attracting hundreds of people, and Coverdell was drumming up vocal opposition to the Clinton plan. He persuaded Ralph Reed to begin a massive postcard campaign highlighting some of the more draconian proposals and personally met with countless interested parties. Senators and staffers were awed by Coverdell's energy and willingness to do the organizational scut work few other senators could be bothered with (hence the good-natured joke that Coverdell is "the best staffer in the Senate"). Aides say in retrospect that Coverdell did more to defeat the Clinton health-care plan than any other Republican in Congress.

His activist mentality—more common in the House—is popular with the Senate's junior conservatives, but thanks to a nonthreatening style and a readiness to submerge his ego at a moment's notice, Coverdell remains popular with moderates and the more restrained Old Bulls. That's why Lott put him in charge of managing the balanced-budget-amendment working group; numerous other senators had claimed the issue as their own, but all could agree that Coverdell was a good choice to coordinate the amendment's passage (in the end, it failed by one vote). "Maximum output with minimum annoyance," is how one aide characterizes Coverdell's *modus operandi.* Spencer Abraham, a GOP senator from Michigan, notes that Coverdell stands out by virtue of his activity in so many different areas: legislation, fund-raising, message development, and Senate floor management. Coverdell also has a crack staff. McSlarrow is one of the Senate's most influential aides, while press secretary Jonathan Baron and policy director Terri Delgadillo have helped boost Coverdell's stature inside and outside the Senate.

Kent Lemon

Paul Coverdell

The traits that have impressed his Republican colleagues also explain why no Democrats have announced they will challenge Coverdell for reelection next year. He has already raised $2 million, has strong ties with Atlanta's predominantly nonpartisan business community, and maintains a political organization in all of the state's 159 counties. In the absence of Democratic opposition, his most vocal adversary is the reflexively liberal editorial page of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* the state's most widely read daily. In May, the paper published a scathing editorial entitled "Senator Chameleon" that described Coverdell as "assuming the protective coloration of those around him" and forsaking his reputation as a pragmatic conservative "in a shameless courtship of his party's far-right fringe." Expect more such criticism of Coverdell if he follows through on his plan to hire Ralph Reed as a consultant for next year's campaign.

In the meantime, Coverdell will press some of his pet issues, including educational savings accounts. He introduced the measure earlier this year—it gives special tax status to money spent on education—and it's become a centerpiece of the GOP's education package. Lott and Gingrich are strong supporters. It would already be law had President Clinton not promised to veto the entire tax-relief package if the Coverdell measure were included. The issue is vintage Coverdell: It's good public policy, it puts Democrats on the defensive, and its passage will require a massive effort to overcome the diehard opposition of the education establishment.

It's the kind of fight few other Senate Republicans would be prepared to wage, much less win. But Coverdell intends to press forward with this battle and others like it. His zeal—in stark contrast to the GOP's general lethargy—all but ensures that sooner or later Paul Coverdell will escape from anonymity. Probably sooner. ♦

Gerc-Crit

John Ellis's Island of Lost Literature

By Roger Kimball

In 1984, when the then-director of the National Endowment for the Humanities William J. Bennett published *To Reclaim a Legacy*—a pointed attack on the way that the humanities were being taught—evidence that something had gone dreadfully wrong at our colleges and universities was plain for all to see. Yet the response to Bennett's report from the academy was a combination of disbelief and rage: disbelief that anyone could still seriously speak of such things as "civilization's lasting vision" and "its highest shared ideals and aspirations," and rage that a Reagan appointee (albeit one with a Ph.D. in philosophy) should dare to criticize . . . well, *them*, the intellectual and moral elect. Judging from the abuse showered upon Bennett, one would have thought that he represented a monstrous threat to the survival of academic freedom, scholarly creativity, and true culture.

But that reaction was mild compared with the apoplexy that greeted the late Allan Bloom when he published *The Closing of the American Mind* in 1987. Condescension turned to shock and, once again, to rage, as this impassioned exposé of the spiritual degradation of America's elite students shot up the bestseller list. Additional assaults on the academy followed: my own *Tenured Radicals*, Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education*, David Lehman's *Signs of the Times*, Charles Sykes's *Profscam*, Camille Paglia's stinging essays on women's studies programs and kindred follies, and Paul Gross and Norman Levitt's *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels With Science*. Whether the subject was the institutionalization of sixties radicalism on campus, political correctness, professorial dereliction, the moral and intellectual fatuousness of deconstruction and radical multiculturalism, or the grotesque attacks on science and technology by avant-garde "humanists," the message was clear: Something was very, very wrong with liberal education in American colleges and universities.

John M. Ellis
Literature Lost
Social Agendas and the Corruption of the Humanities
Yale, 272 pp., $25

Again and again, though, the response from the academy began in denial and ended in denunciation. The phenomenon of political correctness, though documented in countless books and articles, was recently dismissed by one politically correct academic as a "myth." Spokesmen for the academic establishment have busied themselves assuring parents, trustees, and alumni that criticism of the academy is overstated, that the hue and cry over the politicization of the humanities is a fantasy concocted by "right-wing" extremists who don't know what they are talking about.

One marvels at the persistence. But the publication of John Ellis's eloquent new book, *Literature Lost: Social Agendas and the Corruption of the Humanities*, makes one wonder anew how much longer the charade can continue. Ellis, professor emeritus of German literature at the University of California, Santa Cruz, is a founding member of the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics, the organization of literary scholars that was started a few years ago to provide an alternative to the thoroughly politicized Modern Language Association.

It should be said straight off that the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics is not a conservative organization; indeed, in many ways it is a bastion of liberalism. It was created in the hope of providing a forum where literature could still be discussed not as a political tool but—*mirabile dictu*—as literature. The eminent literary scholar Christopher Ricks, another founding member, summed it up thus: "The concern is not the presence of politics in the MLA; it's the absence of non-politics. . . . It does seem that race, gender, class, and gayness are the only aspects under which literature is seen to exist there."

It almost goes without saying that this effort to foster a little "non-politics" in the study of literature has been attacked as a viciously ideological activity. And so it is not surprising that the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics and its members have been branded as right-wing apologists by *bien-pensant* deconstructionists, new historicists, queer theorists, radical multiculturalists, and devotees of "cultural studies."

This is the fate that surely awaits *Literature Lost*. Even now, I imagine, Yale literature professors are writing furious letters to the director of the Yale University Press to express their outrage that such a book was pub-

Roger Kimball is executive editor of the New Criterion.

lished under its auspices. And the situation is all the more serious because Ellis is not a first-time offender. His 1989 book *Against Deconstruction*, a brief but meticulously argued attack on one of the most poisonous and influential academic fads of our day, marked him as an untrustworthy ally in the pursuit of intellectual fatuousness. It was all the more objectionable for being written in clear, precise English, and for subjecting the arguments (and pseudo-arguments) of the deconstructionists to the unflattering light of rational analysis.

Literature Lost continues and expands on the discussion Mr. Ellis began in *Against Deconstruction*. As in that earlier book, he is at his best when patiently setting forth and criticizing the key assumptions and arguments of his opponents. He brings a philosopher's rigor to the notoriously muddled field of literary "theory," subjecting its often grandiose and pretentious claims to the tribunal of common sense.

But where *Against Deconstruction* focused on a fairly narrow set of arguments and attitudes, *Literature Lost* steps back to consider the fate of the humanities—and literary studies in particular—in the age of political correctness. Along the way, Ellis devotes particular attention to a number of influential figures—Terry Eagleton, Gerald Graff, and Stephen Greenblatt, among others—whose work epitomizes one or another aspect of what he calls "PC logic." As Ellis notes, so successful has this radicalization of the academy been over the past two or three decades that "it requires some effort to recall what the typical attitudes toward the study of the humanities were just a short while ago." We live now at a time when—to quote the influential literary Marxist Fredric Jameson—even literature professors believe that "everything is 'in the last analysis' political."

In essentials, the argument is as old as Thrasymachus' insistence, in Plato's *Republic*, that "might makes right," though it got a major overhaul when Marx came along with his theory of ideology. As Ellis puts it in what is perhaps his neatest analogy, "As Marxism is to the economic sphere, so cultural political correctness is to the cultural sphere." Just as the one promised abundance and everywhere brought penury and unhappiness, so the other promises greater freedom and diversity and winds up demanding a twisted puritanical conformism in intellectual as well as moral matters. The great peculiarity is that "just at the time when in the real world Marxism was collapsing so completely that its viability as a political theory seemed almost at an end, its influence in the universities of the English-speaking world was increasing just as dramatically." To a large extent, *Literature Lost* is a meditation on this puzzle.

HOW EXCITING TO BE NOT JUST READING SHAKESPEARE BUT CHALLENGING IMPERIALISM TOO!

The idea that "everything is 'in the last analysis' political" reduces art and literature as traditionally conceived to little more than a self-indulgent diversion. For the race-class-gender lobby, all social, artistic, and intellectual life must be subjected to a battery of political tests. It's the Sovietization of intellectual life, where the value or truth of a work is determined not by its intrinsic qualities but by the degree to which it supports a given political line.

In some ways, as Ellis points out, this approach to cultural life is a highly moral—or, rather, a highly moralistic—one. Although it is thoroughly anti-bourgeois and thoroughly anti-traditional in its morality, it nevertheless seeks to judge every product of the human spirit by the degree of "virtue" it exhibits—where "virtue" is defined beforehand by whatever gay, feminist, Marxist, racial, or ethnic totem the particular critic has sworn allegiance to. In this respect, gender-race-class criticism—let's call it Gerc-Crit for short—is no less vigilant than Mr. Bowdler and no less sanctimonious than Mrs. Grundy.

The extraordinary, if perverted, moralism of Gerc-Crit (the "G," incidentally, is soft, as in "German," the "C" hard as in "arc") is one of its great appeals. Few things are more titillating to intellectuals—who grow up being told that their pursuits are of limited social utility—than the prospect of infusing their work with high moral purpose. How edifying to think that one was not simply teaching a novel by Jane Austen but was somehow also striking a blow for female emancipation! How exciting to believe that one was not just reading Shakespeare but was somehow challenging imperialism as well!

There is, however, a problem with the moralistic approach that Gerc-Crits employ, and that is its terrible simple-mindedness and philistinism. It was a problem for Mrs. Grundy, and it is a problem for the likes of Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton, too. Moralistic tests of cultural achievement always wind up being reductive, and the more ruthlessly applied, the more reductive they appear. This is where the jargon of deconstruction and kindred continental imports has been a godsend for academics. It has allowed them to indulge their moralism to the hilt while at the same time appearing intellectually sophisticated (or incomprehensible, which is often just as good). As Ellis observes, "Combining race, gender, and class criticism with the language of deconstruction takes care of both problems at once. Politicized criticism gives deconstruction an apparent seriousness of purpose, and in return deconstruc-

tion makes a rigorously moralistic position seem avant-garde and sophisticated." Nice work if you can get it.

Unfortunately, as Ellis shows, the moralism is as unconvincing as the sophistication is bogus. Ellis is hardly the first to point out, but he nevertheless usefully reminds us, that the anti-Western and (in particular) anti-American animus of so much Gerc-Crit has its origins in a utopian Romanticism that goes back at least to Rousseau. It was disastrous then, and it is disastrous now. Moreover, in extolling the virtues of societies and civilizations other than our own (and at the expense of our own), Gerc-Crits are merely following in the footsteps of the intellectually disgruntled from Johann Herder to Margaret Mead and beyond. The most ironic aspect of this whole performance is that "Those seized by this mood may imagine that they are taking an anti-Western stance, but that is all part of the same pattern of self-delusion."

In fact, criticism of the West has been a prominent ingredient in the West's self-understanding at least since Socrates invited his fellow Athenians to debate with him about the nature of the good life. As Ellis suggests, no civilization in history has been as consistently self-critical as the West. The very concept of "ethnocentricism," which is used like a sledgehammer to disparage the West, is a Western invention.

> Our Western cultural inheritance is not perfect, but it has succeeded in raising us from the barbarism of a state of nature. It has managed to abolish many forms of human cruelty, has given us forms of democratic government that actually work, and has a record of human thought in literature and philosophy that offers extraordinary range, depth, and complexity. Far from debasing human beings, it has enhanced their dignity in a thousand different ways. We can build on it, extend it, modify it; but if we allow the politically correct to pull it down with their characteristic utopian promises about what they can replace it with, we have only ourselves to blame. We can be sure that if we allow their destructive resentment to destroy yet again so that they can create perfection, we shall witness the destruction but never see the benefits promised.

As a kind of corollary to this observation, Ellis enunciates a political dictum, the wisdom of which is worth the price of *Literature Lost*: *If, when a great moral principle is introduced, its full cost must be paid immediately, progress will never occur*. When it comes to moral progress, we have more to fear from self-declared partisans of virtue than from cautious traditionalists.

If the claims of Gerc-Crits to greater moral sensitivity and insight cannot stand, neither can their assumption of superior intellectual sophistication. One of the first things one notices about Gerc-Crit is how drab and unvarying it is. Works of literature are read not for their own sake but for predetermined political lessons about some form of racial injustice, sexual oppression, or class warfare. The result is formulaic criticism-by-number. As Ellis notes, Gerc-Crits "are convinced that their triad of issues is fundamental and that anything else is superficial." But, he asks with refreshing common sense, "Why must all literature be about the same thing?" What is left

out of the Gerc-Crit view of literature is literature. Trivializing the nature of aesthetic experience—which in its highest sense binds us to a larger community by educating that most social of faculties, taste—Gerc-Crits reduce everything to politics. But even their view of politics is simplistic, for, as Ellis observes, "A meaningful politics must recognize other important values in human life. Indeed, politics makes no sense when it stands by itself. If the question who wields political power is not broadened to take account of what that power is to be used for—that is, what human values it will serve—then it reduces to a matter of who manages to subdue whom. . . ." And that is not so much politics as its barbaric alternative.

The real villain in this story is not, as Ellis puts it, "theory but *bad* theory." The irony is that "theory," which once meant a respectful, disinterested beholding of reality, has come to be synonymous with a form of intellectual political activism. In tracing the course of that devolution, *Literature Lost* tells a very sad tale. ♦

B&A

Freedom of Preach

Flink's First Amendment

By Stephen Bates

In 1947, the American news media got a public spanking from, in *Editor & Publisher*'s dismissive phrase, "11 professors, a banker-merchant and a poet-librarian." The loftily named Commission on Freedom of the Press declared that the media's shortcomings "have ceased to be private vagaries and have become public dangers"; at stake was nothing short of "the preservation of democracy and perhaps of civilization." Commission members—including University of Chicago president Robert Maynard Hutchins (the chairman), theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, political scientist Harold Lasswell, "banker-merchant" Beardsley Ruml, "poet-librarian" Archibald MacLeish, and other intellectual luminaries of the day—offered an assortment of proposals for reforming the press. "The Commission's recommendations," Hutchins acknowledged, "are not startling." The press took umbrage at the whole enterprise, and the proposals had roughly zero impact.

Stanley E. Flink
Sentinel Under Siege
The Triumphs and Troubles of America's Free Press
Westview, 309 pp., $28

Fifty years later, many of the same unstartling recommendations appear in Stanley Flink's *Sentinel Under Siege*. Flink, like Hutchins et al., wishes journalists were better educated, more ethical, quicker to confess error, more sensitive to privacy concerns, and subject to more criticism from within and without. The Hutchins crew suggested "a new and independent agency" to appraise the press. Flink, who devotes a chapter and a half to the 1947 commission, advocates a "credible, independent oversight body" that would issue seals of approval. Unlike the commission, he thinks this approval should depend partly on a newspaper's record of "enlarging minority participation and upward mobility." Overall, though, his book demonstrates just how little blueprints for media reform have changed in 50 years. While Flink suggests convening another Hutchins Commission, we could simply republish the 1947 report and be done with it.

More provocative than Flink's threadbare (but largely astute) *hows* of media reform is his *why*. Unless journalists quit shirking their democratic duties, he writes, they may well find themselves facing "a reexamination of First Amendment protections." Upgrading journalism won't merely protect democracy, in this formulation (another echo of the Hutchins report); it will also protect the press itself. That's a nice First Amendment you've got there, pal—it'd be a shame if anything happened to it. . . .

In making his case, Flink, a former *Life* writer and TV producer, provides a mostly lively, engaging overview of journalism history. He moves briskly through the Revolution, the birth of the First Amendment, and the partisan press of the era. After an overlong discussion of slavery and its aftermath, we ease into the 20th century and the rise of advertising, when newspapers became "the single most important marketing instrument for American products" and the advertiser supplanted the politician as the power behind the masthead.

Entertaining and informative as they are, though, the tales from the past fail to bear the weight Flink places on them. To begin with, if the First Amendment is going to be eroded, as the author warns, the reason won't be that newspapers toady to corporate interests or that the public is trivia-minded. From the Sedition Act onward, history demonstrates that the press faces trouble when the press makes trouble. Consumerism and fluff don't provoke elected officials or Supreme Court justices to hack away at press freedom.

Anyway, the author himself seems

Stephen Bates, literary editor of the Wilson Quarterly, *has written widely about journalism and politics.*

to be of two minds about the First Amendment. He offers the dubious proposition that "two centuries of judicial interpretation and legislative statutes have left the First Amendment on shaky ground," then, instead of urging Americans to defend their sacred liberty against any and all incursions, he counsels that we stop exercising it so cavalierly. He writes that trashy tabloids "have presumed constitutional protection" and notes with approval the view that the First Amendment ought to cover only discussions of public issues and not literature, music, drama, *Entertainment Weekly*, or anything else. For this politics-only limitation—a limitation accepted by none of the recent Supreme Court justices whom Flink charges with enfeebling the First Amendment—he quotes Alexander Meiklejohn; he could just as well quote Robert Bork.

Flink hardly comes across as a right-winger—he condemns Rush Limbaugh for inciting "anger, discontent, hate, and faceless populism"—yet he also makes a second Borkian move by looking to the Framers for guidance on the proper role of the press. "Eloquently and without exception," he asserts, the Framers lauded "the free press as the sentinel who guards democracy." Here he builds on the late Justice Potter Stewart, who, in a 1974 Yale Law School speech, contended that the First Amendment was written to promote "organized, expert scrutiny of government"—i.e., investigative reporting. In this view, irresponsible journalism is a slap at James Madison.

Contemplating the press of their era, though, Madison and Jefferson didn't see Woodward and Bernstein. Instead they saw harried printers who, alongside more remunerative activities like running off business forms and religious tracts, sometimes published newspapers. The "news" in such papers was minimal: items about local deaths, elections, fires, and the like, based on information provided by readers, and items about events elsewhere, which were lifted, often unchanged and without credit, from other papers. A larger portion of the late-18th-century newspaper consisted of what we would consider op-ed pieces or editorials. From the Stamp Act on, most newspapers allied themselves with one side and published essays intended to advance its interests. Accuracy was less important than believability. Opposing views were omitted or caricatured. Printers unabashedly served The Cause, not any notion of fairness, objectivity, or truth.

A modern newspaper that mimicked the Framers' press would no doubt appall Flink. So, for that matter, would most American newspapers of the past two centuries. His book's air of crisis is thus a bit hard to fathom. If media are "the mucilage of a free society," as he contends, then his book is more reassuring than alarming. Flink shows that the American press has been far worse when the stakes were considerably higher, as in the Revolutionary era and the Civil War, and yet American democracy somehow survived. Even appallingly irresponsible media seem to provide a mucilage that's sufficiently gooey.

FROM THE STAMP ACT ON, MOST NEWSPAPERS UNABASHEDLY SERVED 'THE CAUSE,' NOT TRUTH.

A second problem for Flink is the marketplace. The author serenely asserts that more responsible journalism would prove more profitable, but surely those corporate bosses, whose bottom-line obsessions he laments, would have seized upon such a road to riches. Americans favor *People* over the *Economist*, Barbara Walters over Jim Lehrer. Indeed, the author discloses that he has nourished those unworthy tastes himself. As a *Life* correspondent in 1951, he published a detailed description of the room in which William Randolph Hearst had died, plus an exclusive interview of Hearst's grieving lady friend, Marion Davies. If this deathbed *mise en scène* attracted newsstand browsers who might otherwise have snatched up the latest *Foreign Policy*, the author offers no apology.

And why should he? Flink believes that the vital issue is "not so much the public's right to know but the public's need to know." But what of the public's right not to give a damn? What of the right of Americans to be lousy citizens, to immerse themselves in schlock about Marion Davies or the People's Princess? Those are questions that the author never asks. Just as he thinks libel awards are too important to be left to "unconstrained" juries, perhaps he thinks information choices are too important to be left to unconstrained citizens.

The American news media, of course, warrant plenty of scrutiny. And, on the whole, they're getting it. Media critics like Howard Kurtz, David Shaw, William Powers, and the late Edwin Diamond have done first-rate work. Steve Brill, whose *American Lawyer* has aired the dirty secrets of attorneys, is launching a magazine about journalism. More and more research institutions, both university-affiliated and freestanding, are investigating how the press might improve itself, sometimes by supervising real-world experiments in "civic journalism." All in all, it's better to have this plethora of critics and organizations poking away at the press, like the various groups that issue scorecards for members of Congress, rather than Flink's vision of a single organization enforcing its monolithic view of journalistic propriety.

The first chapter of *Sentinel Under Siege* features an epigraph from Tom

Stoppard's *Night and Day*, saying in part: "Information is light. Information, in itself, about anything, is light. That's all you can say, really." Two lines uttered by a different character in Stoppard's play may bear more directly on Flink's effort. "Junk journalism," the reporter declares, "is the evidence of a society that has got at least one thing right, that there should be nobody with the power to dictate where responsible journalism begins." And, referring to a would-be media reformer, he says: "What Dick wants is a right-thinking press—one that thinks like him." ♦

THE SOVIET LIT BIZ

A Remarkable Inside Account of Stalin's Culture

By Arnold Beichman

Is it not strange that a half-century after the end of World War II, there should be a best-selling book about the Holocaust called *Hitler's Willing Executioners* but no equivalent about the Soviet Union—a *Stalin's Willing Executioners*? True, there are documentary classics about Stalinism like *The Gulag Archipelago* or Robert Conquest's *The Great Terror*, but there is no popular, let alone academic, concentration on the criminality and inhumanity of Soviet history as there is about the dark German past. No Nuremberg trials for the Soviet killers and torturers, who are probably all receiving their pensions and, with their connections, receiving them on time. As for Lenin, he still lies in state in his Red Square tomb, and Stalin is interred in the Kremlin wall.

Thomas Lahusen
How Life Writes the Book
Real Socialism and Socialist Realism in Stalin's Russia
Cornell, 256 pp., $29.95

One of the areas of Soviet history still to be explored is how the Kremlin and its *gauleiter* intellectuals, particularly during the 1937-38 period of high Stalinism and later, in 1946, during what came to be known as the *Zhdanovshchina*, annexed the printed word—fiction, nonfiction, plays, essays, short stories, children's literature, textbooks, journalism, everything—to the Party apparat. Writers, some enthusiastically, some fearfully, became servile functionaries of the state, or "artists in uniform"—thereby producing what Lionel Trilling called "the monolithic conformity of the intellectual life of Russia."

The Marxist-Leninist dictatorship successfully liquidated a literary tradition—Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Gogol, Lermontov, Pushkin, Tolstoy, Turgenev, and others—that had flourished for a century despite Czarist censorship. Under Stalin's dispensation, being a writer was no guarantee of a long and serene existence. (Of the 700 writers, average age 39 years, who in 1934 attended the First Writers' Congress, only 50 survived to attend the second in 1954.) Osip Mandelstam, his widow recalled, said to her, "Only here [USSR] do they really respect poetry—they kill because of it. More people die for poetry here than anywhere else." Mandelstam was one of those who died for his poetry—in a psychiatric ward near the Magadan forced labor camp—in 1938.

The end of Russian literature and the formal beginning of Soviet literature came with the 1925 Central Committee resolution, "On Party Policy in Literature," which in brief stated that in a class society art cannot be neutral. "By the early 1930s," said the official *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* in 1973, "the majority of Soviet writers were actively engaged in socialist construction." They were fulfilling their role, as Stalin put it, as "engineers of human souls."

As in pornographic literature, so with "socialist realism"—the plot was always predictable. This quasi-literature was dominated by a special language (what Arthur Koestler named "Djugashvilese," in tribute to Stalin's family name). This language had a remarkable vocabulary, remarkable not of course in that it was taken seriously in the Soviet Union but in that it was taken seriously in Communist and fellow-traveling literary circles the world over. In the world of socialist realism, historical necessity, democratic centralism, revolutionary consciousness, workers of brain, and workers of brawn were all good; while hostile ideological tendencies, social fascism, deviationism, bourgeois philistine individualism, rootless cosmopolitanism, esthetic hooliganism were all bad.

In his novel *The First Circle* Alexander Solzhenitsyn notes that in a totalitarian society, a great writer is a second government because he exercises a moral authority that threatens the viability of a dictatorship. To make sure such a danger could never arise, the official Writers' Union of the USSR obtained, first, the right of the Soviet party to decide what was publishable; second, if declared publishable, the party had the right to alter, amend, rewrite or insert into the manuscript, with or without the author's permission, whatever it was felt would make it even more acceptable to Stalin. It was known that Stalin began taking a personal interest in all matters literary at the end of World War II and wanted

Arnold Beichman, a Washington Times *columnist, is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution.*

novels about major construction projects as monuments of socialist postwar construction. Thus to satisfy him, the party assumed the unrestricted right to order a novel, a work of history, anything, to be rewritten even after publication. The Writers' Union bureaucracy under the direction of Konstantin Simonov, editor of *Novy Mir*, became a sort of omnipotent Maxwell Perkins with an audience of one. How these rights were implemented in practice is the theme of *How Life Writes the Book*, Thomas Lahusen's fascinating new volume.

The mechanics of transmuting literary creativity into Soviet ideology has never before as far as I know been documented in such a nuts-and-bolts, how-to, voyeuristic fashion. Lahusen, a professor at Duke, relies on a personal archive secretly maintained by Vasili Nikolaevich Azhaev, a second-rate Soviet novelist with a first-rate temperament. His archive, preserved by his widow (Azhaev died in 1968 at the age of 53) and recently uncovered by Lahusen, tells the story of Azhaev's novel *Far From Moscow* and how, after seemingly endless rewriting ordered by the Writers' Union, it became a 1946 best-seller in the USSR. After a further party-ordered post-publication rewrite in 1948, it received *the* ultimate reward—a Stalin Prize the following year. The novel was translated into 20 languages, made into a movie, and adapted as an opera. (The English translation in three volumes adds up to 1,430 pages.) The novel became mandatory reading, and to be sure that *Far From Moscow* was read, mandatory "conferences" of readers were organized. The Azhaev archive lists almost 100 readers' conferences set up by the party all over the country in the late 1940s.

The history of this novel is far more interesting than the novel itself because it reveals from the inside and in detail what the writer's life was like under Stalinism and under Stalin's successors. *Far From Moscow* deals with the construction of an oil pipeline in the Siberian Far East during 1941-42. While the government's plan had allotted three years as pipeline-building time, the workers under the always heroic party leadership ignored warnings of foreign experts and in true Stakhanovite spirit built it in one year. Azhaev didn't tell his readers that the pipeline workers were slave laborers watched over by turnkeys with truncheons and machine guns. In fact Azhaev was himself a political prisoner in that very Soviet Far East area—the Corrective Labor Camp of the Baikal-Amur Main Line—where, after serving part of a four-year sentence for "counterrevolutionary activities," he remained in the area with the status of "free laborer." He became a camp official, head of a Gulag section called the "Central Bureau of Rationalization and Invention," and began publishing in the NKVD *Literary Artistic Journal*.

THE WRITERS' UNION BECAME A SORT OF OMNIPOTENT MAXWELL PERKINS WITH AN AUDIENCE OF ONE.

Azhaev's first draft of *Far From Moscow* concealed the truth, but a knowledgeable reader would have been able to decode the truth about the pipeline workers. The Writers'

Union officers were smart enough to see through Azhaev's maquillage, which is why they demanded—and got—editorial changes.

The Azhaev archive contains a report of what happened on December 18, 1944, at the regional committee meeting of the Soviet Writers' Union, which met for eight hours to discuss Azhaev's short stories and his unpublished *Far From Moscow*. The author read several chapters of the novel, after which came a postmortem. Azhaev did so well that it was recommended he be sent to Moscow to complete his studies. But that didn't mean his novel would be published, even though it had received unanimous approval. It seems the regional censor wouldn't give the manuscript his okay because the novel dealt with a "classified subject," the construction of a pipeline in the Far East. But, in fact, from the standpoint of Soviet realism, the pipeline was the real hero of *Far From Moscow,* and the regional censor was overriden.

Lahusen has done a remarkable comparative reading of the different editions of *Far From Moscow*, through which he shows the inner workings of Stalinist culture in a completely original way. The task must have been mind-numbing, and reminded me of something Macaulay wrote after reading a two-volume biography of some British noble bore: "Compared with the labour of reading these volumes, all other labor, the labor of thieves on the treadmill, the labor of children in the mines, the labor of slaves on the plantation, is but a pleasant recreation."

In 1995, Lahusen went to Siberia to see if there was anybody still living who might have read *Far From Moscow*. He found one man, probably a guard at the prison camp, who wept when asked if he had read the book. He had read 20 pages and could read no further. The pipeline, he said, "had been built on bones." Another man, a soldier, had only seen the film and he said "the tractors, the bulldozers, nothing of this ever existed, only shovels and bare hands." A third man, a mechanic, had read the novel 20 times and seen the film: "It was all a lie." The pipeline was dug by 12,000 *zeks* in this fashion: "A man every two meters, no dynamite, no explosions, people using their own hands to dig into the ice."

In *The First Circle*, one of the characters describes a new novel titled "Far From Us," obviously a play on the title of *Far From Moscow*. After reading it, he "felt nausea. The book was a meat pie without the meat, an egg with its insides sucked out, a stuffed bird . . . the experienced reader sensed that the author himself . . . was lying with cold, glassy eyes." ♦

BCA

Vile Body

Will Self, a Waugh Without God

By J. Bottum

Evelyn Waugh was a satirist of enormous talent—beyond much doubt the greatest of the 20th century, producing such classics as *Vile Bodies* in 1930, *Black Mischief* in 1932, and *Scoop* in 1938. He was also a Roman Catholic of a somewhat antique and dyspeptic character. Asked once how he could call himself a believer while being so savage in his writing and much of his public persona, he is reported to have replied, "Imagine how nasty I'd be if I *weren't* a Christian." With the 1990s fiction of the British journalist Will Self, we begin to get an idea of just how nasty that could have been.

Will Self
Great Apes
Grove Press, 400 pp., $24

Unfortunately, making any sort of comparison of the two authors might be taken as a suggestion that Self shares something of Waugh's ability. Even more unfortunately, the suggestion is not entirely false. Will Self's latest full-length satire, *Great Apes*, is nasty, brutish, and, at least in its second half, surprisingly well done—a book that, despite its endless vulgarity and its author's cloying cleverness, cannot be dismissed quite as easily as the reader would very much like.

Born in 1961, Self is by all accounts a particularly loathsome figure, a trendsetter among the British literary hipsters, a drug addict, and an English version, 25 years late, of the "Gonzo Journalism" mixture of hallucinogens and political commentary practiced in America by Hunter S. Thompson for *Rolling Stone* magazine. Sent as a reporter to cover this year's parliamentary elections, Self was, in a widely reported incident, revealed to have snorted heroin in the bathroom of Prime Minister John Major's campaign plane.

In his journalism, Self has mastered the predictably slick, self-referential prose style much prized by the glossy British tattle magazines. But he also had almost from the beginning a certain less predictable talent for arresting metaphor—of the kind, for example, that leads him in *Great Apes* to describe someone at a cocktail party as "an adipose wader of a man, dipping his bill into knots of people."

With his first book, 1991's *The Quantity Theory of Insanity*, Self began

Contributing editor J. Bottum last wrote for The Weekly Standard *about the Japanese novelist Banana Yoshimoto.*

to publish fiction, and the editors of the influential *Granta* magazine quickly named him to their list of the "Best of Young British Novelists." Self seemed in his early fiction unable to rid himself of the absurd sense that authentic conversation between fictional characters must be larded with relentless streams of profanity, but his narrative voice occasionally did exhibit his patented metaphors, and he sometimes managed to hit the genuinely macabre note at which he often aimed. His fiction, however, was notable mostly for its deliberate sickness—a sort of willful indulgence of a slickly chosen "shocking image" as the over-clever master idea for a book. In *Cock & Bull*, for instance, he tells of an abused wife slowly growing the equipment with which to rape her husband. In *My Idea of Fun*, he relates the sexual uses to which a man puts the severed head of a hobo.

All of this ought to be plenty to keep any sensible reader away from Self's fiction. Its functionless indecency, its vulgarity for no other purpose than vulgarity, is bad enough. But worse in some ways is its outmodedness, its exhausted notion that there's still literary value left in being shocking—its author unaware just how dated and boring his desperate stabs at hip grossness have become.

With its interminable descriptions of sex and its over-clever central idea, *Great Apes* starts out little different from Self's earlier work. Its main character is a successful artist named Simon Dykes who spends his days bedding his girlfriend, thinking about painting, and taking whatever drugs are offered him by the other members of London's tony art world. But one morning, after a night mixing alcohol, cocaine, and Prozac, he wakes to find that he has turned into a chimpanzee—as has everyone else in England, for Dykes awakens in a world in which chimps have proved evolution's dominant species, and the few human beings left are in zoos, African preserves, or medical laboratories.

Quickly judged insane for his insistence that he is a human trapped in an ape's body, Dykes is placed in the care of the aging chimpanzee Dr. Zack Busner, a psychiatrist and media-star known for his interest in unusual psychoses. But Busner has his own problems, for his young colleagues are hoping to oust him from his spot as the alpha-male at the hospital and a drug-trial that Busner led many years before may be, in the chimpanzee universe, the cause of Dykes's delusion that he has undergone a Kafkaesque metamorphosis from human to monkey.

Will Self

Chas Fagan

In concept, this isn't that far from something Waugh might have done: an exact replica of London's various social worlds, populated with apes. Particularly in the first half of the book, however, Self's typical indulgence of grossness not only wrecks any pleasure the reader might take in the novel, but ruins as well the author's own satire. His chimps engage in minutely and repulsively and repeatedly described grooming sessions, group sex, and coprophilia for no satirical purpose, but rather because Self discovered, as he mugged up information on simian behavior, that chimpanzees actually do such things.

But as the book progresses—and the reader, bludgeoned into insensibility, ceases to react to the grossness—Self actually begins to tell a story within his satirical frame. It's a story about how the dominance patterns hidden in human society are exposed in a chimp world. It's a story about how artistic perspective relates to the human body, and about how the elderly seem to lose their social prominence and reputation not gradually, but all at once in a coup by their younger replacements. And along the way, the novelist gets to take satirical potshots at animal rights activists, medical researchers, psychiatrists, and Self's own world of hip Londoners.

Great Apes is not a book to recommend to anyone with a weak stomach. It may not be a book to recommend to anyone at all. Certainly, as a man, the author deserves little short of a straitjacket. Unfortunately, as a writer, his is a genuine, though repellent, talent. ♦

"Well, my mother and father taught me that I'm no better than anybody else, but also that I'm no worse. So I said I wouldn't go on bended knee and I wouldn't kiss anything…"

—William Weld, September 15, 1997

that stood me in good stead. I remember fondly the advice of Lowell Cabot Chuffington, my old Latin preceptor at St. Grottlesex. "Chuffs" would conclude a reading of Livy with the exhortation to "remember you're no better than anyone else."

"With the proletarian filth, rotten table manners and all, breeding like rabbits all around us," Chuffs would opine, "it helps to remind oneself that one is no better than anybody else. . . . For that matter, it helps to remind *them* you think that, too. Ha! Ha! Ha!" Truly, a New England wryness that has been the mark of the Chuffingtons since they arrived on the *Arbella* with the Welds! (They needed the wryness! The Chuffingtons, of course, came over in steerage!)

In truth, this was a lesson I had always been taught by my dear old mother. "Your trust fund has ninety-six million dollars in it," Mumsy once said as we sat on the patio of our villa in Cap d'Antibes. "That doesn't make it better than other trust funds—or the gross national product of Paraguay, for that matter. Just bigger."

"Or take this house," she said, suddenly expansive. "It's not *better* than the tenements of South Boston, or Logan Airport, or the Louisiana Superdome. It's just larger, more expensive, and commands bigger oceanfront views."

It was in the spiritual realm that these lessons were most fruitful. While my elegant breeding and constant good humour may have convinced reasonable observers of my confirmation battle that I was worth a hundred of those illiterate, ill-mannered, Bible-thumping cracker cretins who so uncouthly derailed my ambassadorial nomination, I managed to stay above the fray, remembering my mother's