the weekly Standard

NOVEMBER 17, 1997

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TOM WOLFE'S BONFIRE REVISITED

ANDREW FERGUSON

'97
Election

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☑ **David Brooks: Rudy Giuliani Wins Big**

☑ **Tucker Carlson: Christie Whitman Wins Small**

the weekly
Standard

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FROM THE GRAVE: NIXON ON FRED THOMPSON

Fairly or not, Republicans from Trent Lott on down have been grousing lately about Sen. Fred Thompson and his handling of the campaign-finance hearings. It turns out that grousing about Thompson has a long history among Republicans, a history stretching all the way back to the martyred President Nixon.

From *Abuse of Power: The New Nixon Tapes*, published this month by the Free Press, we offer this choice tidbit, dated February 22, 1973:

HALDEMAN: *Minority counsel is aware of the way things work in Washington, and we can handle a guy like Sam Dash, majority counsel. Oh, Baker has appointed Fred Thompson minority counsel.*

PRESIDENT NIXON: *Oh s—, that kid.*

HALDEMAN: *I guess so.*

PRESIDENT NIXON: *They are going to lose them all. . . . It's too damn bad the kid* (unintelligible).

HALDEMAN: *I guess that's the way it is. Is this Fred Thompson the young guy from Tennessee?*

PRESIDENT NIXON: *Yes.*

HALDEMAN: *Do you know him?*

PRESIDENT NIXON: *Yes. He is a young kid.*

HALDEMAN: *Well, we're stuck with him.*

PRESIDENT NIXON: *Yeah, I know.*

Like so much about Watergate, that "(unintelligible)" is tantalizing. What did the president know about Fred Thompson, and when did he know it?

QUEASY ON QUOTAS

Do congressional Republicans still believe in a color-blind Constitution and equality before the law? It's hard to know after their schizophrenic performance on racial preferences last week.

First the good news. At least nine Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee appear to have held firm in opposition to Bill Lann Lee, the Clinton administration's nominee to become assistant attorney general for civil rights. Lee's constitutional understanding of civil-rights law is well outside the mainstream and runs contrary to a series of court decisions over the past few years that have consistently struck down an array of racial-preference programs. Judiciary Committee chairman Orrin Hatch led the charge, delivering a stinging indictment of Lee's views as "exceedingly narrow and violative of the court's holdings."

The bad news comes from the House, where the Judiciary Committee last Thursday killed Rep. Charles Canady's bill outlawing race and gender preferences in federal programs. Republican George Gekas of Pennsylvania said voting on the Canady bill would "hinder the achievement of the ideas espoused by one of our nation's greatest presidents," Abraham Lincoln. Indiana Republicans Steve Buyer and Edward Pease agreed. Even Rep. Elton Gallegly of California, one of the bill's cosponsors, bailed out.

How did this happen? The day before, everything seemed to be going smoothly; House majority leader Dick Armey, apparently overcoming private doubts about the measure, had even given Canady a statement of endorsement. But at a Wednesday meeting of the entire Republican conference, none other than Dick Armey rose to urge that the vote on Canady's bill be canceled. That was all the cover nervous-nellie Republicans on the committee needed the following day.

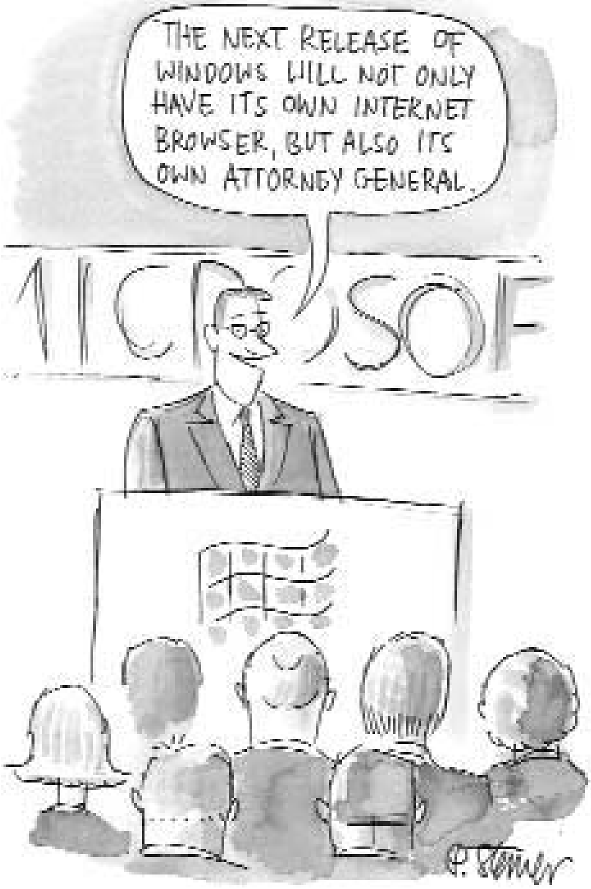
The Canady measure is dead in Congress for the rest of this year. Republican consistency isn't in much better shape.

VOTING OFTEN FOR EARLEY

Confounding *Washington Post* predictions and conventional pundit opinion, Virginia attorney-general candidate Mark Earley, strongly backed by Christian conservatives, won his election and led the Republican ticket in that state.

Being a favorite of the religious Right and focusing one's campaign on abortion is supposed to be the kiss of electoral death in Washington's northern Virginia suburbs, and a severe handicap statewide. After Earley won a June primary against two "moderate" Republicans with his anti-abortion/anti-porn message, the *Post* predicted: "Now Earley must scramble to soften his image to fit the game plan of the GOP candidate for governor . . . who is focusing on moderate, suburban voters." Mandy Grun-

Scrapbook


THE NEXT RELEASE OF WINDOWS WILL NOT ONLY HAVE ITS OWN INTERNET BROWSER, BUT ALSO ITS OWN ATTORNEY GENERAL.
MICROSOF
P. Steiner

wald also joined the he'll-have-to-change choir. "The true believers are not going to win it for you. There just aren't enough of them." It's true that Jim Gilmore, the candidate for governor, went for "moderate, suburban" voters and won his race handily. But Earley didn't go squishy, and he received 57 percent of the vote, outpolling Gilmore. All this without the recommended slouch to the middle. Maybe Virginians are more conservative than the *Post* would like to think.

The Report on Kinsey

Attacks on the methodology and ideology of pioneering sex researcher Alfred C. Kinsey have come out piecemeal over the decades. The recent biography by James H. Jones gathers the record together for dispassionate consideration. And it turns out that Kinsey was . . . a masochist, a sadist, a voyeur, and—to resurrect an apt old term—all around deviant. He was also a blackmailer. He secured a stream of foundation money for his research by "shrewdly obligating his sponsors in those organizations by collecting their sexual histories." The orgies he organized for "senior staff, their spouses and outside volunteers" served the same purpose: to "bond them together under his paternal authority."

But why is that anybody's business? asks Richard Rhodes, reviewing the Jones volume last week in the *New York Times Book Review*. Kinsey was a pillar of the scientific method, Rhodes insists, if only we'd understand it properly. It's those who've assailed him for the past 50 years who are the true weirdos. Rhodes attributes all such attacks to vested interests, particularly among the "Eastern Establishment" that cut off Kinsey's funding, out of sheer "homophobic McCarthyism." But he attacks Jones, too, who "appears to cherish the quaint notion that good science is disinterested science."

When push comes to shove, Rhodes defends Kinsey not as a scientist but as a sexual liberator, one who "contributed vitally to the march toward tolerance that continues today." We haven't heard the last of Kinsey's defenders. But we can now see that their final defense is an ideological, not a scientific one. Which is what Kinsey's critics have said all along it would be.

We'll Impeach When We Land

Before putting off the fast-track trade vote, Bill Clinton showed just how accommodating he can be when he really, really wants your vote. He invited Rep. John Mica to fly with him on Air Force One to the dedication of the George Bush Library in College Station, Texas.

Mica took the trip, but he's not just any Republican. Perhaps unbeknownst to the White House, the Florida Republican is one of 17 cosponsors of a resolution seeking to begin an impeachment inquiry against the president.

We Are Proud to Announce . . .

. . . that contributing editor J. Bottum, whose fiction criticism has been a regular feature in The Weekly Standard for the last two years, becomes our Books & Arts Editor with this issue. Jody's recent contributions to these pages include "The End of the Academic Novel" and essays on Thomas Pynchon and Paul Theroux. In his new position, he will continue to write regularly on fiction, in addition to overseeing the back of the book.

Casual

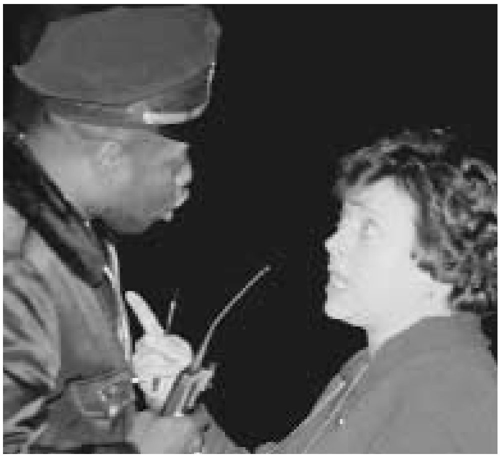
ANN DEVROY, 1948-1997

Ann Devroy, White House correspondent of the *Washington Post*, fought a heroic battle with cancer for more than a year. She beat it back and returned to the paper this June. Then she suffered a recurrence. On October 23 she died. To all who knew her, which means most of political Washington, the fact that she is gone seems scarcely believable, so ubiquitous and vivid was Devroy's presence.

I was introduced to her in the usual fashion: over the phone, and unforgettably. In early 1991 I was about to resign my post in a marginal office of the Bush White House. Devroy had already found reason to squeeze my impending departure into the newspaper—with mysterious accuracy, less than 24 hours after I had accepted another job, and before I'd had a chance to give notice. Now, a week later, she was calling to say that my successor had just been selected. She knew more about my office than I did. I was suitably amazed.

I was further amazed to learn that Devroy had all the relevant personnel forms arrayed across her desk, that the new person's chief qualification for my job was a family connection to some prominent Bush-world personality, and that my job would pay this person vastly more money than it had ever paid me. This development was the best anecdote Devroy had for a piece she was writing about White House hiring practices. She wanted my reaction, on the record. I whimpered for mercy and quickly excused myself.

There may be people who are not mortified at the prospect of having their salaries published in the hometown paper, but I am not one of them. So each of the next few mornings, the *Post* was a time-bomb on my doorstep. And then, finally, some version of Devroy's piece appeared, textured and thick with information. But my name was not in it.



Washington Post

I recount this minor incident because it is only partially consistent with the Devroy legend. It is consistent with the part about how good she was at her work. No detail of White House life—not even me—was small enough to elude her. She was nearly always first to report it: Dan Quayle's anatomically correct doll, John Sununu's plane trips, Bill Clinton's Camp David encounter- group sessions, and more conventionally "important" things, too. She nearly always reported it—the hows and whys of politics—with matchless sophistication. And she did so at superhuman volume, year after year. "She was so much better than all the rest of us that it was almost embarrassing," remembers Brit Hume, who covered the White House for ABC during the Devroy era. "I mean, there was nobody who could touch her."

Devroy's superiority was so beyond dispute, in fact, that when she fell ill last year and left the beat, White House coverage in every other major American newspaper grew noticeably more relaxed—and therefore worse. Simply because competing reporters no longer had to wake up each day in justified fear that the *Washington Post* was about to kick their butts.

Which is the other major part of the Devroy legend, the part she played as hellhound of the White House briefing room, someone willing to cut your legs off if a scoop or breaking story demanded it. Devroy cultivated this image. She used the photo on this page as the screensaver on her computer in the *Post* newsroom. It depicts a Secret Service officer in the foolish act of attempting to prevent Devroy from interviewing someone in the White House driveway. Moments after this picture was snapped, Devroy won the argument.

She won most of her arguments, I expect. But the memory of those arguments does not do her justice. I got to know Ann Devroy quite well these past few years. She was very smart, very funny, very generous with her time and advice, the finest gossip I have ever known. And she was something else. Late this summer, walking her back to the *Post* after a lunch date, I reminded Devroy how she'd once left my salary out of the newspaper. I wondered why. "You were so distressed about it," she said. "I try to be nice, you know."

Ann Devroy was very nice, indeed. The world will miss her.

DAVID TELL

FLAT-TAX PURISTS HAVE THEIR SAY

Make up your minds. Should the Republican leadership bow to demagoguery or not? Should the Republican leadership stick to principles or not? The answers change every week.

First, in October, you assert that the Republican party must lead the charge for equal treatment under the law and tear out every last vestige of affirmative action. Then this week you urge us to run from the principle of equal treatment and abandon calls for a pure flat tax ("Second Thoughts on the Flat Tax," Nov. 10).

On affirmative action, you urge a massive attack. Damn the demagoguery, full speed ahead. But on tax reform, the potential for class-warfare demagoguery is the only reason you give for urging us to abandon our principles.

An editorial page that routinely accuses us of fleeing from our own shadows is suddenly willing to capitulate to the old left-wing class-warfare mantra that America has rejected over and over again.

As I've always said, conservatives fear the public *won't* understand and liberals fear the public *will* understand. I'm sorely disappointed to see THE WEEKLY STANDARD fall into that trap.

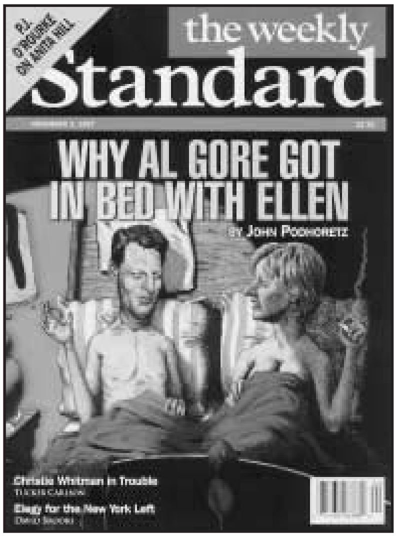
My flat tax is a tax cut. Tax reform should not be revenue neutral. That would amount to condoning the current size of government, which I will not do. Every American trying my postcard-sized form will see the emptiness of any demagogic attack and appreciate a code that treats everyone the same.

It's especially upsetting to find your capitulation to demagoguery sharing the pages of an issue devoted to praising Ronald Reagan, who never abandoned what you deride as "quasi-theological" dedication to free-market principles. A Republican party afraid of demagoguery would never put forward any ideas. We would become as intellectually bankrupt as the other party.

Clearly your publication deserves its name. Your standards change weekly.

DICK ARMEY
MAJORITY LEADER
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC

THE WEEKLY STANDARD's go-slow editorial about the flat tax raised valid concerns about the political implications of tax reform. The editors should have taken the time, however, to talk with flat-tax supporters and strategists. Had they done so, they would have found that tax reformers recognize there is still a lot of public education that remains to be done. The editors would have discovered that flat-taxers do not want a vote on the flat tax until 2001. They would have seen that flat-tax advocates are pursuing strategies—such as the tax-code sunset legislation—that keep the focus on the current system. Flat-taxers also support the kind of "hold-harmless" provisions that would allow taxpayers to stay in the current system. In short, supporters of the flat tax believe it is the right thing to do, but we also recognize that it will never happen unless we can demonstrate to legislators that good policy is also good politics.


P.J. O'ROURKE ON ANITA HILL
the weekly Standard
WHY AL GORE GOT IN BED WITH ELLEN
BY JOHN PODHORETZ
Christie Whitman in Trouble
Elegy for the New York Left

Part of our work, needless to say, is correcting the kind of factual error that crept into the editorial. The author inaccurately claimed, for instance, that taxes on interest and profits would disappear with a flat tax. In reality, taxes on both sources of income are withheld and paid at the business level under the new system (much as employers withhold and pay income taxes for workers today). The editorial also states, incorrectly, that the flat tax imposes the heaviest burden on wage and salary income. The flat tax imposes the same 17 percent tax rate on all income. Moreover, because of the generous personal allowance available to taxpayers, the effective tax rate on wages and salaries actually will be measurably lower than the tax rate on capital and business income.

More disappointingly, THE WEEKLY STANDARD errs by accepting the liberal definition of fairness when it comes to the tax debate. Most Americans believe that if their neighbor makes 10 times as much as they do, he should pay 10 times as much in taxes. Not five times more by taking advantage of special loopholes, and not 20 times more because of discriminatory tax rates (the Left's definition of fairness). If conservatives believe that the law should treat everyone equally, then the flat tax is the only fair way to tax.

Finally, the editorial claims that zero taxes on the poor and lower taxes on the rich will mean a burden on the middle class. First, the assertion is wrong. A revenue-neutral flat tax would increase liabilities for business, not middle-class taxpayers. More important, however, is THE WEEKLY STANDARD's assumption that tax reform cannot be accompanied by tax reduction. Indeed, the reason both majority leader Dick Armey and Steve Forbes picked a 17 percent rate is to guarantee that the vast majority of individual taxpayers will send less of their money to Washington. For most conservatives, that is an added benefit of tax reform, not something to complain about.

DANIEL J. MITCHELL
THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION
WASHINGTON, DC

A COVER WORTHY OF GORE

John Podhoretz's "Why Al Gore Got in Bed with Ellen" (Nov. 3) clearly illustrates that it is highly effective to employ a well-chosen metaphor.

But to depict it on the cover is low and tasteless. Perhaps it would be more appropriate for a college newspaper, where sleep-deprived hack editors conjure the courage to publish clever caricatures of authority figures, despite the risk of losing precious student funding.

But you are not hacks and this is not college.

Yes, Vice President Al Gore's remarks were tasteless. But if I had children, I would not want them to see this.

Your cover—which I'm returning—is exactly what makes conservatives look like wackos.

If you do it again, you'll lose my subscription.

JOHNNY PEREZ
WASHINGTON, DC

Like John Podhoretz, I am a traditionalist. I "do not believe that morals are subject to evolution." It is wrong—it has always been wrong—to burn witches, to persecute Jews, and to discriminate against homosexuals.

GEORGE JOCHNOWITZ
STATEN ISLAND, NY

SOME TROPHY

Thank you for your Scrapbook item concerning actress, revolutionary, and trophy-wife Jane Fonda ("Someone We're Not Fonda," Nov. 3). If you are serious about objecting to her support for Communist revolutionary movements in Southeast Asia, please note that when her side won, millions of Cambodians were murdered in a campaign of genocide by the victors.

Had U.S. foreign policy and military efforts to stabilize the region by protecting South Vietnam been successful, this tragedy would not have occurred. The editors and readers of THE WEEKLY STANDARD should further examine the role of Fonda and others of like mind, who, by giving aid and comfort to revolutionary causes, linked themselves to the killing fields of Cambodia. We cannot allow our Eurocentric prejudice to ignore the deaths of millions of innocent non-Westerners.

FREDERICK A. LEE
NEW YORK, NY

SIDER'S STATIST FLAPDOODLE

I was dismayed to see John J. DiIulio Jr.'s glowing review of Ronald J. Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* ("Sider's Socio-Christianity," Nov. 3). The review would have been more properly titled "Sider's Socialist Christianity."

Guilt is a highly motivating human phenomenon that along with the absence of Biblical literacy and competence in economics among young evangelicals, Sider and his ilk exploit shamelessly. His thesis is that wealth is a zero-sum game: Every dollar in my pocket is one fewer in the pocket of some member of the noble poor—a fact that God hates.

Sider's solutions to economic problems are invariably statist. As he puts it in the book, "The constantly growing demand for food must stop—or at least slow down dramatically. That means reduced affluence in rich nations and population control everywhere." One looks in vain for injunctions in favor of "population control everywhere" in Holy Writ, though they are alive and well in Red China, and in Sider's daydreams.

JOHN M. CAMPBELL
NEWARK, DE

COUGHING UP THE TRUTH

In mentioning Sen. Daschle's remark that Americans are not overtaxed, you slightly misstate Michael Kinsley's definition of a gaffe ("Daschle Our Hopes," Scrapbook, Nov. 3). According to Kinsley, a gaffe is not what happens when a politician accidentally says what he means. It is what happens when he accidentally tells the truth. Of course, by the latter definition Daschle's statement was indeed a gaffe, since America seems to have more than its share of stupid rich people who refuse to be told that civilization does not come free. Cough up those bucks, you stingy creeps!

JOHN J. REILLY
JERSEY CITY, NJ

SEEING GREEN, INDEED

Ronald Bailey's "White House Hot Air" (Nov. 3) provides a glimpse of the true motives behind the global-warming movement. Tellingly, he quotes Paul Wilhelm, who says of attempts to cut carbon-dioxide emissions, "All it's going to do is transfer huge amounts of the wealth in this country to somewhere else."

That wealth will flow into the countries that are exempt from the climate treaty. This is about economics, not the environment. The exempted countries believe the United States has achieved wealth at their expense and that they would have a better chance to compete in the world economy if the United States were forced to slow its growth.

Rather than do what is necessary to have productive economies, these countries have decided it's easier to attack the United States. The only way the world can ask Americans to give up their prosperity for others is by scaring them, and the global warming "catastrophe" does just this.

Why does the president support this plan? Since he's willing to sacrifice America's national interest to special-interest groups at home, why worry about sacrificing it to other nations? Of course, doing this will appease the environmental Left and help Al Gore get the nomination in 2000, a goal that Clinton sees as a vindication of his presidency.

A real danger is the way conservatives are handling the issue. They are right to argue that the best satellite data show no warming, but conservatives treat the global-warming proponents as if they were honestly mistaken. They don't question why they won't back down when presented with the facts, or why they always fall back on various fallacies.

By failing to expose that the global-warming movement is a blatant strike at American wealth and the values that make it possible, conservatives become vulnerable to the kind of scare tactics that caused them to lose on Medicare. The fear is that liberals will continue to scream that conservatives are killing the planet and destroying the future, and the Senate will ratify whatever treaty President Clinton sends them.

WILLIAM VAN NEST
WAYNE, NJ

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the weekly Standard

SADDAM MUST GO

Some nations can afford to suffer more humiliation than others. When you're the United States, even a little humiliation exacts too high a price. This isn't just a matter of national pride. When the world's strongest power abases itself, allies begin to worry, adversaries start whetting their appetites, and pretty soon America's international credibility—a big and important component of national power—starts taking a dive.

This past week, Iraq's Saddam Hussein humiliated the United States: First he ordered the expulsion of American officials from a United Nations team charged with ensuring that Iraq is not producing weapons of mass destruction. Then he demanded an end to all flights by American U-2 surveillance aircraft over Iraq and threatened to shoot them down. Then he moved some equipment that could be used to manufacture weapons out of the range of video cameras that had been installed by the U.N. inspection team to keep watch over them.

> THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION'S CRAVEN RESPONSE TO IRAQ HAS COMPOUNDED THE DANGER. THE ADMINISTRATION SO FAR HAS CAVED TO SADDAM'S BULLYING.

A few observers, including some administration officials, have described Saddam's actions as foolish. Some fool. Saddam's actions are well calibrated to achieve three important aims: to embarrass and thereby weaken the United States; to exploit divisions in the international coalition that defeated him in the Gulf War but has been fraying ever since; and last but certainly not least, to build as rapidly as possible the weapons of mass destruction that can put him back in the driver's seat in the Middle East—a scant six years after his armies were decimated in Operation Desert Storm.

Despite the Clinton administration's denials, Saddam appears to be succeeding on all three fronts. The last is particularly alarming. According to a report in the *New York Times*, U.N. inspectors believe that Iraq now possesses "the elements of a deadly germ warfare arsenal and perhaps poison gases, as well as the rudiments of a missile system" that can launch the warheads. Thanks to Saddam's recent actions, the U.N. inspection team "can no longer verify that Iraq is not making weapons of mass destruction" and specifically cannot monitor "equipment that could grow seed stocks of biological agents in a matter of hours."

The Clinton administration's response to Saddam so far has compounded the humiliation, and the danger. On the one hand, officials trying to sound ominous in warning Saddam against a wrong step have succeeded only in sounding ridiculous—as when President Clinton declared it would be a "big mistake" for Saddam to shoot down an American U-2. On the other hand, the administration has agreed—or worse still, has been forced to agree—to a number of concessions to Saddam's bullying. Rather than simply telling Saddam to shove it and preparing the first wave of air and missile strikes, the United Nations dispatched a team last week to "talk" with Saddam about the importance of complying with U.N. resolutions. The Clinton administration insisted that these talks were not "negotiations," but that pretense was all but exploded when the U.N. and the United States agreed to suspend the U-2 flights Saddam had complained about. This appalling concession, intended to improve the atmosphere for these non-negotiations, was the worst of the administration's missteps so far.

All these concessions were evidence, moreover, that the old Gulf War coalition is indeed collapsing. Apparently, the United States has been having a devil of a time convincing other Security Council members to approve any kind of military action against Saddam, no matter how long he defies the international community. At the end of last week, administration officials started talking about trying to persuade them at least to impose new sanctions on Iraq. Even that action, however, pitiful as it is, would be difficult given the clear determination of the French and Russians to remove sanctions altogether.

But here's the really bad news. Even if the United States summoned the courage, alone or with U.N. approval, to launch a missile strike against Iraq this week or next, such an attack would gain only a brief pause in the downward slide of U.S. policy in the Gulf. Saddam has already calculated that he can survive another cruise-missile strike, as he survived the last, and may even come out of it in a stronger position. Once the assault has ended, the situation will return to the status quo ante: The international coalition will continue to collapse, Saddam will continue to probe for weaknesses, and U.S. credibility will continue to erode. Indeed, a U.S. attack that leaves Saddam in charge of Iraq, no matter how much damage it does to his country, might serve only to expose the futility of American power.

So there is really only one alternative now. It has become increasingly clear ever since the Gulf War ended that the Gulf War ended badly. The decision to leave Saddam in control of Iraq, and to hope vainly that he would be overthrown or assassinated by his own people, was a mistake—an understandable mistake, perhaps, but a mistake nevertheless. We were sorry to see former President Bush last week denounce those who are now coming to this conclusion. The fact that he erred in letting Saddam remain in power does not detract from his magnificent accomplishment in fighting the Gulf War and liberating Kuwait. It would be a real service to the nation if Bush could acknowledge his error. Because what we most need now is to take the difficult but inescapable next step of finishing the job Bush started.

American policy toward Iraq should aim at removing Saddam from power. We are under no illusions about what will be required to accomplish this goal. There will be no coup against Saddam and no assassination at the hands of his own lieutenants. Nor, unfortunately, will an air and missile strike do the job. In a sustained air campaign, we might get lucky and hit Saddam by accident, but if we didn't get him during the weeks-long barrage of air and missile attacks in Desert Storm, we're unlikely to succeed in a shorter and smaller attack today.

We would certainly support a serious and sustained air attack on Iraq, and the sooner the better. But the only sure way to take Saddam out is on the ground. We know it seems unthinkable to propose another ground attack to take Baghdad. But it's time to start thinking the unthinkable. The fact is, it would take fewer than the half-million troops deployed in Desert Storm to roll into Baghdad today, especially after an air campaign scattered or destroyed whatever resistance Saddam might be able to throw up. Who knows how many Iraqi soldiers would even fight in a Desert Storm II? Their last experience against American forces and weapons was not such as to encourage exceptional valor.

If you don't like this option, we've got another one for you: continue along the present course and get ready for the day when Saddam has biological and chemical weapons at the tips of missiles aimed at Israel and at American forces in the Gulf. That day may not be far off. ♦

CLINTON TILTS LEFT

by Fred Barnes

At his Oval Office press conference following the off-year elections, President Clinton cited only a single result as having "national significance." It was the defeat in Houston, 55 percent to 45 percent, of an initiative to ban racial preferences in city contracts and hiring. Of course, there wasn't much else the president, as a Democrat, liked in the election results. "The only other thing he could have pointed to was the Des Moines mayoral race going from Republican to Democrat," said a White House aide. So, without being asked about it specifically, Clinton brought up the Houston vote, saying he was "profoundly grateful" the people of Houston "voted to retain their affirmative-action program."

The fixation on Houston reflected the White House's drift to the left in the president's second term. No, Clinton hasn't changed his public position on any issue, or at least not much. But in emphasis and tone and selection of issues on which to concentrate, he has changed. Rather than draw from his conservative side, as he did last year while running for reelection, Clinton is now stressing his liberal leanings. Why? One reason is he's not as beholden to public opinion now because he doesn't have to run for election again. Another is his fear of independent counsel Kenneth Starr and congressional investigations. His response is to shore up his party base, which is predominantly liberal. And the tilt to the left also seems to fit with Clinton's personal sentiments.

Once a racial moderate, the president is now obsessed with preserving most affirmative-action programs. At the White House, aides monitored the voting in Houston. And even before the polls had closed, they began notifying journalists, including Tim Russert of *Meet the Press*, that the effort to ban preferences would fail. Meanwhile, Clinton is deeply involved with his advisory board on race. Headed by scholar John Hope Franklin, the board has focused chiefly on white racism, which Franklin says is rampant. Clinton, meeting with the board on September 30, commented, “There is more housing discrimination in America than I had thought when I became president.” But the president also wants the board to have “a broader debate” on race and not look solely at white racial bias, according to senior aides. For one thing, he suggested it look into the problem of gangs. At the same meeting, however, Vice President Gore echoed Franklin and declared “race is a pervasive if often unacknowledged part of every issue, controversy, indeed conversation in the United States of America. And those who pretend it’s not are in danger of deluding themselves.”

ON HEALTH CARE, CLINTON HASN’T SO MUCH ADOPTED A NEW POSITION AS GONE BACK TO HIS OLD PLAN, WHICH HE’S NOW PUSHING AGGRESSIVELY BUT ONE STEP AT A TIME.

The president *has* shifted his position on tobacco. Bruce Lindsey, the White House attorney and close Clinton friend, kept in touch with the talks among tobacco companies, plaintiffs’ lawyers, and state attorneys general. In fact, the White House privately approved the settlement announced June 20. Then the president was pressured by the public-health lobby, Gore, and Donna Shalala, the secretary of health and human services, to take a tougher stand. On September 15, he did, demanding stiffer regulation of tobacco and stronger steps against tobacco companies.

On health care, Clinton hasn’t so much adopted a new position as re-emphasized an old one. Having failed spectacularly in 1993 and 1994 to achieve national health care, Clinton all but dropped the issue in 1995 and 1996. Now, he’s back with the same goal but a new approach. Since the effort to enact a national program in one swoop was a non-starter, he’s turned to an aggressive, incremental strategy. “Now that what I tried to do before won’t work, maybe we can do it in another way,” he told a conference of the Service Employees International Union in September. “That’s what we’ve tried to do, a step at a time, until we eventually finish this. . . . We’ve got to do it right so we can go on to the next step and the next step and the next step.” The initial steps, he said, were making health insurance portable and expanding taxpayer-funded insurance for kids. In 1998, he wants more regulations on health insurance, including a patients’ bill of rights that a Clinton commission on “quality” health care is drafting.

This has alarmed both insurers and Republicans. Insurance companies are afraid federal quality standards will drive up premiums, create more uninsured, and generate new pressure for nationalized health care. In a memo to House Republicans on November 3, Majority Leader Dick Armey warned that the president’s “new offensive on ‘health-plan quality’ follows a common Clinton pattern: First he identifies a ‘crisis,’ usually in the fall before an election year. Then he highlights it in his January State of the Union. And then he calls on Congress to send him by Election Day some Kennedy-Blank bill to ‘solve’ the crisis. His actions on health-plan quality follow this pattern to a tee.” The president, Armey insisted, “has never changed goals, only strategies.” Of course, this is no secret; Clinton openly admits it.

On two other issues—taxes and gays—Clinton hasn’t repositioned himself but has changed his rhetoric. Campaigning for Democrat Don Beyer in the Virginia governor’s race on November 4, Clinton characterized those eager to abolish the state’s hated car tax as “selfish” and willing to let education funding lag. “How could you knowingly damage the education of children and the future of your state for something that will be immensely satisfying for about 30 seconds, maybe an hour, maybe a week at most?” That’s a question Clinton would never have asked last year. Nor would he have spoken at the dinner of a national homosexual organization, which he was to do on November 8.

Maybe I’m making too much of this, but Clinton mentioned one candidate in his post-election press conference, Jim McGreevey, the Democrat who narrowly lost the New Jersey governor’s race. “I was surprised and terribly impressed by the remarkable campaign of Mr. McGreevey,” the president said. Remarkable? McGreevey’s distinguishing political feature was unrepentant liberalism of the left-labor variety. Yet Clinton, an aide said, “thought he ran a better campaign than a lot of others.” That includes Beyer, who styled himself after Clinton as a New Democrat. Clinton, taking a more liberal tack now, didn’t appreciate the imitation.

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THE WAGES OF WEDLOCK

by Allan C. Carlson and David Blankenhorn

All in the name of fixing the "marriage penalty" in the federal tax code, some good people in Washington are about to make a bad mistake. The marriage penalty is triggered when two people get married and their joint income pushes them into a higher tax bracket than they were in (or one of them was in) before. As a result, the couple pays more in taxes than the two of them together would have paid if they had remained single. To correct this inequity, over 200 members of the House of Representatives, including the Republican leadership, are proposing to allow married couples to file their returns either singly, as if they were unrelated individuals, or jointly, whichever results in the lower tax burden. Many consistent champions of marriage and family have endorsed this proposal, introduced by Republicans Jerry Weller of Illinois and David McIntosh of Indiana. Even Dr. Laura Schlessinger spent a recent radio show touting the scheme.

THE TAX CODE SHOULD TREAT MARRIED COUPLES IN A WAY THAT CORRESPONDS TO THE REALITY OF MARRIAGE.

It is a terrible idea. Yes, it would eliminate the marriage penalty. But it would also increase regressivity in the tax code by easing the tax burden on comparatively affluent couples. Moreover, because it would reduce the tax burden on two-earner couples while leaving everyone else's burden the same, it would further penalize parents who stay home.

There is a way, however, to use the federal tax code to strengthen the institution of marriage and even to help revive civil society. It's called income splitting. It has been proposed in the Senate by Republican Connie Mack of Florida and others. It would cost more money than "single filing," now steamrolling through the House, but it has the advantage of being a good idea.

Under income splitting, a married couple at tax time would add up their income and divide by two, so that effectively each spouse would be taxed on half. This would apply to both two-earner and single-earner couples. Thus, if one spouse earned $20,000 and the other $30,000, each would report a taxable income of $50,000 "split" in two, or $25,000, to be taxed at the basic rate. And if one spouse earned $50,000 and the other nothing, the tax result would be the same.

This may sound like a mere technical matter, but it's not. Permitting married couples to split their income would amount to a far-reaching reform in favor of marriage, family time, and community life. It would replace the marriage penalty with a financial incentive for marriage and an equally clear disincentive for divorce. And it would be just.

To be just, the tax code should treat married couples in a way that corresponds to the reality of the marriage relationship. This is the heart of the matter. Far better than our current tax code, and far better than the Weller-McIntosh single-filing proposal, income splitting reflects the economic truth of marriage.

Typically, married people are not autonomous economic actors. Quite the contrary. In the economic sphere as in other areas of life, married people cooperate, trade off, give freely to each other, and specialize according to talent and inclination in order to achieve better results for the household. In short, the basic reality of marriage is that two become one. Legal notions like community property and the equal division of assets following divorce recognize this fact. So would income splitting for tax purposes.

For more than three decades, the notion that the family is the social unit to be taxed has been weakening, as inflation has slashed the value of the dependent exemption. (The single-filing proposal would further the conceptual shift away from taxation of families and toward individuals.) One result of this trend has been an increase in the share of the tax burden falling on married couples with children. Another result, more subtle but more damaging, is a tax code based largely on a fiction: the belief that there is little meaningful economic difference between a married person and an unmarried person. Income splitting would serve as a corrective to that fiction. It not only would increase the fairness of our tax code but also would clarify our vision of marriage.

Finally, income splitting would permit couples to erect a buffer against the encroachment of the marketplace into family life. By rewarding couples for sharing their income for tax purposes, and by treating both partners as equal taxpayers, income splitting would better recognize the contribution of married people who are not in the labor force. In a society where the roles of worker and consumer increasingly usurp our time and attention and put pressure on the roles of spouse, parent, and neighbor, think of income splitting as a small blow for the sphere of intimacy and nurture, a modest encouragement to the unpaid work of parenthood and civil society.

Think of it also, if you wish, as a women's issue, since most of the parents who choose to leave the labor force to raise children, manage households, and contribute to their communities are women. Permitting income splitting would say to these people: You matter.

There are three arguments against income splitting. One is that it constitutes a special benefit for marriage. Well, of course it does; that's the whole point. The second is that it represents the abandonment of the idea that government ought to tax, indirectly, the unpaid labor of spouses. Again, perfectly true; that is an intention of the reform.

The third objection is that income splitting would cost too much. It would cost a lot: probably $30-35 billion a year in lost tax revenues. (The joint-filing proposal would cost the Treasury about $18 billion per year.) Especially if income splitting were combined with more generous dependent exemptions and credits (we favor doubling the personal exemption to $5,000 and the child tax credit to $1,000), it would probably require large spending cuts or revenue increases.

This third objection is likely to be decisive. Consider the choice now facing members of Congress: on the one hand, a tax cut for relatively affluent two-earner couples that would "fix" the marriage penalty without costing too much; on the other hand, a more substantive and far-reaching shift in the way we tax, and therefore value, the non-market bonds of marriage and community. Unfortunately, without a much fuller national debate on this subject, Congress is likely to follow the path of least yuppie resistance. But it's the wrong path for the country.

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SHUT UP, THEY EXPLAINED

by David Frum

If you were a politician and wanted to enact a law forbidding private citizens to criticize you, what would you call it? If you possessed any flair for publicity at all, you'd do what nearly half the Senate and almost all of the media have done: You'd call it "campaign-finance reform." Proponents of campaign-finance reform nearly always declare that they're trying to protect ordinary citizens from the dangerous influence of Big Money in politics. But it would be closer to the truth to say that they're trying to protect ordinary citizens from the even more dangerous influence of ordinary citizens in politics. The campaign-finance legislation now temporarily blocked in the Senate—the so-called McCain-Feingold bill—imposes startling new restrictions on the right of private citizens to speak up during an election.

IN CANADA YOU CAN SEE SOMETHING A LOT LIKE THE MCCAIN-FEINGOLD CAMPAIGN REFORM ALREADY AT WORK—AND FREE SPEECH IS JEOPARDIZED.

Defenders of campaign-finance reform justify these restrictions by promising voters that government supervision of political speech will result in a healthier democracy. The National Right to Life Committee—one of the organizations that would be shut up by McCain-Feingold—observed a remarkable bit of reasoning by a prominent advocate of campaign-finance reform, Burt Neuborne, legal director of the Brennan Center for Justice.

At a February 27 hearing before the Constitution subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee, Neuborne commended the panel's chairman, Charles Canady of Florida, "for the disciplined way the hearing has been run, and how carefully you maintained the ground rules that allowed real free speech to come out here. And I'm really saying that the same idea has to be thought of in the electoral process. . . . In a courtroom, speech is controlled. In this room, speech is controlled, and the net result is good speech."

Is it really? If you look just across the border, you'll see a version of McCain-Feingold in operation in Canada. (Canada is to American liberalism what Cuba is to the American automobile industry: a place where broken-down old jalopies are kept running decades after they should have been scrapped.) Is it promoting free speech and democracy?

Consider the case of Garry Nixon of British Columbia. In the summer of 1996, the socialist government of British Columbia called an election. It argued it deserved to be returned to office because it had balanced the province's budget without harsh cuts in social services. Mr. Nixon, a civic-minded accountant, believed that the government was fudging its figures. He dug into his own pocket and paid $6,300 Canadian (about $4,500) for a series of small newspaper and local radio ads denouncing the province's budget as a sham.

The socialists won the election. But it turned out that Mr. Nixon had been right: The province *was* running a big deficit, and the government *had* been manipulating the numbers to get itself reelected. Unfortunately being right has not done him any good. The chief electoral officer of the province has hit him with a $13,000 fine—without trial—for violating the campaign-finance law by speaking up. He got off lightly. A British Columbian advocacy group, the B.C. Fisheries Survival Coalition, bought ads in the same election accusing the socialist government of mismanaging the province's fish stocks. They have been hit, again without a trial, with a $220,000 Canadian fine.

By Canadian standards, British Columbia runs a fairly tolerant regime. Private citizens are allowed to spend up to $5,000 Canadian of their own money to express themselves during a campaign. That pays for a few minutes of radio or a few square inches of newspaper. In the province of Quebec, by contrast, citizen speech has been virtually outlawed: Until the Canadian Supreme Court struck down Quebec's law in October, Quebeckers were permitted to spend no more than $600. What that meant was that Quebeckers dissatisfied with the left-leaning policies of the province's two main parties were forbidden to use any technological device invented after 1400 to communicate their unhappiness with the choices on offer: no newspaper ads, no radio, no television, no meeting halls large enough to require a microphone, no Web pages, pretty much nothing except quiet muttering over the back fence.

The Canadian federal government has been attempting to impose a gag law like British Columbia's and Quebec's since 1983, with the support of the three old-line parties: the Liberals, the Conservatives and the socialists. It's lost twice in the intermediate-level courts, but the Supreme Court decision that struck down Quebec's $600 limit indicated pretty strongly that a slightly higher limit—the court proposed the figure of $1,000—would be constitutional for both federal and provincial governments. For politicians who believe, with Neuborne and senators McCain and Feingold, that controlled speech is good speech, it was a welcome green light.

Canadian governments so disdain the right of private citizens to have a say in the elections that choose their rulers that they have invented a marvelous phrase for those who try. The law calls them "third-party intervenors." The political parties, you see, are the principals. Private citizens who try to have an influence on their own with any device more sophisticated than a graffiti spraycan or a sandwich board are interlopers, "third parties," meddling where they do not belong. This is the path down which American campaign reformers would take the United States—a path toward a two-class political system. At the top would be the politicians and the media, who may say whatever they please. At the bottom would be everyone else, whose rights to comment on their electoral choices would be regulated and circumscribed.

Over the years, the right of free speech has taken on a strange and even rococo shape in the United States. But at the very same time that it has been twisted and stretched to cover activities that are only remotely speech-like, its core value—the right of citizens to make their voices heard when it's time to decide who will govern them—has come under assault. What kind of free speech right can be understood as guaranteeing government money for smearing your naked body with chocolate on stage, but not your right to take out an ad in the newspaper saying "Joe Smith says he loves the environment but he voted to pave Yellowstone"?

The senators who support McCain-Feingold profess to care about free speech. They say they are protecting it. But the law they've written frankly jettisons the right to speak during an election, in order to make workable the law's otherwise ramshackle and futile latticework of restrictions, regulations, and general bossiness. If McCain-Feingold should ever pass, the right of Americans to speak their minds about the governance of their country, a bedrock right if there ever was one, will depend on the forbearance and good sense of the regulators of electoral speech. And as Gary Nixon can tell you, that's not a position the citizens of a democracy should ever find themselves in.

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ENGAGEMENT IN THE DOCK

by Matthew Rees

ONCE AGAIN, THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION has made known its unwillingness to get tough with Beijing. A few days after Chinese president Jiang Zemin left Washington in late October, the administration announced its opposition to six modest legislative proposals intended to stiffen U.S. policy toward China. They range from requiring cabinet agencies to publish a list of Chinese military companies operating on American soil to preventing entry into the United States by Chinese officials involved in forced abortions or sterilizations. Perhaps most revealing of the administration's timidity is its opposition to a proposal by Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen to increase the number of U.S. embassy staffers in Beijing monitoring human rights. What could be wrong with that? According to the administration, it "would unnecessarily micromanage [State] Department activities and impair the Administration's ability to manage resources effectively."

The House believed otherwise. Only five members took the administration's line and voted against the Ros-Lehtinen bill, while 416 voted for it. The story was the same with the forced-abortion bill, which passed 415-1. Two other bills opposed by the administration received more than 350 votes.

These votes marked the first time Congress has moved against China since the House passed legislation repealing most-favored-nation trading status for Beijing-owned enterprises in 1992. That bill was never enacted, and it's too early to tell whether any of those that passed the House last week will become law. But even if they don't, some progress will have been made. Going through the process of holding a debate, casting votes, and forcing the White House to oppose reasonable legislation sheds valuable light on U.S. policy toward China.

The background to the China votes is as follows: After last year's annual renewal of MFN, Rep. Chris Cox, a California Republican, introduced a resolution declaring the MFN debate "inadequate to address the many policy and security issues" affecting U.S.-China relations and directing House committees to develop proposals covering matters such as trade, human rights, and nuclear proliferation. The resolution passed 411-7.

A vote was supposed to be held on the resulting proposals in 1996, but it never took place. Cox introduced his package last July, shortly after MFN was renewed. It remained unclear, however, when the proposals would be considered by the House, as speaker Newt Gingrich, an MFN supporter, had little interest in pushing legislation viewed as hostile to Beijing.

Cox and Gingrich have often had frosty relations, but Cox's stock soared when he was loyal at the time of the botched coup attempt against the speaker in July. Gingrich subsequently asked Cox and House majority leader Dick Armey to canvass House Republicans about their priorities for the rest of the year. They found interest in Cox's China package, prompting Gingrich to announce in mid-September that it would be brought to the House floor this year.

Cox and his key GOP allies, International Relations Committee chairman Ben Gilman and Rules Committee chairman Gerry Solomon, hoped the legislation would be considered prior to President Jiang's visit. So did leading Democratic China critics Richard Gephardt, David Bonior, and Nancy Pelosi, who wrote Gingrich a letter to that effect. But Gingrich and Rep. Doug Bereuter, who chairs the International Relations Committee's Asia subcommittee, felt a pre-visit vote would pollute the atmosphere for Jiang's arrival, and the vote was put off.

A pre-visit vote would have attracted more media coverage, but all was not lost by the delay. That so many House members, Democrat and Republican, voted to sanction China *after* all the fanfare of the summit stands as a stinging rebuke of the Clinton administration for its policy of engagement. "It's only the extraordinary vacuum left by President Clinton's non-policy toward Communist China," says Cox, "that allowed us to muster this kind of bipartisan support."

In the Senate, a version of the Cox package introduced by Republican Spencer Abraham of Michigan faces a chillier reception, though the climate has improved. Majority leader Trent Lott has always supported renewing MFN for China and has not been sympathetic to the anti-China campaign waged by social conservatives. But asked at a Mississippi press conference last month what the Senate could do to sanction China, Lott pointed to the Abraham package. He wouldn't promise to bring it up for a vote, but Republican senator Tim Hutchinson, a China critic, says he's received "very positive signals" from Lott that Abraham's proposals will be considered early next year.

If these bills pass the Senate with the same majorities they won in the House, the president will be under enormous pressure to refrain from wielding his veto pen. If he doesn't refrain, his veto could prove almost as embarrassing as that of the partial-birth abortion ban. In the unlikely event he signs the bills, he will be tacitly acknowledging the shortcomings of his engagement policy. The president, in other words, will be in a box. Which is right where critics of his China policy want him.

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GOING AFTER JEFF JACOBY

by Abigail Wisse

JEFF JACOBY IS A CONSERVATIVE columnist at the *Boston Globe*. More to the point, he is the only conservative columnist at the *Globe*, and he was brought to the newspaper to serve as its conservative columnist. So, on October 23, he was doing his job, and doing it well, when he published a piece about tolerance and free speech. What Jacoby got for his trouble was an explosion of intolerance, and an effort to stymie his speech, from his coworkers.

Every year at Harvard University, gays and lesbians on campus celebrate National Coming Out Day. This year, Jacoby told his readers, a Christian group from the law school decided to offer an alternative on that day. The Society for Law, Life & Religion organized a meeting called "National Coming Out of Homosexuality Day." The posters advertising the meeting read: "For those struggling with homosexuality, there is hope in the truth. . . . You can walk away." The group announced a gathering open to all Harvard students with a valid ID at which they would hear a "message of compassion and hope for those who desperately seek a way to leave the lifestyle of self-destruction behind." The message was to be delivered by Michael Johnston, a man who had renounced a gay life and taken up both heterosexuality and Christianity.

Within a day, the Christian group's posters were either torn down or defaced and replaced with a parody that read in part: "For those struggling with Judaism there is hope in the truth. You can walk away. (To the gas chambers.) The National Coming Out of

Diversity Day. Sponsored by the HLS Society for Law, Loathing & Hate."

The fraudulent posters continued with, "Open to the entire Harvard community . . . except you. Yes, the Jewish-looking kid. Or you Black and Asian guys. Or you, wearing the pink triangle. (American Nazi party ID will be required to present proof of non-mongrel ancestry for at least four generations.) Bring your own rope."

In his column, Jacoby criticized those at Harvard who would equate the advocacy of heterosexuality with fascism and genocide. "Dare to suggest that homosexuality may not be something to celebrate," Jacoby wrote, "and instantly you are a Nazi, a hatemonger, a gas-chamber operator." Jacoby asked how inviting a man to speak at Harvard about having turned from homosexuality to heterosexuality and Christianity could be considered on a par with marching Jews into gas chambers.

A fair question. But for some staffers at the *Globe* and especially for the paper's ombudsman, Jack Thomas, Jacoby was not only asking an unfair question; he was revealing his own bigotry.

THE COPY EDITORS COMPLAINED THAT JACOBY'S COLUMN VIOLATED THE *GLOBE'S* POLICY AGAINST PURVEYING "BIGOTRY OR HATRED."

The ostensible purpose of a newspaper ombudsman is to serve as an in-house critic, though it is more often the case that the ombudsman plays the role of kind-hearted apologist. But in an extraordinary and unusual move, Thomas devoted his entire November 3 column to an attack on Jacoby. He began no-holds-barred, describing Jacoby's writings on "gay men and lesbians" as "intolerant, frequently overbearing and sometimes downright insulting." He wrote that from the moment of his arrival from the *Globe*'s conservative rival, the *Boston Herald*, Jeff Jacoby has been a thorn in the side of gay staffers. And not just any gay staffers. "The gods must have a sense of humor," Thomas wrote, because they sent two "gay activists" to the *Globe* to serve as Jacoby's copy editors—whose job it is to shepherd Jacoby's column from his computer into print.

According to Thomas, the op-ed page's copy editors, Peter Accardi and Robert Hardman, "were incensed" by the piece. They argued that Jacoby's column was insulting and in violation of a rule enunciated by editorial-page editor David Greenway that "free speech is not a license for the *Globe* to purvey bigotry or hatred."

Op-ed editor Marjorie Pritchard sent the piece to her boss, Greenway, because it made her "uncomfortable." But Greenway refused to touch Jacoby's work. "The thrust of the column was to attack those at Harvard who would not let others speak," Greenway told the ombudsman. That wasn't good enough for the ombudsman, who went on to question the accuracy of Jacoby's description of gay protests at the society's meeting. Thomas wrote ominously that "by means of rhetorical devices—'gay activists thronged the entrance'—Jacoby left some readers with an impression that the meeting had been unruly." A rhetorical device? Horrors! (And indeed, Thomas offers no evidence to contradict Jacoby's assertion that "gay activists thronged the entrance." He only quotes a *Globe* reporter in attendance, who said he thought the meeting peaceful and civil.)

Thomas ends his column by saying that, while *in this case* Jacoby's "offensive" column should have run, "it's a high price to pay for freedom of the press." When I asked Thomas how he came to write a piece denouncing his colleague in these remarkably strong terms, he told me he had received "six calls and one letter to the editor." These inspired him to "ferret out" the supposedly aggrieved gay *Globe* staffers. A previous Thomas column was based on over 200 angry phone calls to the paper about a specific news story. A paper with a circulation as large as the *Globe*'s—493,000—receives several hundred letters and phone calls a week complaining about something or other. But when it comes to a matter involving a conservative's column on the need for tolerance of Christian views on sexuality and the inappropriate use of a Holocaust analogy, six phone calls were apparently enough to get Thomas to act.

Thomas's censoriousness underscores an important truth of our time: Homosexuality must not only be tolerated, it must be advocated. Anything that does not further the advocacy of homosexuality is by definition a condemnation of homosexuality and by extension all homosexuals. If you criticize any part of this orthodoxy, you show yourself to be a homophobic gay-basher. Jeff Jacoby wrote a column about intolerance—the intolerance toward those whose views on homosexuality violate the new orthodoxy. It was titled "Where's the Tolerance Now?" His own treatment at the hands of the *Boston Globe*'s ombudsman—and his copy editors—makes Jacoby's argument all the stronger.

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OUR COUNTRY, RIGHT OR CENTRIST

The Lessons of Election '97

By Michael Barone

For conservatives, the 1997 elections could hardly have turned out better. Conservative Republicans won a sweeping victory in Virginia, hardline mayor Rudolph Giuliani was handsomely reelected in Democratic New York City, and Republican right-to-lifer Vito Fossella carried the New York 13th Congressional District in a special election with a larger percentage than pro-choice Susan Molinari took in a special election in 1990. Meanwhile, Republican liberal Christine Todd Whitman, endlessly touted by the press as a national candidate, barely won reelection as governor of New Jersey. Overall, the results look very much like those of 1993 and 1994, when Republicans won handily—and not a bit like those of the presidential election Bill Clinton won with 49 percent in 1996. All of which bodes well for Republicans in 1998 but sheds less light on how they can prosper in 2000.

It is notable that most of the 1997 contests were fought on Democratic turf. The Northeast Metroliner Corridor, from New England south to the District of Columbia, is the only region of the country where Republicans lost ground in congressional elections between 1992 and 1996. Last week's New York City, New York 13th, and New Jersey elections show how Republicans can survive and even thrive in this one-sixth of the country that strongly backed Clinton (59-31 percent) and Democratic House candidates (58-41 percent) in 1996. The Virginia results show how Republicans can win in the other five-sixths of the country, which gave Clinton a plurality (47-43 percent) and Republican House candidates a bare majority (51-47 percent) in 1996.

When it comes to the battle of ideas, one result stands out: Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's long-anticipated victory in New York City. Thirty-two years ago, the election of John Lindsay as mayor of New York ushered in an era of what Fred Siegel has called socialism for the economy and a free market in morals. Government would spend large sums on welfare and bureaucracy to help the poor, and government would stop regulating behavior previously thought of as deviant.

Three decades later, the verdict on those policies is in. New Yorkers had four years of Lindsay-ite government under David Dinkins, followed by four years of conservative government under Giuliani. The national press likes to paint Giuliani as a liberal because of his stands on abortion and gay rights, but he governed the city as a conservative, shrinking the welfare rolls, cutting taxes, and slashing crime in half. After the closest thing there is in politics to a controlled experiment, New Yorkers opted for Giuliani by a thumping 57-41 percent. Both times Lindsay was elected, he carried Manhattan overwhelmingly but lost the rest of the city to more conservative opponents. Last week, Giuliani carried even Manhattan, the heartland of American liberal governance. After all these years, Manhattan voters admitted, in effect, that they were wrong in the Lindsay era and that the outer boroughs and the rest of America, which they had loved to despise as reactionary and racist, were right.

Some liberals are trying to obscure this result by saying that Giuliani's challenger was a lousy candidate. But Democrat Ruth Messinger is intelligent and experienced and talked gamely about still-festering problems like education. Liberalism's problem was not the Messinger but the message. Now New Yorkers and the national press are touting Giuliani as a nation-

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al candidate. He is not likely to get far because of his positions on some national issues. But by curbing crime, and proving wrong all the criminologists who said that this couldn't be done in an unjust racist society, he has changed more than New York. Across the country, mayors are scurrying to copy his police commissioners' tactics. Giuliani, if he does nothing else in his entire career, will have improved American life more than most politicians ever do.

Make no mistake: Giuliani's victory was the vindication of a set of ideas. So was the victory of 32-year-old Republican Vito Fossella in the New York 13th District (Staten Island plus Bay Ridge and Bensonhurst in Brooklyn). Democratic apologists may say that Fossella won only because the Republican National Committee threw some $800,000 into the 13th. But more than $1 million was spent in behalf of Democratic candidate Eric Vitaliano, who represented a competitive Staten Island district in the state assembly for 15 years, fought the odiferous Fresh Kills landfill, and sponsored the partial-birth abortion ban. Bill Clinton campaigned for Vitaliano, and organized labor mounted an extensive effort in a district where one-third of voters are union members. Vitaliano is intelligent, articulate, friendly, hard working: It is difficult to imagine a better Democratic candidate for this district. But he had one major problem: As a member of the lockstep Democratic majority in the New York Assembly, he had voted for tax increases. Republicans hammered this home, and Fossella won 62-38 percent, a smashing victory in a district Clinton carried 51-40 percent in 1996. In the Northeast Metroliner Corridor, the biggest issue for Republicans has long been taxes. It still is.

THE WHOLE NORTHEAST METROLINER CORRIDOR HAS MOVED TO THE LEFT IN RECENT YEARS.

Some will say that Christie Whitman's narrow escape in New Jersey (she won 47-46 percent) shows the tax issue had no bite. In her first term as governor, Whitman kept her promise to cut income-tax rates 30 percent, yet she barely won reelection. But Whitman didn't promise to cut taxes further in a second term. Indeed, in debates she presented almost no agenda, arguing instead that she was more competent than her inexperienced challenger, the mayor of Woodbridge, at administering state government. That was undoubtedly true and helped her win the endorsements of most New Jersey newspapers.

But editorial writers cast few votes, and New Jersey, like the whole Northeast Metroliner Corridor, has moved left: It voted 54-36 percent for Clinton in 1996. Democratic candidate Jim McGreevey hammered home the fact that New Jersey has the highest property taxes and auto-insurance rates in the nation. Whitman, unlike Giuliani, never convincingly challenged liberal premises. She did offer an auto-insurance plan that would allow policyholders to pay lower premiums in exchange for renouncing pain-and-suffering damages. But when the plan lost in a legislature controlled by her own party, she conducted no public campaign for it, and she failed to highlight the connection between New Jersey's high insurance rates and the leading role New Jersey courts have taken over 40 years in broadening tort liability and weakening insurance companies' defenses against trial-lawyer-driven lawsuits. Nor did she present a plan to cut property taxes or take on local officials who shamelessly pad payrolls at their constituents' expense. Whitman's near-defeat belies the liberals' alibi that the 1997 elections were just the reelection of incumbents in feel-good times. This incumbent nearly lost, because she didn't set out conservative solutions to problems voters faced.

Two other points need to be made about New Jersey. One concerns abortion. The press did Whitman no favor when it lionized her for vetoing a partial-birth abortion ban; the veto was popular in feminist-dominated newsrooms, but a large majority of voters opposed it. (Similarly, the *Washington Post*'s highlighting of Virginia Republican Jim Gilmore's sympathy for a spousal-notification law was undoubtedly intended to hurt him, but the *Post*'s own poll found that a plurality of voters favored it.) In New Jersey, 5 percent of the vote went to Libertarian Murray Sabrin, who said the government should ban abortion as part of its minimalist duty to protect life, liberty, and property.

Finally, the New Jersey race illustrates the point that a strong showing by an extremist candidate in a primary hurts his party in the general election. The press is always on the lookout for this among Republicans, but in New Jersey it was the Democrats who suffered. McGreevey, a little-known mayor and state senator, had help from labor and black organizers to win the Democratic primary 39-37 percent over congressman Rob Andrews, a moderate who has never voted to raise taxes. Whitman spent much of her campaign attacking McGreevey for supporting Jim Florio's 1990 tax increase. She couldn't have done that against Andrews, who probably would have beaten her by a wide margin. The Democratic Leadership Council recently touted a Penn & Schoen poll showing that Democratic primary electorates are more moderate than they used to be. But they're still liberal enough to nominate a labor-left McGreevey over a DLC-moderate Andrews. That cost the Democrats the governorship of New Jersey in 1997 and could cost them some races in 1998.

Outside the Northeast Metroliner Corridor, the most important contests were those in Virginia. In early October the conventional wisdom was that the governor's race was a dead heat between Republican Jim Gilmore and Democrat Don Beyer; that Republican John Hager, a former tobacco-company executive, was a sure loser for lieutenant governor; and that Mark Earley, the Republican nominee for attorney general, was a religious-Right nut who would have trouble winning. On election day, Gilmore won 56-43 percent, Hager won 50-45 percent, and Earley led the Republican sweep 57-43 percent.

What intervened was October—the month for Republicans. Before October, political dialogue tends to be dominated by the "free media," newspapers and television stations, about 90 percent of whose reporters, editors, and producers are Democrats. For the most part without any conscious intention, they naturally frame the dialogue in terms favorable to Democrats. But in October, the "paid media" take over—television advertisements, radio spots, and direct mail. Both parties start to get their messages out unmediated by the press, and the Republicans begin to do better. And not necessarily because they spend more money: In the Virginia gubernatorial race, the spending was about even until Republican Gilmore pulled ahead and Democrat Beyer, contrary to expectations, declined to dip into his family fortune, crucial in electing and reelecting him lieutenant governor.

Gilmore's message was clear, consistent, and well articulated: "no car tax" and "4,000 new teachers." Virginia imposes a property tax running up to $1,000 on ordinary vehicles, and in the northern Virginia suburbs of Washington—which Beyer hoped to carry on issues like abortion and tobacco—the tax comes due in October. In May, Gilmore proposed to phase out the tax on cars worth up to $20,000. Beyer attacked this as reckless, then came up with his own plan to rebate several hundred dollars of tax to people with incomes under $75,000. Unfortunately for him, that is about the median income in northern Virginia: Potential Democratic majorities here as across the country include many voters with liberal views on cultural issues but with incomes that disqualify them for Clintonian means-tested tax breaks.

Gilmore's strategy, which he executed near-flawlessly, is one Republicans everywhere can follow: Target an unpopular tax, come up with a plan that is readily understandable, ignore the inevitable attacks of editorial writers and government apparatchiks, and press your advantage home in October when you can talk directly to voters. This should not be unfamiliar: Ronald Reagan did something like it in 1980, George Bush in 1988, and Republican House candidates in 1994. Gilmore offered as well his plan to hire 4,000 teachers, which helped to neutralize Beyer's promise to raise the salaries of teachers'-union members. Meanwhile, Beyer's ads linking Gilmore with Pat Robertson and attacking him on abortion gained Beyer nothing: Outside the Northeast Metroliner Corridor, many voters approve of the religious Right and are queasy about abortion. Beyer seemed not to understand that phrases pleasing to feminist groups and in newsrooms grate on many ordinary voters.

The lessons from 1997 are fairly simple. Republicans win if they promise to cut taxes. They lose or come uncomfortably close to losing if they don't. Despite Bill Clinton's popularity, and despite well-financed campaigns and good candidates, Democrats have trouble winning.

In addition, Republican candidates can ally themselves with state and local leaders whose records give them coattails: Gilmore and Fossella both benefited from association with popular Republican governors, George Allen and George Pataki; and Fossella benefited from links to Mayor Giuliani and Staten Island borough president Guy Molinari. This should remain true in 1998. Nearly 75 percent of Americans have Republican governors, most of whom have positive job ratings. (Republican candidates stand to benefit from association with governors Paul Cellucci of Massachusetts, George Pataki of New York, Tom Ridge of Pennsylvania, George Voinovich of Ohio, John Engler of Michigan, Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin, and Arne Carlson of Minnesota. All of them, incidentally, are either ethnics or Catholics: The post-Reagan Republican party has moved beyond the country club.) These strong local Republicans seem to count for more than the unpopular Newt Gingrich, against whom Vitaliano directed most of his campaign ads.

Clearly, the 1997 results augur well for Republicans in 1998, but they tell the parties less about how to win in 2000. Though Bill Clinton's presidency has been a disaster for the Democratic party in Congress and in statehouses and many city halls, Al Gore or another Democrat could still run against a putatively extreme Republican Congress. A candidate's personal character and priorities are more important in a presidential race than in a gubernatorial race, and a broader range of issues comes into play. Republicans will probably learn the obvious lesson from Gilmore's victory: Tax cuts work. But it's not clear whether they will learn the less obvious lesson from Whitman's near-defeat: Fail-

GIULIANI'S GORGEOUS MOSAIC

By David Brooks

I'm in a room with 2,000 New Yorkers, none of whom knows who Frank Rich is. It's about 9 p.m. at Rudy Giuliani's midtown victory celebration, but the crowd is area-code 718. These are the bridge-and-tunnel people from Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island, where few people read the columnists on the *New York Times* op-ed page and sometimes the local newsdealer doesn't even carry the paper.

Security is tight for this event, and my theory is they hired night-club bouncers and told them to reverse their criteria. Guys with brown shirts, brown suits, and black leather jackets? Let them in. Girls in spangled heels, with too much eyeliner and evening gowns in the *très* Atlantic City style? In. Young men with moussed-back hair and New York Rangers jerseys? In. Some of these people stand nervously against the wall, as if the Manhattan taste police are going to swoop down and evict anybody with the wrong accent, no neck, and too much back hair.

The place looks like an Italian bar mitzvah, with rabbis all about and old men with Italian-American lapel pins looking for chairs so they can rest their feet. The ethnic groups travel in packs, like teenagers cruising at the mall. A group of six Hispanic politicos swings by in one direction, a clutch of Pakistanis swoops past in the other, four black nationalists in African garb are milling about on the left, some Chinese women are chatting on the right. This really is a gorgeous mosaic. You can go years without seeing so many Reagan Democrats in one place.

It's good to have these people in power again. If you know New York only from the newspapers or *Seinfeld* or the cop shows, this is the New York you don't see. You wouldn't want a city governed strictly according to the preferences of the insurance salesman from Bensonhurst, but these people have been right about a lot of things over the years. They knew that urban riots weren't justified rebellions. They knew that law and order wasn't a code word for racism. They knew all along that there was something screwy about ceding control of public places to panhandlers, pushers, and crazies. These people kept alive some sensible ideas that Manhattanites are only lately rediscovering.

They wait patiently for Giuliani's appearance (Manhattanites pronounce his name Julie-Onnie; the people in this room pronounce it Julie-Annie). The MC, the actor Ron Silver, invites the crowd to watch a five-minute campaign film. It shows the mayor in scene after scene with smiling schoolkids. The music is mushy New Age. Rudy the Mobbuster is being advertised as Rudy the Purple Dinosaur. Frank Luntz, Giuliani's political consultant, has brought his saccharine style with him from Washington. Giuliani spent the final weeks of the campaign talking about caring, cuddliness, and compassion. The sweet-Rudy ploy worked with the TV reporters—he got glowing coverage for his softer style. But the movie is doing nothing for the people in this room.

Then the mayor comes down for his victory speech and immediately starts kissing men. He wasn't kissing men the way some Manhattan men kiss men. He was kissing big fat Italian men on the cheeks. This was belly-to-belly, secure-in-my-masculinity, grab-you-by-the-face, razor-stubble kissing.

Suddenly it's clear that Rudy Giuliani is not just a politician who appeals to Reagan Democrats. He *is* a Reagan Democrat. His wife, who is scarcely seen with him and who does not attend this election-night rally,

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seems to have social ambitions. She wants to be an actress and a TV star. But while Giuliani has intense political ambitions, he seems to have no interest in social-climbing his way to Park Avenue. We think of him as the worldly Wall Street prosecutor with squads of Yale assistants. But Giuliani can be stiff and formal with Manhattanites. Tonight he is open, fluid, and ebullient with the bridge-and-tunnel crowd.

Rudy Giuliani is probably more rooted in his neighborhood than we cosmopolitans have realized. This has implications for how he is going to conduct himself over the next four years. Busting crime and even battling the mob are prototypical Reagan Democrat activities. Giuliani goes into his second term vowing to declare war on drugs—that too will go down well in the boroughs. But surely the central challenge for Giuliani now is to revive New York's economy. Among other things this will mean taking on the municipal unions, whose cushy work rules and pay scales lead directly to New York's incredible tax rates. The union leaders Giuliani will have to crush, though, are bridge-and-tunnel people. Many of them are up partying in Giuliani's suite on the 44th floor. Giuliani has shown that he is willing to take on his base when it is good for the city—he is in the midst of a bruising battle with the heads of the police union. But this is an agenda even more challenging than the first-term crime agenda.

Giuliani's status as a prototypical Reagan Democrat also has implications for his career after City Hall. Most people laugh when you suggest that a pro-choice, pro-affirmative-action, pro-gun-control, pro-gay-rights Republican like Rudy can have a future outside of New York City. But most Republicans who take these socially liberal positions are snobs when it comes to the social conservatives. One suspects that it's the snobbery as much as the positions that drives mainstream conservatives up the wall.

Giuliani is the opposite of a snob. And while his politics are socially liberal, he is no urbane relativist. To hear him talk about the porn merchants and the gamblers is to sense how much he is revolted by indecent behavior, by people who aren't tough on themselves and who don't work honestly and hard. The one genuinely moving moment of the night comes in the midst of his victory speech. He has already touted the crime figures and New York's new spirit and all that. But then he says that of all the things about the city that make him proud, there is one thing that makes him proudest (he is shouting at this point). He declares it was when the federal government tried to shut off benefits to hard-working legal immigrants, and New York stood up to fight. "And we won!" he exults. He goes on to praise the legal immigrants who put in those incredible hours on the job. He is bellowing into the microphone, and the white ethnics all around me are cheering and roaring. It is unexpected and unaffected emotion.

These are the ethnics who got castigated as Archie Bunkers. But Election Night, it's obvious how unfair that scorn was. You can take these people out, you just can't dress them up. ◆

THE WHITMAN SQUEAKER

By Tucker Carlson

In a world brimming with publicity-hungry porn stars and talkative lesbian mud wrestlers, it takes a special kind of politician to win air time on Howard Stern's radio show. Christie Whitman has done it effortlessly. Stern, whose support of the New Jersey governor in 1993 was so effective that she named a highway rest stop after him as an expression of gratitude, seems to adore everything about Christie Whitman—her tough talk on crime, her tax cuts, her enthusiastically pro-choice views. Plus, as Stern often reminds his listeners, she has fantastic breasts.

"You didn't buckle under to the right wing of the Republican party," Stern told the governor in late September, on one of the many occasions she called his radio show to promote her candidacy. "If the Republican party is ever going to be anything great again, they have got to get rid of these religious freaks." Whitman didn't deny that this was true. Later, the subject turned to romance. Whitman admitted that she was sexually attracted to Kevin Costner. Interesting, said

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Stern. Speaking of which, How's the sex with your husband? Is it "hot"? Whitman allowed that "things are always more relaxed" at Pontefract, the family farm where she and her husband spend the weekends. For a middle-aged woman, Stern said enthusiastically, your body is "smokin'." The governor giggled. "Thank you," she said. The banter continued, and after a while Whitman signed off. Stern kept going, speculating aloud about which sexual positions Whitman preferred. I wonder, said Stern, "what it's like to do the governor?"

Whitman, meanwhile, met up with Dan Quayle, who had recently arrived in New Jersey to join her final swing across the state. Quayle's mission: to convince social conservatives that the governor was—in a spiritual sense, at least—on their side.

Only if Whitman were desperate would she have subjected herself to this, and she was. Days before the election, polls showed her almost even with Jim McGreevey, a small-town mayor so forgettable that half the electorate still had no opinion of him. Whitman, by contrast, was a nationally prominent figure—a first-termer hailed by the press as the Future of the Republican Party, the subject of no fewer than four fawning biographies, who was running on a solid record in an economically booming state with a falling crime rate. No one had laughed six months earlier when Whitman's aides predicted that she would get at least 60 percent of the vote. By early fall, it looked like she might lose. As it turned out, Whitman received 47 percent of the vote, one percent more than McGreevey, winning with a margin of about two votes per polling booth.

Most of the analysis the day after the election pointed out that Whitman's poor showing might hurt her political career, possibly even affect her chances of becoming president in 2000. (The Whitman mystique has been remarkably resistant to the evidence.) Whitman herself tried to spin the results as a stunning victory and claimed to be "just extraordinarily pleased" with her 1 percent edge. Perhaps she is. Still, one wonders, how did Christie Whitman come so close to losing?

Just about everyone agrees that Whitman lost control of the defining issues early in the campaign. Months ago, she settled on a slogan—"Promises made, promises kept"—meant to remind voters that she had stayed true to her pledge to cut taxes and had otherwise been a pretty good governor. It might have been an effective strategy, except that, midway through her term, polls began to show that voters were upset about the state's high car-insurance rates. Whitman could have turned the discontent to her advantage, promising, perhaps, to cut car insurance the same way she had cut taxes in 1993. She didn't.

Instead, Jim McGreevey, listening to the chatter of his own focus groups, decided to put car insurance at the center of *his* campaign. "Reporters got frustrated with the issue because it's so boring," says Rich McGrath, McGreevey's press secretary. "But the fact is, it resonated."

The fact is also that McGreevey had little else to talk about. Aides in both campaigns admit that there is hardly an ideological divide separating Whitman and McGreevey. Both supported affirmative action, both were opposed to the attempt by state Republicans to ban partial-birth abortion. McGreevey even voted for Whitman's 30 percent state-income-tax cut. In a race without ideas or ideology, car insurance became the debate, and McGreevey clung to it for dear life. By the time he gave his concession speech, McGreevey had talked about car insurance so much for so long that he appeared unable to stop. "New Jersey has the highest auto-insurance rates in the nation," he informed a ballroom full of his dispirited supporters.

For her part, Whitman couldn't seem to take the issue seriously. Four days before the election, Lyn Nofziger, one of the governor's longtime advisers, gave an interview to National Public Radio in which he scolded voters for being concerned with something as silly as car insurance. People in New Jersey, he said, "look at all the little things that annoy them. There's no great thing that unifies them, like the Cold War. That unified the country. But that's gone now, so they can sit around and be cranky because they have nothing better to do."

Nofziger may have been on to something. But in a race in which Whitman was being successfully portrayed as a rich airhead insensitive to the concerns of ordinary working people, he probably should have kept it to himself. With only days to go, Mike Murphy, Whitman's media consultant, pushed the campaign into running the now-famous "*mea culpa* ad," in which Whitman apologized for failing to comprehend the deep importance of auto-insurance rates. "You've sent me a message," Whitman said, wearing pink and looking earnest. "I've heard you loud and clear."

Sappy as it may have been—"I feel your car insurance"—the ad worked. Almost instantly, Whitman's poll numbers rose. The state's single-issue car-insurance voters apparently were appeased. Pro-lifers, though, were a harder sell.

It was clear from the moment she did it that Whitman's veto of the partial-birth-abortion ban would cost her. "She knew," says Murphy. "We had polls and I told her. We all made it very clear that it could cost her the job. She said, 'Hey, it's what I believe in. Piss off.' " Whitman should get credit from conservatives for acting on principle, Murphy argues, and though it's possible to see his point, it's hard to imagine that many conservatives in New Jersey will forgive her. Whitman's inflexible position on abortion enraged important elements of her Republican base. Most damaging of all, it created room for Murray Sabrin, a pro-life Libertarian who became the first third-party candidate in New Jersey to qualify for matching campaign funds, and wound up with 5 percent of the vote.

Sabrin's presence in the race hurt both candidates (in McGreevey's case, by siphoning off anti-incumbent voters), but it's likely that he hurt Whitman more. The damage was by design. While Sabrin had some compelling issues of his own—raising the state's speed limit to 65 and eliminating carpool lanes were two of the most appealing—his campaign seemed to exist to punish Whitman for her liberalism. His own staff said that the message of the Sabrin ads was "Get rid of Whitman" and that the Sabrin camp was hoping to take credit for showing that Rockefeller Republicans can't succeed.

Whitman, of course, did win, but barely, and without the help of many Republicans. Exit polls suggest that fully a third of all conservatives in the state voted for someone other than the governor. And so the Sabrin campaign—four full-time staffers working out of an unmarked office next to a pest-control company on Route 1 in Edison—did manage to underscore one of the most reliable precepts in Republican politics: alienate pro-life voters at your own risk.

Even without her self-inflicted disabilities, Christie Whitman might have had a difficult time getting elected in New Jersey this year. "This is a tough state," Whitman said in her noticeably brief victory speech, and for Republicans it is true. There are close to 270,000 more Democrats than Republicans in New Jersey, an advantage equal to 10 times Whitman's margin of victory. Many of them are organized in a way Republicans only read about, usually in books about deceased Chicago mayor Richard J. Daley.

On Election Day in Linden, a blue-collar city near the Newark airport, state assemblyman Joe Suliga oversees a phone bank at McManus Hall, the city's Democratic-party club. A dozen volunteers are eating sauerkraut hot dogs, smoking cigarettes, and working the phones trying to convince voters to elect Democrats. There are 19,000 registered voters in Linden. Suliga and his lieutenants have called 13,000 of them—every Democrat and independent in town—at least once and asked each one to vote for Jim McGreevey. Other volunteers with cell phones monitor polling stations around Linden, keeping Suliga apprised of turnout. Residents who live in wards with light voting get phone calls urging them to vote. Suliga makes many of the calls himself. The assemblyman, who runs an Italian-ice company on the side, works from a computerized list of every person he has met in the last decade or so, thousands of names, each with an identifying note that allows Suliga to apply precisely targeted pressure. "He was our waiter" at a local restaurant, reads one notation. "Democrat. Parents in teachers' union. Friend of Debbie's."

Scenes like this are repeated in Democratic clubs around the state. (the machines in some towns, reportedly, are even more efficient than they are in Linden.) And with the huge amount of union support Democrats traditionally receive, winning big as a Republican in New Jersey isn't easy. It is possible, however. It was little more than 10 years ago that Gov. Tom Kean, another liberal Republican from an affluent background, was reelected with 70 percent of the vote (after winning the first time by a mere 1,700 ballots). Then again, people *liked* Tom Kean.

It is close to midnight when it becomes clear that Christie Whitman will be reelected governor. Whitman partisans gathered for the victory party at the Princeton Marriott have spent the last several hours milling around the cash bar looking glum, or else searching for a television set to get the latest vote count. (McGreevey led for much of the night, so it was not until late that the Whitman campaign tuned the enormous television monitors flanking the stage to a news channel.) With more than 90 percent of the vote tallied, the crowd can see that Whitman has just barely passed the mark where it is safe to declare victory. On a small television at the side of the room, McGreevey is giving his concession speech. He looks unbowed and seems to be promising another fight four years from now. Up on the stage, however, the bandleader can only see triumph. "Did we kick the Democrats' asses, or what?" he screams into the microphone. A few people look confused. But most of them just start cheering. ♦

THE COLD HEART OF *BONFIRE*

The Novel That Defined the Eighties, Ten Years Later

By Andrew Ferguson

Tom Wolfe wrote the first draft of his novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities* as a serial in *Rolling Stone* magazine, in 1984 and 1985, and he was only halfway through before his story was, as the phrase goes, overtaken by events. Novels are not supposed to be overtaken by events, of course. We're used to thinking of them as works of pure invention, and thus not susceptible to getting tripped up by the morning's headlines. But Wolfe's ambition was as much reportorial as imaginative. He wanted to capture the grisly carnival of New York City at the midpoint of the 1980s: roiling, putrescent New York, bubbling with irreconcilable ethnic hatreds, wobbling between unimaginable wealth and horrifying squalor, exploited by cynical pols, money-grubbers, and charlatans. He captured it only too well.

To take an example that Wolfe related several years later: In an early *Rolling Stone* installment, he had described one of his characters, an assistant DA in the Bronx, riding the subway, "his eyes jumping about in a bughouse manner." In a future chapter, the author had planned to explain the young man's subway-phobia: He had once been attacked and robbed by a "wolf pack" of thugs on a train in the Bronx. This, in any case, was Wolfe's intention. But not long after the early chapter was published, a real-life wolf pack descended on the tightly wound subway-rider Bernhard Goetz, with spectacular consequences. Wolfe's little plot twist was undone. "Now how could I," he wrote, "proceed with my plan? People would say, This poor fellow Wolfe, he has no imagination. He reads the newspapers, gets these obvious ideas. . . . So I abandoned the plan, dropped it altogether."

There are other examples. Wolfe gave us Rev. Reginald Bacon, a Harlem preacher and poverty pimp who uses the accidental death of a black teenager to rouse the rabble. Three months after the novel was published, the Tawana Brawley hoax brought the indescribable Rev. Al Sharpton to prominence. Sharpton, as Wolfe noted, made Bacon look like a divinity student. Then there was Howard Beach, and Crown Heights —spasms of ferocious race hatred that seemed old news after *Bonfire*. And when Wolfe recorded with almost sensual precision the money-delirium of Reagan-era Wall Street, the excesses seemed impossible to sustain. Sure enough: As the novel hit the bookstores in late October 1987, the market crashed.

"Not for a moment did I ever think of *The Bonfire of the Vanities* as prophetic," Wolfe has written. But the comment is too modest. For its prescience, and for much else, *Bonfire* was the most successful and celebrated novel of its day. For people of a certain cohort—college educated, urban-dwelling, now pushing 40 or 50—*Bonfire* comes as close to a universal literary experience as their generation is ever likely to possess. You could go to a party and talk about it with almost anyone, as, more commonly, you can talk about a hit movie and assume that just about everybody has seen it. *Tout le monde*, as Wolfe likes to say, read *Bonfire* (and called it that, by the way: just *Bonfire*). It's still in print, and ten years to the month after its publication, it deserves another visit. It still retains the power to dazzle, and to disappoint. And to instruct as well—in ways even its far-sighted author could not have foreseen.

The first thing you notice re-reading Tom Wolfe's novel is Tom Wolfe. The same is true of every Tom Wolfe book, for even in his journalism his literary talent is almost blinding—preposterously large. There seems to be nothing he can't do with words. His touch is always exact, always sure. The prose is famously idiosyncratic, with its italics and exclamation points and multiplying ellipses, but to achieve his powerful effects he relies on these gimmicks much less than his critics have maintained. Mark Twain said that the difference between the right word and the almost-right word is the difference between a flash of lightning and a firefly. Wolfe's paragraphs are a series of lightning bolts. Here he introduces us to the hostess of a Fifth Avenue dinner party.

> A blazing boney little woman popped out from amid all the clusters in the entry gallery and came toward them. She was an X ray with a teased blond pageboy bob and many tiny grinning teeth. Her emaciated body was inserted into a black-and-red dress with ferocious puffed shoulders, a very narrow waist, and a long skirt. Her face was wide and

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> round—but without an ounce of flesh on it. . . . Her clavicle stuck out so far Sherman had the feeling he could reach out and pick up the two big bones. He could see lamplight through her rib cage.

Every page offers a half-dozen exquisitely observed details. These range from pitch-perfect dialogue—"He galvanizes people to challenge the power structure," a left-wing lawyer says, with a straight face, of Rev. Bacon—to Wolfe's well-known obsession with clothes. Some of the sartorial references now seem incomprehensible. "He wore a white necktie with a black crisscross pattern, the sort of necktie that Anwar Sadat used to wear." (Anwar Sadat?) More effectively he dwells on the minutiae of work and money—the minutiae, that is, that overwhelm and consume us all but that most novelists overlook, for misbegotten reasons of taste, presumably. The book's main character, Sherman McCoy, is going broke while earning a million dollars a year; Wolfe takes us through the balance sheets to show us how, with figures rounded off to the nearest thousand.

Wolfe's most unexpected gift is shown in his handling of the book's enormous plot. At every turn of the wheel the gears engage and disengage with Swiss precision. To sketch the famous story one more time: Sherman is a bond trader, living with his wife and trophy daughter in a $2.5 million co-op on Park Avenue. His principle of urban living is "Insulation! That was the ticket. If you want to live in New York . . . you've got to insulate, insulate, insulate, meaning insulate yourself from those people." But *those people* keep obtruding. One night, Sherman and his mistress end up on a deserted Bronx street in his $48,000 Mercedes. They are confronted by two young black men, and in the ensuing panic one of the kids is hit by the car, falls into a coma, and eventually dies. Sherman and his mistress escape back to the safety of Manhattan. But within days the insulation begins to unravel.

Bonfire is a novel of inversions. A novelist of an earlier time—say, one of the great realists that Wolfe admires, like Dreiser or Sinclair Lewis—would spin out from this accident a tale of urban neglect, turning the black teenager's fate into a parable of the establishment's indifference. But in *Bonfire*, in 1980s New York, where the sky "glows as if inflamed by fever," the forces of the new establishment are mobilized against Sherman. The unlucky teenager is inflated into an "honor student," the "pride of a South Bronx housing project," by a tabloid desperate to appease the city's organized race hustlers. The Bronx district attorney sees in Sherman the answer to his prayers for a "Great White Defendant." Rev. Bacon plays the city's media like a calliope, to his own aggrandizement. Sherman's life collapses, and by the novel's bitter close he is a "professional defendant," with the vultures closing in "to devour at leisure the last plump white meat on the bones of capitalism."

WOLFE TREATS NONE OF HIS CHARACTERS SYMPATHETICALLY. HE DOESN'T LIKE THEM AND NEITHER DO WE.

Bonfire carries echoes, some subtle, some less so, of earlier American classics. A hit-and-run accident proves the undoing of Jay Gatsby as it does of Sherman McCoy, for instance—but with a crucial difference. When the dust clears in Fitzgerald's novel, the parvenu Gatsby is dead, the lowborn Myrtle and her husband are dead, and the aristocrat Daisy survives. In *Gatsby*'s America the aristocrats always sail off untouched, regardless of the wreckage they leave in their wake. But in *Bonfire*, it's the aristocrat who's ruined, and the parvenu (Sherman's mistress, who drove the car as it hit the teenager) is the one who survives, even flourishes. From *Gatsby* to *Bonfire*, the country has changed—been turned on its head, in fact.

Not that Wolfe treats Sherman sympathetically; with rare exceptions, Wolfe treats none of his characters sympathetically. The description of the party hostess, quoted above, is notable not only for its exactness and humor but also for its cruelty. Wolfe's characters are clouded by self-delusion, motivated by vanity alone; he doesn't like them and neither do we. For that matter, they don't even like one another. The layers of mutual contempt reach a fugue-like complexity. One scene brings together a group of British expatriates at a favorite watering hole. Being British, they have resolved not to pay the tab, and so look for an American to pay it. They ask the minor character Ed Fiske to join them, and then pretend to care about his boring conversation.

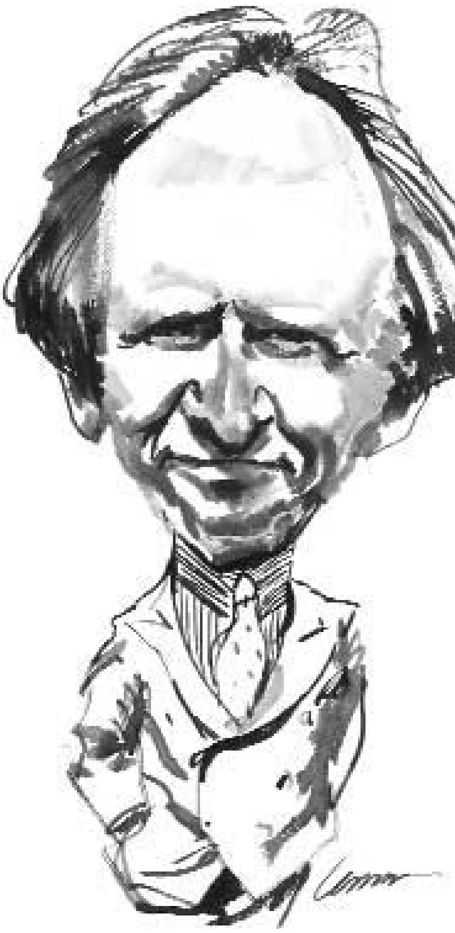
> The Brits hung on every word with rapt and beaming faces, as if he were the most brilliant raconteur they had come across in the New World. They chuckled, they laughed, they repeated the tag end of his sentences, like a Gilbert and Sullivan chorus. Mr. Ed Fiske kept talking, gaining steadily in confidence and fluency. The drink had hit the spot. . . . What admiring British faces all around him! How they beamed! They did indeed appreciate the art of conversation! With casual largesse he ordered a round of drinks . . .

. . . until one by one the Brits slip away, sticking him with the $200 bill. The scene is incidental to the plot, and it's very funny and superbly drawn, but it's unsettling nonetheless. It captures in miniature the author's attitude to his creations: The Brits despise Ed Fiske for his delusion and vanity, and Wolfe despises them for despising him, but in the end he finds Ed Fiske as appalling as they do. There's something chilly at the center of the bonfire, a lump of ice where the book's heart should be. Sherman himself is merely an instrument of his own vanity and delusion, and so when his life collapses it's not so much a tragedy as a comeuppance. The fiery trials he passes through burn away his conceit and self-satisfaction, and alone among the major characters he at last sees himself and his position in life unblinkered. And in the New York of *Bonfire*, his hard-won self-awareness is a state indistinguishable from madness. By the end Sherman is a freak—carrion for society's vultures. But he had it coming.

There is one wholly admirable character in *Bonfire*: the old judge who tries Sherman's case. Mike Kovitsky works in the courts of the Bronx County Building. “They had been built at a time, the early 1930s, when it was still assumed that the very look of a courtroom should proclaim the gravity and omnipotence of the rule of law.” Kovitsky embodies this older, higher aspiration, but to no effect. Even he succumbs finally to Wolfe's fatalism.

Wolfe has elsewhere remarked how much he admires the scene from *Huckleberry Finn* in which Colonel Sherburn faces down a mob that has come to lynch him. With the rabble at his doorstep, Sherburn appears at an upper window, a shotgun cradled in his arms. “The idea of *you* lynching anybody!” Sherburn shouts. “It's amusing. The idea of *you* thinking you had pluck enough to lynch a *man*! . . . Why a *man*'s safe in the hands of ten thousand of your kind—as long as it's daytime and you're not behind him. . . . Now the thing for you to do is to droop your tails and go home and crawl in a hole.”

The “crowd washed back sudden,” and the lesson is unmistakable: The courage of an individual, of a real *man*, will by right triumph over the mob. Kovitsky is such a man, too, and at *Bonfire*'s climax, he chooses to face down the lawless herd of bellowing hysterics gathered outside the Bronx County Building. But . . .



Kent Lemon

> At that moment Kovitsky threw open both glass doors in front of him. His robes billowed out like enormous black wings . . . Kovitsky stopped in the doorway, arms outstretched. The moment lengthened . . . lengthened . . . The arms dropped.
>
> The billowing wings collapsed against his frail body. He turned around and walked back inside the lobby. His eyes were down, and he was muttering.

The mob rages on, and honorable men like Kovitsky find themselves powerless before the consuming bonfire.

What we have here, in other words, is a profoundly pessimistic book. Its plot spins and buzzes and races along with great humor and enormous energy, but always under a low overhang of Spenglerian gloom. There are remarkably few anachronisms in *Bonfire*, ten years on—Wolfe has one male character wear an earring, for example, to signal that he's a street thug; nowadays even bond traders wear earrings. But the largest anachronism, a reader notes today with some relief, is precisely Wolfe's pessimism. After all, the economic boom of the 1980s is still humming in the '90s; New York itself is a vastly cleaner, safer place than the city Wolfe described. The need to insulate, insulate, is less now than it has been in forty years. Even the graffiti on the subway cars, so lovingly described in *Bonfire*, have been cleaned up. And the book's candor about race, which created such a stir when the book came out and which branded Wolfe a racist in the eyes of his more hysterical critics, is only mildly more frank than what you'd hear from a Steven Bochco TV series in 1997.

In one last strange inversion, we may have Wolfe to thank for this, at least in part. With courage and consummate skill, he wrote the most popular novel of the decade as a declamation of where it all was heading. But, as they say these days, we seem to have decided not to go there. The Apocalypse that *Bonfire* pointed to has been averted, for now. This is one prophecy that Tom Wolfe, the most prophetic and gifted writer of his time, got wrong. ♦

WHO PAYS FOR BIG BIRD?

Bewailing the Decay of Public TV

By Matthew Scully

It's now thirty years since government got into the television business, founding the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. In 1967, notes James Ledbetter in his earnest defense of public television, the highest-rated show was *Bonanza* and of the thirty-four programs introduced that season by NBC, CBS, and ABC, not one concerned public affairs. America was "producing a generation of semi-literate consumers," declared Fred Friendly of the Ford Foundation. An editor at *Harper's* warned, "The best brains in television, its best hours, and its best dollars are dedicated to making the American people fat, dumb, and happy—at a moment when the Soviets are straining all their resources to make their people lean, smart, and tough." The Soviets were watching symphonies and ballet and programs about science, while we frittered away our evenings with Hoss and Little Joe. Something had to be done.

James Ledbetter
Made Possible By . . .
The Death of Public Broadcasting in the United States
Verso, 280 pp., $25

Ledbetter's *Made Possible By* . . . traces the history of public television from there to the present. A media columnist for the *Village Voice*, Ledbetter remains an ardent believer in the enterprise, but he fears the corruption of PBS (and National Public Radio, to which he devotes a chapter) by the lure of commercial profit. "Drastic" budget cuts by Congress in 1995—by which Ledbetter means that the CPB got $37 million less than it requested—have made it more reliant upon corporate underwriting. The very popularity of such PBS programs as *This Old House*, the children's show *Barney and Friends*, and Ken Burns's documentary on the Civil War has given rise to mass marketing of videos, toys, and other merchandise—a sacrifice, as Ledbetter sees it, of principle to profit. Equally unseemly are the on-air exhortations to the five million PBS "members" who donate some $400 million a year.

Made Possible By . . . is a painstaking account, the result of going to presidential libraries and poring over every memo, report, budget, or transcript related to public broadcasting. Ledbetter makes some good points about the way PBS does things, but the effect of his book is a little bewildering. You get the impression that no issue today is more urgent than the survival of public television and that for three decades PBS has been at the center of culture. "It is the grand paradox of the Media Age that in the mid-1990s, as the United States stood on the edge of a telecommunications revolution," he writes, "one of the highest congressional priorities was cutting off federal funds for public broadcasting." Just a little overwrought, as are chapter titles like "Embracing the Enemy," "What Is To Be Done?" and "Can It Be Saved?", which sound like something from Lenin or Thomas Paine.

Why such fervor? Ledbetter cites his own experience as part of the first American generation to be reared watching *Sesame Street* and to form in adulthood an "addiction" to Bill Moyers's specials and to such news shows as *The MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour*. These influences are apparent. The author's whole critique seems to arise from a couch-centered vision of the world, in which the two great forces in human affairs are government and TV.

His protagonists are the fathers of PBS, visionaries like McGeorge Bundy at Ford and the authors of *Public Television: A Program for Action*, a report by the Carnegie Commission. This document, Ledbetter reflects, "is a quiet manifesto, expressing the belief that government action can and should be catalysts for perfecting the human spirit."

Memo by memo, fiscal year by fiscal year, the book follows PBS in its struggle to stay true to this lofty aim while beset on every side by petty politics. No sooner had LBJ signed the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 then he began installing cronies on the CPB board. Then Nixon "deliberately plotted to . . . quash public TV content he and his allies disliked." At the time, PBS was airing such programs as *Soul!*, hosted by a Black Panther and an exposé entitled *The Banks and the Poor*. What's never clear is how Nixon, in seeking "to minimize public affairs and political programs," could be faulted for politicizing PBS.

Throughout this book, everything going on in the world is seen through the prism of PBS. Nixon, for example, rejects a plan to centralize telecommunications under the federal government. But this goes down as a mark against him because the plan would have solved PBS's infrastructure problems.

In his final chapter, Ledbetter declares that "the CPB must be liberated from direct presidential control." He seems never to notice that all of the villains in his story, right up to the Republican Congress in 1997, are the elected representatives of the public that PBS is supposed to be serving. His heroes are invariably the executives, producers, artists, and intellectuals striving valiantly to

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Matthew Scully is a writer living in Virginia.

resist "outside interference." Years of political pressure, he writes, have "instilled the habits of self-censorship." PBS is supposedly committed to free speech, yet ever since 1967, "its taxpayer subsidy has repeatedly been used as a club with which to clobber that very commitment."

What he calls "clobbering" most of us would call accountability. His solution is to create some sort of new task force to be subsidized by a permanent tax on the telecommunications industry. This Public Television Task Force would be administered by "community activists, artists, journalists, broadcasters, labor leaders, and clergy." The taxpayers would gladly give their money to PBS's artists, newsmen, and intellectuals—only too grateful to provide a creative outlet to these national treasures.

More convincing is Ledbetter's case against corporate financing, though here again you have to really cherish your TV to care much. With government providing just a quarter of the CPB budget, PBS and NPR have leaned more and more on corporate charity. "The viewer of the *News-Hour with Jim Lehrer* sits through about a minute's worth of advertising from program underwriters—Fortune 500 giants such as Archer Daniels Midland, AT&T, and PepsiCo—before the news begins. What was purposefully planned as a commercial-free environment ironically now sells itself as a preferred media buy."

Corporate underwriting covers 16 percent of PBS's costs, and often comes from each company's advertising rather than charity budget. Probably he's right and PBS ought to be one thing or the other, not just a more elegant version of commercial TV. He notes that many sponsoring corporations are themselves beneficiaries of federal favors, so that the whole arrangement is essentially a laundering operation. If Ledbetter were making an argument against subsidies in general, he'd have a fine case in point.

Oddly missing from this critique of vulgar commercialism, however, is Bill Moyers, the pioneer of PBS-for-profit whom Ledbetter elsewhere extols for "commentary and reporting on great questions of policy and intellect surpassing anything that commercial television could imagine." This might have led to a useful discussion about PBS as a self-supporting enterprise.

Ledbetter seems to operate mostly on the customer-is-always-wrong principle. PBS should be confronting "thorny modern politics" instead of wasting precious air time on what viewers actually seem to prefer: "long-dead social situations" like the "British costume dramas" *Upstairs, Downstairs,* or documentaries like *The Civil War,* exploring well-burnished historical topics. "If the medium is to provide a sustained, intelligent, critical look at American society—as its founders certainly intended for it—it must examine the actions and faults of America's most powerful institutions: government, finance, insurance and real estate industries, oil companies, media, tobacco and agriculture, lobbyists and federal bureaucracies, pharmaceutical companies, auto makers, and the military."

Yes, those tobacco companies have it all too easy. What America needs is more political panel shows, more national self-analysis, and more subsidies for our struggling class of pundits. Of course, as a respite from all this intense debate, we will need some levity, but "PBS seems positively frightened of original comedy programming. . . . It seems unlikely that the American viewing audience would suffer an intellectual breakdown if it were subject to an original satire of network television like HBO's *Larry Sanders Show*, or an animation delight like Fox's *The Simpsons*."

A few philistines might complain that perhaps this is straying a bit from the proper functions of government. But I believe Ledbetter could here cite the Comedy Clause of the Constitution, under which we all enjoy the right to the very best in original satire.

At all events, we have been duly warned that without swift and sweeping measures to save it, public television "will not survive the century." Though the remote control has been passed to a new generation of Americans, "quality television" remains our cause, and we shall not be moved. Let us sink as one into our couches, demanding nothing less than excellence. ◆

THE TRUTH ABOUT BRAHMS

Find It in His Music

By Jay Nordlinger

Jan Swafford
Johannes Brahms
Knopf, 736 pp., $35

Johannes Brahms's nightmare has come true, a century after his death: a mammoth biography that examines virtually every day of his life, every thought in his head. The composer burned many of his letters and asked his confidants to do the same. He despised the notion that a composer's life could aid in understanding his music. "I don't like to hear that I wrote that requiem for my mother!" he once growled. When a volume of Beethoven's correspondence was published, Brahms was aghast: "No one can do me less of a favor than to print letters of mine," he wrote (in a letter that has survived). The Beethoven letters had done nothing but expose "features so unwelcome that it would have been preferable to be kept in ignorance of them."

The biographer Jan Swafford will stand for no such ignorance of Brahms. He goes after his quarry with palpable glee. "It has been my aim to take him off the pedestal," he writes, "to get behind the beard." The "common illusion" that Brahms "epitomized the 'purity' of music" must be dispelled.

Yet somehow, after 700 unsparing pages, this "illusion" is not dispelled. Brahms remains atop his pedestal. Music—certainly Brahms's—is not autobiography, and no amount of psychological conjecture can make it so. And yet, a life can tickle a reader's fancy for its own sake—as Brahms's, rich and majestic, happens to do. After all, even idealistic young music students have been known to wonder, What exactly was the nature of his relationship with Clara Schumann (widow of the composer Robert and one of the finest pianists of the age)? More specifically, Did they or didn't they?

Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg in 1833, and it will come as no surprise, given music history, that his father was a professional musician. Johann Jakob Brahms was only a beer-garden player—not so elevated as Johann Beethoven or Leopold Mozart—but he usually earned enough to feed his family of five. He had no higher ambition for his elder son than that he grow up to play in the Hamburg Philharmonic.

Young "Hannes" quickly took to the piano and began to invent pieces of his own. When he was 13, he was sent by his cash-needy father to the bawdy houses by the waterfront, where he entertained the rough element with gypsy songs, quadrilles, and sailor's ballads.

Swafford places great stress on this experience (which lasted less than a year), arguing that it accounted for "shadows" on Brahms's consciousness and his complicated relations with women. He writes, in one of his typical psychoanalytic flights, "As with the poetry on the whorehouse piano, [Brahms] needed to create refuges in his mind. So he withdrew into a hall of mirrors where he could refract his identity."

Swafford also dwells—obsessively, lasciviously—on Brahms's looks, his "sheer attractiveness." Over and over, he describes him as "a slight, girlish boy," "fair and pretty as a girl," with "maidenly features," "forget-me-not eyes," and "long blond hair" framing a face that was "girlishly pretty—virginal and innocent." He suggests, with no basis whatever, that men in the taverns may have taken liberties with him. It is not the only instance in which Swafford reaches farther than his materials warrant.

The breakthrough year for Brahms was 1853, when he was 20 and set out to make his mark on the world. He first toured, as an accompanist, with the Hungarian violinist Eduard Reményi and later joined with a far more important violinist, Joseph Joachim, who would become a lifelong friend and collaborator. (It was for Joachim that Brahms wrote his violin concerto, a masterpiece of

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Jay Nordlinger, associate editor and music critic of THE WEEKLY STANDARD, *last wrote about the composer Gerald Finzi.*

that repertory.) When Joachim and Brahms performed for the music-besotted Georg V of Hanover, he pronounced the young man "little Beethoven." Brahms was soon moving in the highest circles, where he encountered such luminaries as Liszt, whose freewheeling musical approach he rejected emphatically. (Brahms would later write, "My fingers often itch to do battle, to become the anti-Liszt.")

In July of that year, Brahms's parents wrote to inquire after their golden boy's progress. Joachim answered for him: "His purity, his independence, . . . and the singular wealth of his heart and intellect find sympathetic utterance in his music, just as his whole nature will bring joy to all who come into spiritual contact with him." It was a common observation about Brahms, who captivated practically everyone he met and who won a following that was madly loyal and adoring.

It was in September—still 1853—that Brahms had his fateful rendezvous with the Schumanns. After hearing a sampling of pieces that Brahms had composed, Schumann said to him, "You and I understand each other." That night, he recorded in his diary, "Visit from Brahms (a genius)."

Swafford, of course, supplies a base interpretation: Schumann, you see, "was enchanted by Brahms at first sight," because he "was so appealing to look at; there was something burning in his blue eyes that belied the delicate features and the shyness." Swafford goes on to commit the worst outrage of his book, when he muses, "Was the older man attracted to Brahms? Was he bisexual?" He duly remembers Schumann's "affairs with women and his passionate connection to Clara" but alleges that "he was still attracted to handsome and talented youths," of whom "Johannes the Fair was the last . . . perhaps the most beautiful, certainly the most gifted." This, about Schumann, than whom few men in history have ever been more woman-loving and -craving.

Shortly after meeting Brahms, Schumann, eager to become his champion, wrote a controversial essay, "New Paths," in which he heralded Brahms as the messiah of music, come to rescue it from the clutches of Liszt and the dastardly, dangerous Wagner. The path Brahms was treading was in fact an old one—winding from Bach to Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert. The essay made Brahms—only 20 and a long way from musical maturity—famous all over the continent and placed on him a tremendous burden. Swafford rightly perceives that Brahms's vindication of Schumann is his towering achievement.

In early 1854, catastrophe struck: Schumann went irretrievably insane.

SWAFFORD GOES AFTER BRAHMS WITH GLEE. YET AFTER 700 PAGES, THE COMPOSER REMAINS ATOP HIS PEDESTAL.

With the composer confined to an asylum near Bonn, Brahms grew closer to Clara, protecting her, encouraging her, and watching over her seven children. Was he standing in for Robert, to whom he owed so much, or betraying him? For two years, while her husband lingered, Clara "existed in some limbo between wife and widow," as Swafford puts it, and Brahms fell deeply in love with her. The letters they exchanged during this period are so achingly poignant that they are almost unbearable to read. The weighty, unspoken question was, What will happen once Robert goes? Swafford presumes to speak for Brahms when he writes, "He wanted him to get well; he wanted him to die." When Schumann did die, in July 1856, Brahms did not marry Clara, and he would never marry anybody else—in part because he could not find in another the ideal that, to him, was his friend's wife.

Clara later wanted her children to know what Brahms had meant to her: "He strengthened my heart as it was about to break, he lifted my thoughts, lightened, when possible, my spirits." She implored, "Believe all that I, your mother, have told you, and do not heed those small and envious souls who make light of my love and friendship, trying to bring up for question our beautiful relationship, which they neither fully understand nor ever could." Swafford writes that, for Brahms, Clara was "some inextricable tangle of mother [she was 14 years older] and forbidden lover," his "strange and eternal bride, his love and his art and his life."

From the 1860s on, Brahms lived in the capital of music, Vienna, of which he was a prized citizen. He was that rare composer, honored and wealthy in his own time. Never once did he have to stoop to a commission; he produced a steady stream of music that sold briskly to an appreciative public. Swafford notes that "music lovers of every stripe began growing up between Brahms's Lullaby and his *Requiem*, from the cradle to the grave." He had difficulty in giving birth to a symphony, but when he did, it was awe-inspiring—the conductor Hans von Bülow promptly dubbed it "Beethoven's Tenth."

Brahms was also, Swafford shows, an excellent (if sometimes prickly) friend and a noble spirit. He corresponded prolifically—not only with Clara—and he constantly gave money to those in need, often anonymously. He was collegial with the high, gentle with the low. He pulled strings for the powerless, sat by sickbeds. Of the touching gesture, he was a master: After an estrangement from Bülow, he sent him a slip of paper containing only a few bars from Mozart's *Magic Flute*; he knew that his friend would think of the words sung with the notes—"Dear one, shall I see thee no more?" Brahms's sense of right and wrong seems to have been exquisite (except, now and then, in the field of romance). When an ex-love interest bequeathed him a large sum, he ordered it deposited—without a word—in an account belonging to her widower. A liberal and republican, he was so repulsed by the anti-Semitism flaring up around him, he snapped, "Next week, I'm going to have myself circumcised!"

In Brahms's final years—the 1890s—he was alarmed by the modernism closing in around him. Richard Strauss was composing clangorous tone poems; Debussy was doing strange things in Paris; Stravinsky was preparing for his rebellion in Russia. Brahms, the conservatives' hero, was the culmination of the grand tradition that had begun with Bach and was now expiring. The story goes that Brahms was walking along the river with the young conductor and composer Mahler. Brahms complained that, after him, there would be nothing left—he was the last. Mahler, pointing to the water, exclaimed, "Look, *Doktor*! There goes the last wave!" Brahms, a modest man who could take a joke, chuckled heartily.

In the first months of 1897, Brahms became too sick to work and took to his bed for the first time in his long, vigorous life. He leafed through scores of Bach, marveling at what the old giant had wrought. A bust of Beethoven sat nearby. Until the end, Brahms was uncomplaining, stoic. After he died on April 3, he was laid to rest in Vienna's Central Cemetery, alongside Beethoven and Schubert. The world—not always fooled in musical matters—knew what he was worth.

Swafford, who apparently does some composing on the side, subjects us to an occasional, "From my own experience as an artist . . . ," which grates. More seriously, his prose can be pompous when he wants it to be magisterial. But make no mistake: His life of Brahms, for all its numerous flaws, is a stupendous feat—of scholarship, of assemblage, of thought. It will no doubt stand as the definitive work on Brahms, one of the monumental biographies in the entire musical library. Yet if the Brahms-seeker has only an hour, he should listen to the *Requiem*. If 45 minutes, one of the symphonies. If a half hour, the Handel variations. If only five minutes, a ballade or an intermezzo. If even less than that, a ditty from the *Deutsche Volkslieder*. There he will find the truth about the composer.

Oh, about Brahms and Clara? Swafford guesses that they didn't. ◆

THE 2,037 YEAR OLD MAN

Mel Brooks Meets the Millennium

By John Podhoretz

He has a birth certificate from the land of Og, but he can't carry it around because the certificate is inscribed on a boulder. He grew up before the nation-state, but he grew up singing a national anthem that ran, in its entirety, "Let 'em all go to hell—except Cave 76!" He has over 42,000 children, but not one comes to visit him.

He knew the great and the near-great, including Robin Hood, a lovely man who ran around a forest stealing from everybody and keeping everything. It was Robin's assistant, Marty the Press Agent, who devised the spin that Robin robbed from the rich and gave to the poor; and since Robin gave you such a clop on the head when he stole from you, you couldn't remember what had happened anyway. And speaking of Medieval England, it was only when King Arthur ate with his family that the round table was round; when the knights came over, they had to put in the leaves. It should have been "King Arthur and the Oval Table."

He dated Joan of Arc, but the relationship didn't go anywhere, and he felt just terrible when she was burned at the stake. He lived next door to Paul Revere, who he insists was an anti-Semite bastard. Why? Because Revere rode around shouting, "They're coming, they're coming, the Yiddish are coming!" Upon being told that Revere said "the British," not "the Yiddish," he promises to drop Revere's wife an apologetic note.

He knows about the origins of customs and of words. All words, he says, are onomatopoetic, even the word "shower." How so? Well, when the water starts, it goes "shh" but then you add the hot water, and you say "ow!" so together you get "shower." (And what about the word "nose"? "What are you gonna blow, your eyes?" he says.)

Of all the inventions and wonders in world history, from the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus to the polio vaccine, he has two favorites: Saran Wrap and Planet Hollywood. Saran Wrap amazes him because you can take three olives and make a little Saran Wrap, or you can take ten sandwiches and make a big Saran Wrap. How could he prefer Saran Wrap to a life-saving device like the heart-lung machine? "*That* was a good thing," he allows.

John Podhoretz is deputy editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD *and the incoming editor of the* New York Post*'s editorial pages.*

And Planet Hollywood? "Oh, what they're doing there!" he says. "Every wall is a movie! And the motorcycle from *Easy Rider*? In the window!" How could he possibly compare Planet Hollywood to the Hanging Gardens of Babylon? Well, are Bruce and Demi hanging around the Hanging Gardens? No, they're hanging around Planet Hollywood.

He has had a lifelong love affair with show business. He invested in one Shakespeare play called *Queen Alexandra and Murray*, which closed out of town (in Egypt). He quotes one passage from memory:

> **Queen Alexandra:** What ho, Murray? What could it have been that I have seen? Is it not in our marrow? Are we not one in ourselves?
>
> **Murray:** What are you hollering? You'll wake up the whole castle.

He is the 2,000 Year Old Man, the comic character created by Mel Brooks on the spur of the moment in 1950 and featured in three legendary recordings released in the early 1960s. A fourth came out in 1973, and last month marks the unexpected release of a new CD featuring Brooks and his straight man, Carl Reiner, called *The 2,000 Year Old Man in the Year 2000*. (There's also a book of the same name that is largely a transcription of the new recording.)

The 2,000 Year Old Man is now 2,037, but he still has the same Yiddish accent, and the same jaunty perspective. He has agreed to sit with Carl Reiner once again because he's on a book tour; among his works, we learn, is a book about how to respond when somebody in a bar says to you menacingly, "What are you looking at?" The answer is, "I'm looking at *you*, s—head," because when you say that, the other guy thinks you're crazier than he is and he leaves you alone.

As the use of profanity shows, he has changed some in the 24 years since we last visited with him. Where once he nearly had a heart attack when Reiner used the word "masturbation"—"Hey, what's the matter with you? Teenagers are gonna hear this. You don't have to use that word! Be oblique! Be smart!"—this time the 2,000 Year Old Man even confesses to a homosexual experience. He tells Reiner he was married once to a great kisser named Bernice Zolotow, but the marriage lasted only three days because he discovered on the wedding night that Bernice was actually . . . Bernie. (And, we learn not on the CD but in the book, when Bernie got entirely naked, it turned out he wasn't even Jewish.)

But he still has some of the same old stories to tell—about his upbringing (he learned to read from a book in ancient Hebrew called *Zechem Mochem Ruchem*, which translates as "See Moses Run") and about ancient medicine (there was a doctor named Poultice who made you forget you had a pain in your chest by dropping a rock on your foot, and made you forget the pain in your foot by sticking a twig in your eye).

The 2,000 Year Old Man in the Year 2000 is pretty good—nowhere near as good as the earlier 2,000 Year Old Man material, it's true, but then again, what is? The original routines constitute one of the high points of American humor in this century. You can get them in a four-CD set on Rhino Records. Get them. Don't be a shmuck. ◆

> "Rostenkowski has his House pension, $104,000 a year, and friends say he will not have trouble finding work while on probation."
>
> —*The New York Times*

Parody

Rosty to Head Campaign Finance Probe

Reno Changes Course, Seeks Independent Counsel

By Roberto Suro
Washington Post Staff Writer

Amid mounting evidence of White House involvement in political fundraising during the 1996 presidential campaign, Attorney General Janet Reno has requested the appointment of an independent counsel to investigate possible wrongdoing. The decision represents a major about-face for Reno, who had earlier insisted that no independent counsel was needed. Former congressman Dan Rostenkowski will lead the inquiry.

"He is the right man for the job. He has an extraordinary record," the attorney general said of the former 18-term congressman from Cook County, Illinois, who once chaired the House Ways and Means Committee. Rostenkowski, an avid stamp collector, left office in 1994 to pursue other interests.

Reno's decision came as a surprise to many who have watched her fend off repeated calls for an independent counsel. She is said to have reversed her position after the revelations from another set of White House videotapes, misfiled in the president's "Smokey and The Bandit" collection. According to Justice Department sources, Rostenkowski's name came to mind almost immediately because it was inscribed on numerous armchairs, crystal figurines, and commemorative dinner plates he had sent to the attorney general and her aides over the years.

As independent counsel, Rostenkowski will have a virtually unlimited budget and staff to pursue the possible misuse of funds by the Clinton campaign.

"Uncle Danny is going to do a great job," said his newly hired chief investigator.

Reached at his family's insurance agency on the North Side of Chicago, from which the Office of the Independent Counsel will lease office space, Rostenkowski vowed that the investigation would be sweeping and thorough.

"I will personally follow the facts of this case wherever they lead," he told reporters. "If they lead to Pebble Beach or the Florida Keys, well, then, so be it."

Reaction to the appointment has been mixed. At the White House, the mood has been one of studied nonchalance. Among stationers, landscapers, and automobile dealers, however, there was jubilation as the news of Rostenkowski's

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