the weekly
Standard
DECEMBER 8, 1997
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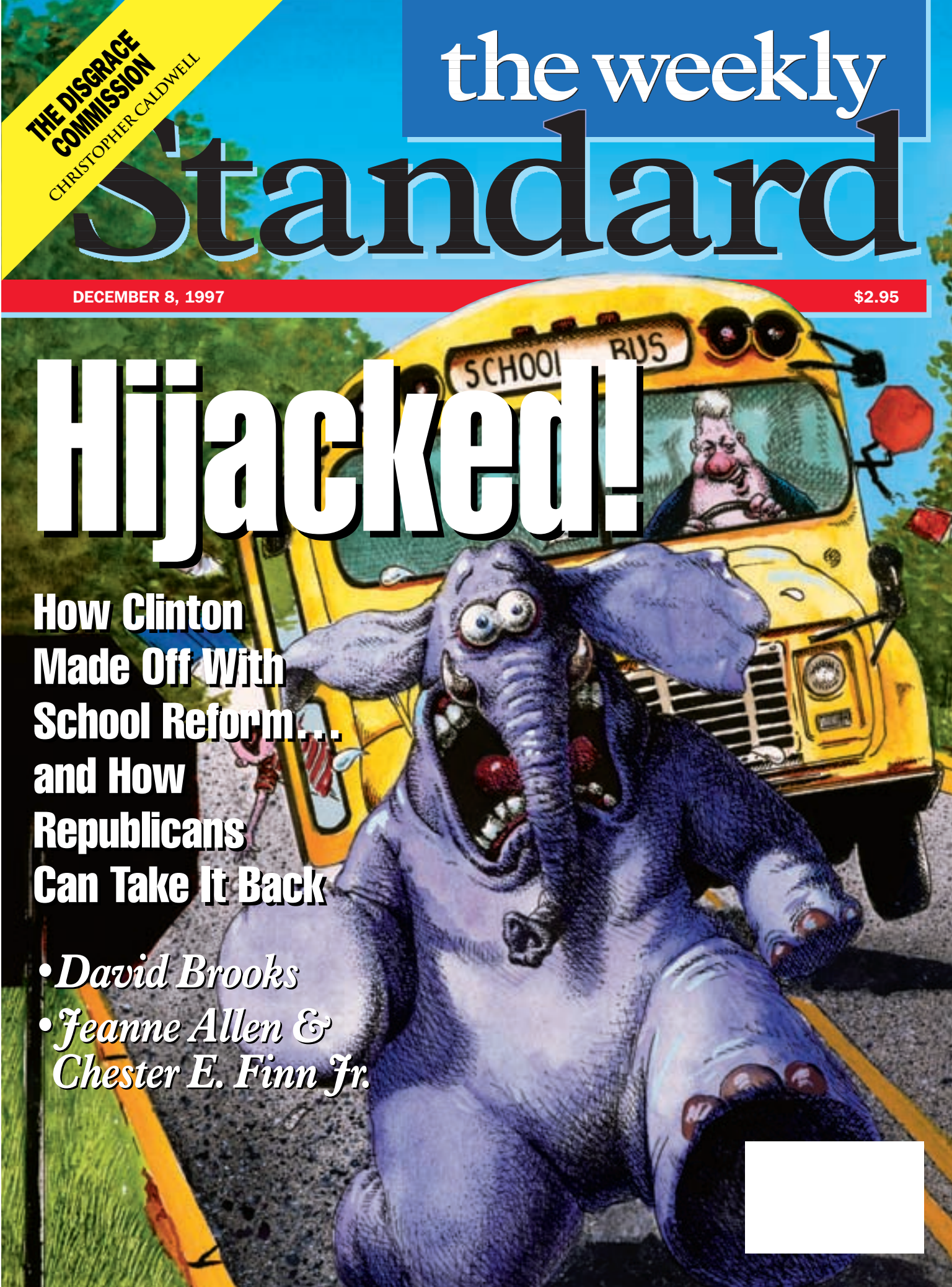
THE DISGRACE COMMISSION
CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

Hijacked!

How Clinton Made Off With School Reform… and How Republicans Can Take It Back

- *David Brooks*
- *Jeanne Allen & Chester E. Finn Jr.*



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Cover by Sean Delonas

Books & Arts

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The Decline of the Hunger Strike

Gandhi turned himself into a ribcage in a loincloth. The IRA's Bobby Sands starved himself for 66 days until he died in a Belfast prison. But hunger-striking, like other demanding disciplines, isn't what it used to be.

Last week, *The Hill* reported that Kathryn Cameron Porter, wife of Rep. John Porter of Illinois, was embarking on a three-week hunger strike to protest Turkish oppression of the Kurds. There was, however, a wee, little qualifier: Porter "has been eating one meal a day because she has diabetes."

Never mind that this is akin to a celibate monk's escaping to the local bordello once a month for relaxation. For today's hunger-strikers, it's the thought that counts. And Mrs. Porter is well within the bounds of recent practice. Jesse Jackson, who's been known to call hunger strikes one day and show up at banquets the next, invented tag-team striking a few years back. After refusing solids on behalf of Haitian immigrants or California grape workers, Jackson then allows somebody else—somebody as hungry for publicity as Jackson is for food—to take over his fast. Jackson calls this "passing the cross" down "the chain of suffering."

Fellow waif Al Sharpton once promised to go without food after being arrested for blocking traffic on behalf of hoaxstress Tawana Brawley. But a jail guard revealed that while Sharpton had taken the unusual measure of skipping several meals, including barbecued chicken, "He told us it's a good time to lose weight. But he's not really on a fast." Likewise, NBA center Olden Polynice, also protesting the detainment of HIV-infected Haitian immigrants, vowed a hunger strike that would allow him to eat only on game days. That lasted until his team got a five-day rest.

A modest proposal for the next Gandhi wannabe: Announce a "virtual hunger strike." Cut down to just two meals and two snacks a day—as an ironic homage to protesters of yore. Then once a week call a press conference at which you release computer-generated simulations of what you would look like if you had actually stopped eating. After all, it's the sanctimony that counts.

Three Cheers for Seven McCaugheys

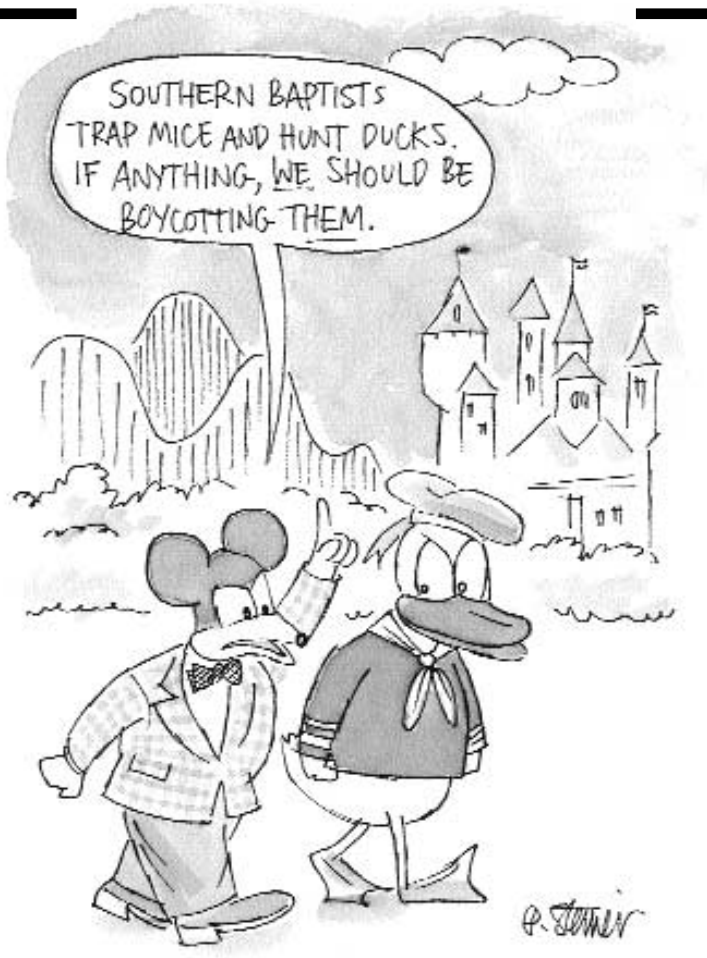
The arrival of the McCaughey septuplets in Iowa last week looked like the ultimate good-news story, and the TV reporters covered it that way at first. But celebrating the birth of lots of apparently healthy children, against enormous odds, to happy and relieved parents is apparently *de trop* in America's newsrooms. It sure didn't take long for the fecundity backlash to set in.

"I think this is an unfortunate event," said Maria Bustillo, a reproductive endocrinologist, on CNN. "I'm glad they're doing well, but I think that in general, we would look at this, those of us who do this for a living, as kind of failure of our technology."

Bobbi and Kenny McCaughey certainly don't consider themselves unfortunate, but what do they know? By the canons of modern medical expertise, they are grossly irresponsible: After the fertility drugs succeeded beyond expectation, you see, they should have preemptively killed several of their unborn babies. This form of abortion involves the injection of poison into one or more of the siblings. As Nancy Snyderman, ABC medical correspondent, explained it on *Good Morning America*: "Now, I know it's an unsavory thought for a lot of people, but selective abortion, where you literally think about not which fetuses to get rid of but how many to get rid of, is something that we really need to talk about openly in cases like this."

The McCaugheys, who oppose abortion, said "No thank you" and took their chances. Sam Donaldson, perhaps taking his cue from Snyderman, weighed in disapprovingly on *This Week*: The McCaugheys were playing "Russian roulette" with the health of their children, saying, as it were, "I don't care. I'll put the bullet in this chamber and it won't come up." Fortunately, Cokie Roberts jumped in and silenced Donaldson before he could injure any bystanders with his metaphor, pointing out that "this is a eugenics argument."

Scrapbook



The *New York Times*, for its part, marked the happy occasion with an op-ed from Gene Jones, the director of the Des Moines Coalition for the Homeless, who wrote that the outpouring of gifts to the McCaughey family is an example of the "warped character of American compassion and obligation." Shame on Iowa governor Terry Branstad, Jones argued, for pulling together private support to build the McCaugheys a new house. Meanwhile, there are "at least 9,000 homeless children in Iowa" and "6,000 to 8,000 children have been disqualified from welfare." The connection? In our heartless country, "Private compassion is good; public compassion and responsibility are bad."

So much for good news.

To the Smoke-free Station

Those looking for a historical antecedent to America's anti-smoking hysteria should search no farther. It may have begun as so many of our century's tragedies began: with Vladimir Ilyich Lenin's train ride from Zurich to the Finland Station in Petrograd, where he launched the Bolshevik Revolution. We quote from *A People's Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution*, by Orlando Figes: "Lenin worked alone in his own compartment, while his fellow travellers, much to his annoyance, drank and sang in the corridor and the other compartments. Smoking was confined to the lavatory and Lenin ordered that all non-smokers should be issued with a 'first class' pass that gave them priority to use the lavatory over the smokers with their 'second class' passes. . . . It seemed from this piece of minor social planning that Lenin was already preparing himself to 'assume the leadership of the revolutionary government.' The 'sealed train' was an early model of Lenin's state dictatorship."

Is there a smoker in America today who doesn't feel as though he's been issued a "second-class pass"? The harsh glare of Lenin's example at last illuminates the shadowy motives of our anti-smoking zealots: Today tobacco—tomorrow the world!

There Will Always Be a Berkeley

You know that we are confronting one of the momentous issues of our time if the Berkeley, Calif., city council weighs in. Last month, it voted 7 to 0 with two abstentions to lift sanctions against Iraq. The director of the Middle East Children's Alliance, Barbara Lubin, was sanguine about this development. She recalled that Berkeley was among the first cities to come out against the Vietnam war, and among the first to call for the divestment of American business in South Africa. Sure, these causes may have seemed like losers at the time. "But history," Lubin said, "has proved Berkeley right time and again. I am sure last night's vote against sanctions in Iraq will be another of those times."

Does the Berkeley city council really feel like making a splash? Does it want to be in the vanguard of revolutionary change? Well, Bay Area Castroite Ron Dellums is retiring from Congress this year. Maybe the council should endorse a Republican.

Casual

The Art of the Talk Show

A local synagogue held a big shindig recently, and I realized in the course of it that talk-show hosting is America's number one performance art.

When you are a talk-show host, your main goal is to get a laugh. Your big topics are gossip, sex, and people's feelings. The talk show is, in short, a perfect match with the needs of communal worship in synagogue. (If you don't get that last sentence, you may not be up to the challenges of modern American citizenship.) On the morning I'm talking about, the synagogue was celebrating the acquisition of a new Torah scroll and had invited guests, including a famous rabbi to perform during the morning service. Also including me; I was part of the after-lunch program. What I lacked in celebrity I made up in proximity—we live five minutes away.

It isn't a synagogue we usually attend, but we know a lot of fine people who do. The regular starting rabbi is a smart and charming man. His special guest was state-of-the-art. Easing forward through the morning prayers, we reached the point where a rabbi can sermonize if he feels like it; the rules stipulate only that the Bible portion of the week must be the jumping-off point. Here the special guest took the controls, and in no time he had everyone in stitches. He informed us that this week's Bible portion was full of "adult material"—"If you have children in here, be warned"; that got another big chuckle—and then he launched his spiel, which was as colorful and exciting as a hot-air balloon and equally appropriate to the time and place. We were led to understand how, with the right approach, you can see straight through the Bible; in actual fact it deals mainly with sex and women's rights, just like every other book that has ever been written.

The presentation was novel almost until the end, but he closed with a routine that has become sadly commonplace in American synagogues, wading into the crowd and soliciting comments on the Bible portion—on the theory that, if a person has no information about a particular topic and has never studied or thought about it, his detailed opinions are eagerly awaited by everyone.

I heard afterwards from lots of people who were appalled, especially at the idea that a Bible discussion in synagogue could be inappropriate for children. I also heard one person defend the performance—the Bible, she said, *is* full of sex, so what's a rabbi to do? In this light it seems amazing that religious leaders have managed to discuss the book in appropriate, even edifying terms for several thousand years. Almost as amazing, every great Hollywood classic of the pre-modern age is rated G. Civilization was dominated by yokels until we came along.

Bad taste usually wins, because it's louder. People come to synagogue to pray, and in some cases to hear the rabbi expound. Some come to register support for the community, some because they are moved by the liturgy. No one (zero people) (0) comes to hear Mr. Schwartz's unrehearsed ruminations on the weekly Bible portion. It's not even clear whether Mrs. Schwartz wants to hear them. In any congregation, the large majority is in favor of sitting down and shutting up. Problem is, we express our opinion by sitting down and shutting up.

The cultural leadership urges us nowadays not to blend quietly with the crowd but to "share our feelings." We are desperate to please our neighbors and superegos (a typical superego in these parts being the internalized voice of the *New York Times*); notwithstanding, we mostly ignore this bad advice. At the synagogue I'm talking about and many others, the seats to the rear fill up first. Latecomers have to sit in front. There is nothing wrong with that. You leave home and join a group because you want to be part of it; you *want* to blend in. You sit with the clump in back to be out of the limelight, to enjoy the strength and peace that come from slipping out of your personality for a while and putting on the stronger, more serene personality of the community. (Orthodox synagogues are different: The leader stands with his back to the group because he is part of it, headed in the same direction. There is no performer and no audience and no show, and the front seats are rarely empty.)

The traditional distance between rabbi and layman didn't rule out friendship but helped preserve the rabbi's authority; you can't exercise moral leadership without authority. But authority frightens us. There are responsible householders in this neighborhood who can't bring themselves to sit at the heads of their own dining tables. To assume authority requires that we act like adults when we don't feel like it and secretly suspect that, as adults, we are frauds. And look at the way we are educating our children and running the country; we may be right.

David Gelernter

On Clinton, Gays, and the Truth

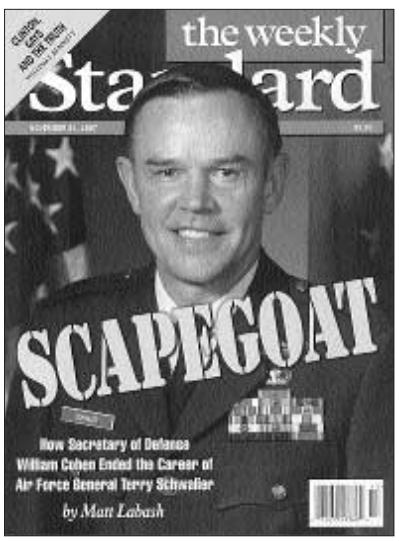
I am writing in response to William J. Bennett's essay "Clinton, Gays, and the Truth" (Nov. 24). I am frankly surprised that a scholar of the caliber of Bennett would rely on myths, stereotypes, and bad research to make his points—which would not be valid even if his facts *were* correct.

Some of Bennett's assertions are almost true. For example, it is not quite true that in his November 8 speech at the national dinner of the Human Rights Campaign, President Clinton "equate[d] today's homosexual movement to the struggle of blacks during the civil-rights movement." Clinton drew several important parallels, but was careful not to "equate" the two. They are not the same, but they are similar, and President Clinton is hardly the first person to see this. Bennett chose not to mention the fact that also speaking at that dinner were Wade Henderson, executive director of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, and Dorothy Height, co-chair of that umbrella organization and a towering figure in the civil-rights community for more than 40 years. Not only did both of these black civil-rights leaders agree that our quests have much in common, but Henderson stated that passage of a federal bill outlawing job discrimination against gays "is the missing jewel in America's crown of civil- rights protections."

In an effort to prove that gay people are privileged compared to the nation at large, Bennett asserts that gay people "as a group [are] wealthy and well-educated." He offers no empirical evidence for this "fact," which is not surprising because there is none. (There is market research that shows this, but using this information to describe the entire gay community would be like using a reader survey conducted by *Architectural Digest* to describe all Americans.) Bennett then goes on to say that gay people "exercise enormous influence in the worlds of higher education, art and theater, literature, the news media and entertainment," as if that proves we do not face discrimination. For the words "gay people," substitute the word "Jews" or "African Americans" or "women." The sentence remains true, but so do the realities of anti-Semitism, racism, sexism—and homophobia.

Here are some empirical facts surrounding gay people, wealth, and education:

•In September 1996, the Human Rights Campaign released the first nationally statistically valid survey of America's gay and lesbian population, which found that gays and lesbians earn wages similar to those of most Americans. This study—conducted by the respected firm of Lake Research, Inc., and reviewed by the University of Chicago's Tom W. Smith, one of the foremost statisticians in America—found 40 percent of the gay community earns under $25,000 a year, compared to 45 percent of the population as a whole. Twenty-one percent of the gay populace earns more than $50,000 per year, compared to 13 percent of the general population. And 35 percent of both the gay and the general populations earns $25,000 to $50,000 annually.



•Another reputable study, "Economic Evidence of Sexual Orientation Discrimination," by Professor Lee Badgett (then at the University of Maryland), found that lesbian, gay, and bisexual workers earn less than otherwise identical heterosexual workers. For gay men, the wage differential was between 11 and 27 percent less.

•In terms of education, HRC's survey of lesbian and gay Americans found that 39 percent of self-identified gays and lesbians have a high-school degree or less. A total of 26 percent have some post-high-school education, but only 35 percent are college graduates.

Bennett then argues that "the real threat to homosexual Americans is not discrimination but physical devastation" in the form of AIDS. To buttress his contention, he cites one of the most bogus statistics in the anti-gay arsenal of religious political extremists: Gay men have an average lifespan of approximately 43 years. Bennett does not provide a cite for this statistic, but it correlates with a widely discredited "study" by a man named Paul Cameron, who has been censured by, and/or kicked out of, several professional associations, including the American Psychological Association, the Nebraska Psychological Association, and the American Sociological Association. Cameron's so-called study of the life expectancy of gay people was based completely on obituaries placed in gay community publications.

Since Bennett is a well-educated man with advanced degrees, I can only speculate that he was not aware that this so-called study took a convenience sample and used it to generalize to an entire population. (If I were more cynical, I might think he was aware of how flawed this study is, which could explain why he called it "the best available research." It is the only available "research.") There are myriad reasons why a self-selected sample like this cannot be extrapolated to the whole population of gay people, but let me list just a few: Such obituaries would tend to exclude people who did not live openly gay lives; those who were not active in the local gay community; and those whose survivors would not think to write an obituary, let alone submit it to a gay newspaper.

I do agree with Bennett that AIDS has taken a devastating toll on the gay male community, but I would point out that he served in the cabinet of a president who refused to address publicly the AIDS epidemic, and who suppressed those health officials in his administration who advocated for strong prevention messages that included information about using condoms. But let me ask Bennett this: If he believes that gay people are living unhealthy, sexually promiscuous lives, why doesn't he come out in favor of same-sex marriage? If Bennett truly

wished to stop the spread of HIV and AIDS, he would embrace prevention strategies and institutions that promote monogamy.

But by framing his arguments against gay civil rights almost completely in the sensational terms of alleged gay male promiscuity and the spread of HIV, Bennett is trying to divert people's attention from the core issues. Let's not talk about whether it's fair or moral to fire someone from his job merely for being gay, or to deny him housing or equal protection of the law, because most people would agree that should not happen.

And let's never talk about the millions of gay people who are living happy, productive lives, many in long-term committed relationships even without the sanction of legal marriage. It is critical to the Bennett method to tear down our lives and claim that we are miserable, all the while ignoring an increasing body of evidence that more and more of us are leading happy, honest lives.

On a final note, I agree wholeheartedly with Bennett when he says that gay people are "entitled to compassion, as well as the rights owed all Americans as Americans." Since this is a point of sincere accord, I would hope that we could in the future use that premise as a starting point and work to find means by which those promises could be fulfilled. For the fact remains that in 39 states, people can be fired from their jobs merely for being gay or lesbian. I welcome further dialogue with Bennett on this and other subjects. He is a critical thinker with many good ideas about creating a nobler, more ethical American society.

Elizabeth Birch
Human Rights Campaign
Washington, DC

William Bennett writes that AIDS "is far more of a threat to homosexuals than employment discrimination. If Bill Clinton has a genuine concern for the well-being of homosexuals, why doesn't he speak out against the promiscuous lifestyle that is devastating so many of them?"

To bolster his argument, Bennett cites my book *Sexual Ecology*, which details the terrible damage that promiscuity has wrought on gay men. He even calls me an "honest homosexual." Yet he fails to mention that I propose logical solutions to this problem, solutions that he rejects for purely ideological reasons.

Consider marriage. Bennett and other conservatives often argue that the breakdown of marriage among heterosexuals inevitably leads to increased promiscuity and social instability, and that sexual fidelity needs strong social support. They're right, and the same is true for gay people. Yet Bennett is an outspoken opponent of same-sex marriage. It seems odd that someone who purports to be concerned with gay promiscuity and AIDS vigorously opposes extending to gay people the primary social institution designed to temper promiscuity.

Bennett sometimes counters that same-sex marriage wouldn't temper gay promiscuity, because the thing that really civilizes men is not marriage itself, but women. But conservatives know that this is only partly true. After all, if it were entirely true, why worry about the breakdown of marriage, since (unmarried) women can still civilize (unmarried) men? The fact is that women may well moderate men, but marriage certainly doesn't hurt. Indeed, if men are naturally more promiscuous than women, then gay men probably need *more* socially sanctioned supports for their relationships, not fewer. Or, as Bennett would have it, none at all.

I also find it odd that Bennett is an outspoken opponent of social changes that would make it easier for gay adolescents to come out of the closet, go to safe schools, and lead open lives. Bennett opposes these changes on the dubious basis of the "waverer" argument—namely, that some kids waver between gay and straight, and that society ought to send a clear signal that it prefers heterosexuality. In other words, society needs to stigmatize gay people in order to make examples of them to children.

Tragically, however, psychological studies repeatedly show that social stigma directed toward gay teens prevents them from going through the normal developmental stages of dating, going steady, and so on. This developmental deficit makes it much more difficult to form lasting, stable, adult relationships, and therefore contributes to promiscuity and AIDS. So logic would suggest that anyone who truly cares about gay promiscuity, as Bennett claims to, ought to be working to make it possible for gay teens to come out and integrate their sexuality into the larger fabric of their lives.

Bennett is correct about one thing. The current debate about AIDS and sexuality is being fostered by honest homosexuals all over the country. But ideological broadsides like Bennett's hinder us. They make many gay people extremely defensive and thereby assist gay-sex radicals in equating our arguments with homophobia.

If Bennett really cared about promiscuity and AIDS, he would support same-sex marriage and other social changes that might genuinely reduce gay promiscuity, and stop undermining "honest homosexuals" by selectively citing our work to support his argument that homosexuality "should not be socially validated." That is not our argument, and if he were being as honest as he wants the president to be, he would acknowledge that.

Gabriel Rotello
New York, NY

I read William Bennett's article with mixed feelings. I am a young, Republican homosexual with solid conservative credentials, including work on the Hill and in the last presidential campaign. I certainly agree with Bennett's criticisms of promiscuity, and I share his concern about the health and lifespan of gay men. I certainly agree with his statement that "homosexuals are entitled to compassion, as well as the rights owed all Americans as Americans." However, Bennett also presents several arguments and makes broad statements about homosexuals and homosexuality that simply cannot be left uncorrected.

In particular, Bennett addresses the issue of my happiness. There are portions of the homosexual community that may live discontented lives, but arguing that the whole group lives in misery is absurd. By Bennett's account, one would be led to believe that we spend every waking moment fighting the urge to slit our wrists. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Sadly, homosexual teens do experience a suicide rate three times as high as straight

teens. This is caused more by reading articles like Bennett's and by bigotry than from some inherent defect in the homosexual "lifestyle."

Does Bennett think that only heterosexuals' lives are joyous? He may have lived a charmed and joyous life in his conservative ivory tower, but the rest of us—gay and straight—probably have hit a few bumps along the way. To the extent that homosexuals do experience feelings of angst and ennui associated with the human struggle for fulfillment, it is precisely because we are human, not because we are homosexual. Feelings of discontent and lack of fulfillment are not as contingent upon sexual orientation as Bennett suggests. Just ask Generation X.

Homosexuals do deserve the same rights and compassion owed all Americans as Americans, as Bennett argues. If he truly feels this way, he would agree that homosexuals deserve protections against employment and housing discrimination. Unfortunately, in 39 states I could be fired legally from my job solely because I am gay. Perhaps Bennett could use his soapbox to help to rectify that situation.

Bennett's approach does much harm to those of us who are trying to live our lives well, responsibly, morally, and happily. If Bennett really wants to help, he should foment opposition and hysteria not against homosexuality, but instead against the radical leftist "anything goes" mindset and agenda. As for me, I am going to get on with my hopeful, fulfilling, middle-class, homosexual existence with the rest of my well-adjusted friends and colleagues, both homosexual and heterosexual.

SCOTT D. MCCOY
ALEXANDRIA, VA

If his speech to the Human Rights Campaign is any indication, President Clinton puts a lot of store in the expanding imaginations of the American people. The pro-gay group warmed to the president's obvious delight in being able to advance the cause of a group that, despite its affluence, media support, and endorsement by the intellectual elite, still manages to portray itself as victims.

Of course, there is some truth to their claim to victimhood. But it doesn't take much imagination to see another side to the story. To claim with pride, as the president does, that "we're spending 10 times as much per fatality on people with AIDS as people with breast cancer or prostate cancer" strains the imagination. To put 10 times the resources toward the eradication of an almost wholly preventable disease as toward those over which humans have no control indicates that our priorities are being driven by something other than pure compassion.

Furthermore, to put gay rights on a par with civil rights, as President Clinton did, is to preempt the conclusion in the still unresolved debate about the origins of sexual orientation. Color is not something over which people have any choice. The claim offends non-white Americans who believe that their struggle involves deeper principles of justice and liberty than struggles involving sexual preference.

Nobody wants to minimize the pain experienced by boys and girls who grow up in our society feeling "different." Nothing justifies the cruel treatment they often receive from their peers and from the wider society. But to combat this we do not need, as the president says, a new definition of equality and dignity. Instead we need to apply the old and basic truth that people are to be valued because they are created in God's image, and yet are still responsible for their behavior.

THE REV. DR. PETER C. MOORE
DEAN AND PRESIDENT
TRINITY EPISCOPAL SCHOOL
FOR MINISTRY
AMBRIDGE, PA

WILLIAM J. BENNETT RESPONDS: ***Ms. Birch questions the life-expectancy figure of Paul Cameron, but she chooses to ignore the large body of evidence that supports my point that male homosexuals live in a world filled with much early death. This includes the work of Dr. Jeffrey Satinover, formerly of Yale and author of*** **Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth.** ***Dr. Satinover agrees that the life span of homosexual men is approximately three decades shorter than that of heterosexual men. He also writes that 30 percent of all 20-year-old homosexual males will be HIV-positive or dead of AIDS by the time they are 30. Dr. William Haseltine, formerly of the Harvard Medical School and now editor-in-chief of the*** **Journal of AIDS,** ***has said, "AIDS ranks right up there***

with heart disease and cancer as a major source of loss of years of life, because it affects, predominantly, younger people. So it should have, in my view, the same priority that those diseases have, based on its impact on life years." Because AIDS is heavily concentrated on the (relatively) small homosexual male population, heart disease and cancer kill many more people. But AIDS kills its victims a lot younger.

Indeed, Ms. Birch recently called AIDS "the worst epidemic of the century." Ms. Birch cannot then argue that AIDS-related misery and early death are bogus claims made by religious extremists. The premise of the highly successful campaign to increase AIDS funding is, after all, that AIDS has devastated the gay population across the board—not that it has taken its toll primarily among senior citizens.

I did not write that homosexuals do not face discrimination. What I said was that amidst all the talk of homosexuals-as-victims, we should recognize the privileged position that many homosexuals occupy in America. Indeed, after writing that there is no empirical evidence to support my statement that homosexuals are, as a group, wealthy and well educated, Ms. Birch proceeds to cite figures from her own organization that demonstrate homosexuals are, as a group, wealthier and better educated than other Americans.

My "method" is not to tear down the lives of homosexuals; the points I made about homosexual promiscuity and misery are supported by the evidence and by the testimonies of many homosexuals. For many gay activists, the very essence of gay liberation is promiscuous sex. Surely Ms. Birch knows this. If not, she should read Gabriel Rotello's book and the CDC figures he cites.

Of course I have "selectively cited" Mr. Rotello's work, but I did not misrepresent it. The problem of promiscuity among male homosexuals is one of the subjects of his book, and something to which his own letter attests. He characterizes the "waverer" argument as "dubious." But the most recent scientific studies, including studies of twins, support that argument. E.L. Pattullo, formerly associate chairman of Harvard's department of psychology, has written that "a very substantial number of people are born with the potential to live either straight or gay lives."

Both Mr. Rotello and Ms. Birch write that my article is a logical argument for "same-sex" marriage. That would be true if marriage were strictly or primarily about harm reduction. But marriage is about much larger, and even sacred, things. The legal union of same-sex couples would shatter the definition of marriage, which is based on natural teleology and the different, complementary natures of men and women. In any case, as Mark Steyn has written, if a grisly plague hasn't furthered the cause of homosexual monogamy, why should a permit from the town clerk?

Mr. McCoy should re-read my article. I did not write that the "whole [homosexual] group lives in misery" or that "only heterosexuals' lives are joyous." What I wrote was that the homosexual lifestyle is not, in general, a contented and fulfilling one—for the reasons I laid out in my article.

Contrary to what Ms. Birch and Mr. Rotello write, homosexuals currently have the rights owed to all Americans as Americans. What they do not have, as homosexuals, is the privilege we now accord to individuals against discrimination based on their race, sex, religion, or national origin.

The problem with the Employment Non-discrimination Act is that its passage would mean you could almost never take a person's sexual orientation, or behavior, into account. There are circumstances in which reasonable people may want to do so: a Boy Scout leader; a day-care provider; the adoption of a child; or the flamboyant behavior of an employee.

Arguments made in opposition to the gay-rights movement are not "ideological broadsides" by "homophobes." They express the concerns of many Americans, of compassion and goodwill, who oppose the increasingly aggressive demands of the homosexual movement. If opposing the homosexual-rights movement causes some people to become "extremely defensive," then so be it. We need a civil, honest, forthright debate, because a lot rests on the outcome.

the weekly Standard

Justice for Sale

Surprise. The Supreme Court will not hear *Piscataway* v. *Taxman*. The court will not review how the Piscataway, New Jersey, board of education achieved "diversity" in its high school—by retaining the only black teacher in the business department and laying off an equally qualified white teacher. Oral arguments had been scheduled for January. But third-party civil rights organizations, fearing the high court's likely ruling against the school board, have agreed to finance a hefty settlement. Sharon Taxman, the fired teacher, will get $433,500. And she and Piscataway, which had resisted paying a much smaller judgment ordered by lower courts, will drop the case.

This development is without historical parallel. Where legal procedure is concerned, it is rather as if . . . no, it is *exactly* as if the Catholic church, expecting the bad result in 1972's epochal abortion case, had bought off Jane Roe just before the Supreme Court took up her claim. Or as if, early in 1954, some band of segregationists had slipped a stack of cash to little Linda Brown's mommy and daddy—so that Topeka, Kansas, and all the other whites-only school systems around the country wouldn't get opened up by *Brown* v. *Board*. *Piscataway*'s denouement is so amazing, in fact, that its true meaning seems not yet to have dawned on anybody. The meaning is this: The Supreme Court's *certiorari* jurisdiction, its power to choose which conflicts of statutory and constitutional interpretation it will resolve, is now for sale on the open market.

What, after all, was to stop Sharon Taxman from opening a Wild West auction on *Piscataway*'s disposition? From the civil rights groups, she heard $433,500. For a higher bid from opponents of race- and gender-conscious federal law, perhaps she could have been persuaded to reject a settlement and press her lawsuit. Perhaps the Clinton administration, which has warmly welcomed this litigation's sudden disappearance, can pursue the innovation to even greater future advantage. If the president doesn't like his favored side's odds in any pending Supreme Court argument, then the solution is simple. The White House phones up Mochtar Riady, who makes the opposing litigant a gift of money too rich to refuse. Case closed.

This isn't funny. The *Piscataway* settlement raises unimaginably horrible questions about the authority and independence of the American judiciary. The thing is a disgrace.

Now, then, what about affirmative action? Just as the civil rights community wished, Sharon Taxman's golden parachute forestalls a comprehensively hostile Supreme Court precedent on the issue. Nevertheless, as an immediate practical matter, *Piscataway* leaves the legal and political defense of race and gender preferences in tatters.

Faced with budget cuts in 1989, the Piscataway school board pink-slipped Sharon Taxman, only because she is white, so it could hold on to Debra Williams, only because she is black. The Bush Justice Department sued Piscataway on Taxman's behalf, alleging a violation under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The Clinton Justice Department won this case in 1993, but when Piscataway appealed the ruling, the Clinton administration changed its mind and decided that Title VII actually didn't forbid what the school board had done. The appeals court rejected this new argument and held for Taxman.

Title VII explicitly makes the "discharge" of "any individual . . . because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin" plainly illegal, no ifs, ands, or buts. What's more, in 1972, when Congress amended Title VII to extend its reach to public employers like Piscataway, it was acting to enforce the Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment. And a long line of Supreme Court decisions makes it unmistakably clear that the Fourteenth Amendment prohibits all non-remedial, government-administered race and gender preferences. Including those ostensibly designed to further "diversity," Piscataway's only excuse. A law intended to support the Constitution cannot, of course, provide a license for action that violates the Constitution.

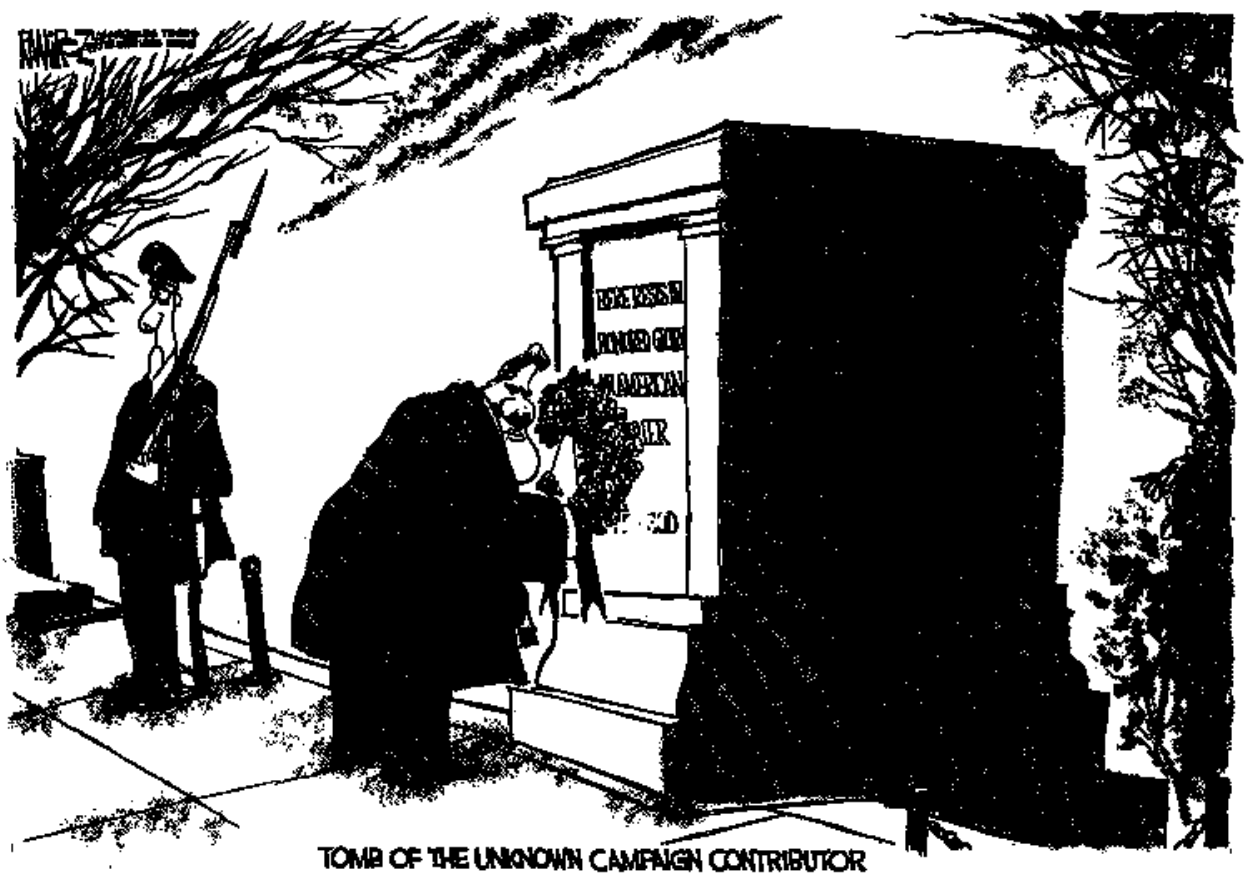
But Piscataway stubbornly appealed again, this

time to the Supreme Court. And the Clinton administration and its pro-preference allies soon began to lose confidence in their position. They correctly perceived a very real risk that the high court would endorse the circuit court's uncomplicated decision. They worried, too, that the Supreme Court might say out loud what seems logically inescapable: that the language of Title VII, if it bans non-remedial preferences by public officials in Piscataway, New Jersey, must likewise ban such practices in the private sector. Affirmative action's legal jig would finally be up, in other words, in every American workplace; nearly all existing preferences are non-remedial.

So the president's lawyers flip-flopped one more time and urged the high court *not* to accept the *Piscataway* case. You don't need to, they said; the "atypical" Taxman layoff *was* a violation of Title VII, after all. The lower court ruling should remain undisturbed. And if the Supreme Court is nevertheless intent on a broader review of employment preferences, the government's final "friend of the court" brief suggested, the justices should at least wait for a case whose facts are "more representative of the kind of actions taken by state and local governments and by private employers nationwide."

The justices ignored this entreaty and put *Piscataway* on the docket. Had it stayed on the docket, Clinton solicitor general Seth Waxman would have stood before the Supreme Court in January to defend the following, incoherent proposition: Sharon Taxman was the victim of an illegal act, because the school board's "simple desire to promote diversity for its own sake . . . is not a permissible basis for taking race into account." At the same time, however, "a school district can have a compelling interest in obtaining the educational benefits of a racially diverse faculty," in which case current law "erects no additional barrier" to race-conscious hiring and firing. Whatever that means. Because civil rights groups have come up with the boodle necessary to settle the *Piscataway* suit, the solicitor general will now be spared the embarrassment of contradicting himself this way.

Next time, though, he will have an even more difficult job. Because in the process of purchasing preferences a temporary reprieve, the friends of race-consciousness have done their treasured idea some serious damage. They have flatly and irreversibly repudiated what has been, for twenty years, their own favorite propaganda for affirmative action. Remember? It was always just a "right-wing distortion" that



Michael Ramirez

race and gender preferences involved the selection or promotion of less qualified people. In the "real world," allegedly, affirmative action was just an eensie-weensie "plus factor," a nearly invisible "tiebreaker" to be used in employment or admissions decisions about individuals with otherwise identical qualifications. All things being equal, the minority candidate gets the nod. What could possibly be objectionable about that?

Well. All things were equal between Debra Williams and Sharon Taxman. And one of them got fired for her skin color. What's objectionable about that, it turns out, is just about everything—from every moral, legal, and political perspective. And no one is any longer willing to defend it, this once-beloved eensie-weensie plus factor. What happened to Taxman, Kweisi Mfume of the NAACP now admits, "was wrong." And in the future, he promises, the civil rights movement is "never going to stand beside something like that."

No, from now on the pro-preference crowd will be forced instead to stand beside something even uglier and less legally tenable. When some poor slob is rejected at the college of his choice, because the admissions office preferred the pigment of another fellow with dramatically lower grades and test scores, they will stand beside the admissions office. *This*, in fact, is the much more common reality of affirmative action—a system in which preferences are not a mere "tiebreaker" but the entire ball of wax.

The losers in this grotesque game will continue to sue. There will be other Sharon Taxmans. And one of them will eventually, conclusively, succeed. Unless the gatekeepers of race- and gender-consciousness somehow manage to buy them all off.

—David Tell, for the Editors

Campaign '98: A Forecast

by Fred Barnes

In 1993, Republicans won governor's races in New Jersey and Virginia and mayor's contests in Los Angeles and New York City, capturing seats (except in New Jersey) controlled by Democrats for more than a decade. In 1997, they held on to all four of those seats. Back in 1993, Republicans retained two GOP House seats in special elections and won another in a Democratic district in Wisconsin. This year, Republicans took a historically Democratic House district in New Mexico and, in an election blowout, kept a GOP seat in New York. Okay, here's the possible connection between 1993 and 1997. We now know the 1993 victories foreshadowed the GOP landslide in 1994. Doesn't it follow that Republican successes this year must be the harbinger of 1994-sized GOP gains in the House and Senate in 1998?

Sorry, but no. Republicans are not on the verge of a repeat of 1994 (52 House seats, 8 in the Senate). But they may get the next best thing: moderate pickups of 15 or more in the House and as many as three in the Senate (plus a governorship or two). This is nothing to sneer at. It's less than normal for the sixth year of a presidency of the other party. But there's a reason for this: Sixth-year gains consist partly of recapturing House seats that were lost in a presidential landslide two years before. However, as President Clinton coasted to reelection in 1996, Democrats added only two seats in the House (and lost one in the Senate). So any serious Republican gains will have to be carved out of Democratic territory.

As recently as six weeks ago, few Republicans aside from House speaker Newt Gingrich and representative John Linder, chairman of the GOP congressional campaign committee, believed even moderate pickups were possible. Clinton was enormously popular (and still is). The performance of GOP leaders in Congress had disappointed many Republicans. Democrats were talking up their chances of retaking the House (now 228-205) and making enough gains in the Senate (55-45) to set the stage for capturing it in 2000. With the economy booming, most political analysts were predicting a bland, pro-incumbent 1998 election. Republicans might win or lose a handful of seats. But either way, they'd keep control of the House and Senate.

The conventional wisdom hasn't changed, but the political environment has. After trailing Democrats by as many as 10 points in polls of voter intentions in next year's congressional races, Republicans are now roughly at parity with them. The NBC/*Wall Street Journal* survey in October gave Republicans a 40 percent to 39 percent edge. Add to that the continuing GOP undertow in American politics, freshly confirmed by the elections last month. Assessing the political climate in an open letter to Clinton in *The Hill*, former Clinton adviser Dick Morris predicted 1998 will be "a disaster" for Clinton and the Democrats. Noting the sixth-year pall over presidents, Morris told Clinton: "The way things are going, you'll be no exception."

What causes sixth-year distress? It occurs chiefly because the president and his aides run out of energy and ideas. Clinton, while still vigorous, is frantic to craft an appealing agenda for 1998. He's been using fund-raising speeches to test new themes, but hasn't come up with much. His aides have leaked a variety of new programs, none of them grabbers. In the end, he'll probably be stuck with proposing a tax cut far less sweeping than what Republicans will be promoting, along with spending increases on health care, education, and the environment, kept to a minimum by the mandate for a balanced budget. In other words, a tame agenda.

Morris argues Clinton's loss on fast-track trade authority and cave-in to Republicans on curbing the Internal Revenue Service are "symptomatic of the onset of the sixth-year doldrums." And things are likely to get worse when the first team of White House advisers departs (George Stephanopoulos, Harold Ickes, and Leon Panetta are long gone) and second-stringers take over. Republicans look forward eagerly to the day press secretary Mike McCurry leaves. "I think McCurry has done more to hurt Republicans than any person working for Clinton," says a Republican strategist. "The women just believe him." A half-dozen top aides may be gone by early 1998. The new team is bound to make rookie mistakes or act too cautiously to keep the political focus on Clinton. "The process tends to make the president irrelevant," says a Clinton adviser. The press corps and politicians grow increasingly interested in who the next president will be, not what the current lame-duck one is doing.

Already the issue mix has shifted to the GOP's advantage. Senate hearings on IRS abuses and successful use of the tax issue in 1997 races have revived tax cuts as the prime Republican talking point. "Republicans have always done well on taxes," concedes a Democratic consultant. Republicans have also learned from Clinton they can't slough off education as a national concern anymore. In winning the governorship of Virginia, Republican Jim Gilmore invoked this slogan: "Education first, then cut taxes." More than his promised elimination of the state car tax, this appeal swung moderate Northern Virginia to Gilmore. Now, House Republicans are drafting a full-blown education program including mandatory transfer of 90 percent of federal education spending to local school districts. If Republicans trumpet a strong plan for education—not just school choice—"they're really going to help themselves," says a Democratic strategist.

For Democrats, the issue shift has linked them to unpopular positions on sensitive social issues. "All the pressure points move them to the left as the public is moving to the right," insists Gingrich. Gay rights? Clinton tied Democrats to the homosexual movement by addressing a dinner of the Human Rights Campaign, the national gay and lesbian group. Affirmative action? To assuage blacks, Clinton has attacked California's Proposition 209, which bars racial and gender preferences. And, far from following Clinton's instruction to initiate a national dialogue on race, the president's race commission has concentrated on heaping fresh blame on whites. Partial-birth abortion? To placate feminists, an important Democratic constituency, Clinton is pledged to veto a ban on it again next year.

Then there's the role of money and organized labor. Here, scandals and congressional inquiries will have an impact. Sen. Fred Thompson's hearings on campaign-finance abuses in 1996 may not have tarred Clinton, but they did dampen fund-raising by the Democratic National Committee. (The party's Senate and House committees haven't been hurt, however.) By nearly everyone's reckoning, Republicans will have more money than the Democrats in 1998, especially in October, when TV spots have the most clout. Paid media in the month before the election aids Republicans more than Democrats, both because the GOP spends more, and because the press, which tilts toward Democrats, has less influence then. The October spike in spending unquestionably helped Republicans this year in Virginia, New Jersey, and New York. And next October, the GOP money advantage may be all the more pronounced. Meanwhile, union spending on behalf of Democrats may be less. House hearings on the AFL-CIO and the Teamsters, along with federal investigations into labor's campaign spending, are bound to detract from the union effort in 1998. Also, if James Hoffa wins the Teamsters' presidency next year (and he's favored), Democrats will suffer. He's vowed to cut Teamster ties to the Democratic party.

John Morgan, the GOP election guru who predicted the 52-seat pickup in 1994 months beforehand, sees yet another favorable sign: the rural and exurban vote. The trends in 1997, he wrote in a November 19 memo to Gingrich, "are highly reminiscent of the 1994 elections in which the Democratic party died in rural America." In Virginia this year, he said, "it made no difference if the rural county was traditionally Democratic or Republican, the GOP prevailed." The same was true in judicial races in Pennsylvania. And in New Jersey, Gov. Christie Whitman "did best" in rural and exurban counties. "Rural America," Morgan said, "detests New York and the Megapolis and does not believe the liberal message coming out of Washington." Morgan recommended going after more rural and exurban House seats "than we are currently

looking at." He provided a list of 43.

There's one person who could cut Democratic losses or produce a Republican landslide, depending. It's Clinton, of course. If he put together an attractive agenda, promoted it heavily, and spent week after week raising money—and if the Clinton scandals petered out—Democrats might break even in 1998. As for Republicans, Linder said he's never taken seriously the idle chatter about another 1994. "I never did see the 40 to 50 seats," he said. "I don't now. That would happen only if the White House collapsed."

True, this could occur if one or more scandals ripened, the economy soured, and Clinton's popularity plummeted. But my advice to Republicans is, Don't hold your breath.

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

WILSON WOOS THE RIGHT

by Matthew Rees

CALIFORNIA GOVERNOR PETE WILSON made a splash at last year's Republican convention in San Diego by noisily agitating for removal of pro-life language from the party's platform. That earned him scorn from anti-abortion groups like the Christian Coalition. But times have changed. When Wilson spoke to the group's California convention on November 8, he was interrupted by applause 30 times and received a standing ovation.

The speech was only the most striking instance of Wilson's effort to win friends among conservatives. With a reputation as a greenish, pro-choice, tax-raising moderate, the governor has an uphill struggle to gain conservative acceptance. He's beginning to make headway, but why would he want to mend fences with many of his ideological opponents when he's approaching the last year of his term and can't run for reelection?

There's a simple answer: Wilson wants to run for president again. "I still have interest in it," he told me at the annual meeting of the Republican Governors Association in Miami in late November. "Interest is not a decision to do it," he says, adding, "I'd love to [be president] if they'd appoint me." Wilson, in other words, isn't salivating at the prospect of jumping into a contest where his moderate credentials would be tested in conservative-dominated primaries. But he understands that he doesn't stand a chance of winning the Republican nomination as long as the right wing continues to distrust him.

Thus the Christian Coalition speech, in which he sounded like a *summa cum laude* graduate of Ralph Reed University. Wilson touched on a number of hot-button issues, including "the shocking twin tragedies of abortion and out-of-wedlock births." He boasted of vetoing a bill to create a state registry of domestic partners (gays strongly supported the bill) and proclaimed that "we are all God's children." The best kind of leader, said Wilson, is "someone with Joseph's political skills, Solomon's wisdom, and Job's endurance and faith. Seven years into this office, I now realize that the quest for leadership doesn't end with the Book of Job, . . . it begins with the last book in the New Testament, the book of Revelation." Sara DiVito Hardman, the Christian Coalition's California chairman, came away impressed. "The governor has been agreeing with us on more and more issues. There's been a gradual trend toward conservatism."

Wilson's outreach extends well beyond social conservatives. He is honorary chairman of a statewide "paycheck protection" initiative being voted on next year that would give union members the option of stopping their dues from being used in political campaigns. "Whether you're going to spend money, or how you spend money, on politics ought to be your decision as a union member and not the decision of union bosses," says Wilson, who persuaded Republican governors to pass a resolution endorsing the measure at their recent meeting.

Wilson is also expected to endorse a statewide initiative to phase out bilingual education, which he says "does a terrible disservice to the people whom it is supposed to help." And Wilson supports the Republican campaign to have Congress buy Ronald Reagan's southern California ranch and to rename Washington's National Airport "Ronald Reagan Airport."

Wilson has greatly improved his relations with the conservative Republicans who dominate the California legislature. They've liked the governor's vocal support for issues like Proposition 187, which ended state benefits for illegal immigrants, and Proposition 209, which outlawed state-sponsored race and sex preferences. After sparring with conservatives in his first years in office, the governor is now more likely to tangle with liberals. He's helped defund the state bar association, overhauled workers' compensation, pushed school reforms opposed by the education lob-

by, and tightened up the criminal justice system by passing a three-strikes law and increasing penalties for people who use guns when committing crimes. Enjoying a budget surplus, he also passed a $1 billion tax cut a few months ago, California's largest tax cut in 50 years.

These achievements notwithstanding, many Republican legislators remain skeptical. They criticized Wilson's recent children's-health package, claiming it enshrined Hillary Clinton-style ideas in law. And they say only pressure from conservatives forced him to embrace the tax cut and scrap a plan to spend the extra revenue. Wilson's GOP critics also note that his appointees to the state Republican party's central committee have been moderates.

Much of the wariness of Wilson stems from the 1991 budget battle. Shortly after being elected governor in 1990, Wilson found that he faced a $14 billion revenue shortfall, equivalent to one-third of the state's budget. He resisted calls from the GOP not to raise taxes, settling on a plan that included $7 billion in spending cuts and $7 billion in tax hikes. Republicans went berserk, and Wilson was forced to work primarily with Democrats to pass the budget. It didn't help matters that early in the negotiations with Republicans, he dismissed the tax foes as "f—g irrelevant," prompting them and their allies to start wearing buttons identifying themselves as "FI."

Skepticism also stems from Wilson's stance on gay rights. He campaigned for gay votes in 1990 and signaled he would sign a bill extending anti-discrimination protections to homosexuals. Under great pressure from conservatives, he vetoed the bill, but first he denounced "the tiny minority of mean-spirited, gay-bashing bigots." When presented with a watered-down bill the next year, he signed it.

But more recently he's vetoed legislation extending many of the same benefits to domestic partners that are given to spouses, and a few weeks ago he went to great lengths to stop the University of California from extending health benefits to the same-sex partners of its employees. Few could have predicted Wilson's involvement in these issues, but he says the logic is simple:

"It is, to put it charitably, naive if not utterly irresponsible to assume that if the state treats unmarried domestic partners in the same fashion that it treats those who are married that it does not devalue marriage, and that is a very serious mistake."

One area where there's been no discernible policy shift is abortion. Wilson has always been pro-choice, and as governor he's done nothing to restrict access to abortion, has resisted efforts to curtail its coverage by the state health-care agency, and has elevated a supporter of abortion rights to be chief justice of the state supreme court. But he's reached out rhetorically to pro-lifers, as Steve Forbes has done. Says Wilson, "If you want to reduce the number of abortions in America, the way you can do it is not by wishing for an amendment to the Constitution. . . . To make a difference we really have to change the culture."

But unlike Forbes, Wilson fumbles when asked about partial-birth abortion. He told me he hadn't taken a position on the congressional legislation, though he probably would have supported the proposed ban—the procedure was "right at the door of infanticide"—yet it was important to be concerned with "the health of the mother."

Because of his stance on abortion and a few other issues, Wilson has never been a conservative pin-up. But he rejects the notion that he's lacked support from the right. "In all my prior statewide campaigns," says Wilson, "the base has always been the people who identify themselves as conservative Republicans." That's partly true. During his eight years in the U.S. Senate, his average score from the American Conservative Union was 75 percent, putting him to the left of Phil Gramm and to the right of Arlen Specter. He consistently supported the Reagan administration on foreign and defense policy, while breaking with the Gipper on many social issues.

Republicans of all stripes urged Wilson to run for governor after George Deukmejian announced he wouldn't seek reelection in 1990, but conservatives' chief concern was a desire to put forward an electable candidate who as governor could influence an important reapportionment. After all the turmoil of Wilson's first term, a wealthy libertarian Republican with no political experience, Ron Unz, won 34 percent of the vote in the 1994 GOP primary by exploiting disenchantment with the tax hike. And conservatives with long memories still bring up what they say are Wilson's two greatest heresies: his support for Gerald Ford over Reagan in the 1976 presidential primary and his opposition to the anti-tax Proposition 13 two years later.

So while doubts remain about whether Wilson is really a conservative, it's clear that if he runs for president in 2000 he'll wage a smarter campaign than two years ago. He has a formidable fund-raising machine and presumably has learned from his mistakes. Shortly before his death, Richard Nixon predicted Wilson would win the 1996 GOP presidential nomination. We'll see whether that prediction was plain wrong or just four years premature.

Matthew Rees is a staff writer for THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

Education as a National Issue

Not All Politics Is Local

By David Brooks

It was the kind of statement you have to read a second time to make sure you got it right. Buried on page B-5 of the November 17 *Washington Post* was this morsel from Newt Gingrich: "There was a long period when Republicans thought education was a local issue and didn't realize it was a national issue."

A solitary sentence like that makes just a little ping when it hits the ground, but don't underestimate its significance. The Republicans have been tremendously frustrated by their inability to make hay on education and are casting about for a different approach. Some are looking at the example set by Virginia governor-elect James Gilmore, who essentially erased the gender gap by promising to pay for more teachers. But others are considering a more radical change. They are thinking of moving beyond the old Republican idea that there should be no federal role in education. The party started winning presidential elections in 1968 when it took the crime issue national (while the Democrats pleaded it was a local issue). Some Republicans may finally be realizing that presidential victories in the future depend on doing the same thing with education.

It's obvious enough that the slash-and-decentralize approach that Republicans have recently relied on has been a failure. When they took over Congress in 1995, they succumbed to temptation and declared war on the nearest bureaucracy, the Department of Education. But their effort to close the department failed, and many voters decided the GOP's education policy was negative, crude, and cheap. As Republican National Committee chairman Haley Barbour told his troops in 1996, women voters in particular came to believe that Republicans don't care about quality education for other people's kids. Ever since that debacle, congressional Republicans have bent over backwards to show they do care. In the current budget, a Republican Congress is bestowing big spending boosts on all the worst programs of the last thirty years.

David Brooks is a senior editor of The Weekly Standard.

Republicans no longer challenge the education establishment head on; they merely hope to reduce its influence around the edges through small voucher programs and tax breaks. Moreover, handcuffed by local-control orthodoxy, Republicans sometimes sound like wonks at a Federalist Society conference when they speak on the subject. Parents want to talk about curriculum, Republicans talk about devolution. Parents want to talk about values, Republicans talk about vouchers. Meanwhile, the Democrats charge ahead as the champions of school reform. Clinton campaigns for high standards, touting a version of the national-test idea that was first proposed by the Bush administration. He crusades for charter schools, a concept propagated by conservative think tanks. The Democrats didn't have to fight Republicans for ownership of these issues. On education, the Republicans simply abandoned the national field.

If Republicans are to reverse this sorry record, they'll have to face the implications of Gingrich's statement. They must accept the fact that the education debate has become a national one, whether Republicans like it or not, and that the problems have to be addressed with vigorous national policies. Maybe in an ideal world education policy would be local. But in recent decades, the education establishment has nationalized it. The big teachers' unions, the administrators' unions, the schools of education, the networks of bureaucrats, and the textbook companies have come together to exert a pervasive influence that makes a mockery of local control. No charter school or lone district can realistically hope to set its own, say, history curriculum if the entire apparatus of the education establishment favors social-science mush—if all the teachers themselves were nourished on soft-core sociology, and the textbooks recycle it, and the conference circuit promotes it. To challenge the education establishment, you have to take it on at the center.

That means not settling for a policy that merely seeks to contain the education establishment. To fight the establishment only at the margins is like fighting

the Cold War only by funding the Afghan rebels—without an Evil Empire speech to deny the legitimacy of the regime and without a military build-up or SDI to threaten the essential viability of the nomenklatura.

The alternative to containment is, of course, rollback. There are two avenues for pursuing that, perestroika and glasnost. Perestroika means restructuring the education bureaucracy. Glasnost means toppling the ideological hegemony of the old regime. There are national policies that can contribute to each.

A handy way to begin restructuring the bureaucracy is the expansion of charter schools. The early evidence suggests that these tax-supported independent schools, run by their own boards within the public system, raise student achievement. Moreover, if the country is going to shift eventually to a voucher system, it will first have to pass through a charter phase, so that when choice prevails there will be a variety of independent schools to choose from. Charters can prove to the public that alternatives exist to a centralized system and so lay the intellectual groundwork for vouchers.

But 68 percent of charter-school operators say the lack of start-up funds is a barrier to the creation of more such schools. It costs about $1.5 million to start a school—to lease space, buy equipment and furniture, and lay in initial supplies. In some cases private industries—like developers hoping to make their real estate more attractive—step in and supply the capital. But in the current climate there won't be enough private capital to turbocharge the charter movement, and the states are providing little help. The Clinton administration has sensibly set up a federal program, which it hopes to expand to $100 million in 1998, to offer startup grants to charter schools.

This is essentially a Homestead Act for charters. It provides capital for education entrepreneurs who are willing to work hard and build new institutions. In the 19th century, the Republican party set aside just such startup capital for the pioneers when it decided that settling the West was an urgent national priority. Now the Republican party should see breaking up the education monopoly as equally urgent. But either from failure of imagination or from self-destructive anti-government dogmatism, the party refuses to assist the independent-school pioneers. Even the expanded Clinton plan would provide only about $85,000 per school. Republicans should be thinking bigger and spending much more. This is a historic opportunity to undermine the centralized bureaucracies that control the schools.

Some conservatives blanch at using the federal purse aggressively, even dictating policy preferences to the states. But conservatives should see that assisting the formation of charter schools isn't meddling in school management. It's using national power to curb district, state, and federal meddling in school management. Bureaucrats already impose myriad rules prescribing how and what schools teach. Strong charter laws of the sort that national Homestead legislation would favor liberate schools from many of those rules. In this regard, Republicans should take a page from Margaret Thatcher, who knew that when you confront a sclerotic centralized system, you have to use national power to break up old arrangements and so liberate individuals and families.

REPUBLICANS SHOULD TAKE A PAGE FROM MARGARET THATCHER, WHO KNEW THAT YOU HAVE TO CONFRONT BUREAUCRACIES WITH NATIONAL POWER.

The second national task is glasnost, destroying the education establishment's near-monopoly control of the curriculum. There's no need to be shy about what this means: It means ousting the multicultural pablum that is popular in the education schools and replacing it with a rigorous curriculum that teaches American history, American values, and American culture first. This does not mean hiding the country's blemishes or pretending the United States is only an Anglo-Saxon emanation from Europe. But there is a crying need to confront the prevailing ethos in schools, which has students hopping from one ethnic experience to another without learning much about any of them while absorbing lots of vague self-congratulation about openness and diversity. Real reform means insisting that the education debate be not only a quarrel about funding streams and bureaucratic structures but, centrally, a values debate between multiculturalism and Americanization.

The two handiest mechanisms for cutting through the culture of low expectations and reestablishing civilian control of the schools are standards and testing. The procedure here is to set up independent boards to oversee the development of voluntary national curriculum standards and tests. We already have such a board when it comes to testing, the National Assessment Governing Board, which oversees a set of tests called NAEP. But the education establishment, in league with conservatives who oppose anything national, has barred the effective use

of its test results. These results are released only state by state, so that parents cannot find out how their particular schools and children are doing.

The purpose of setting up such boards, or expanding the functions of the board we have, is to broaden the pool of people who set basic expectations for the country's schools. At the moment, members of the education establishment—that is to say, progressives—have almost total control over school curricula. An independent board appointed by both parties and insulated from daily politics would allow our conservative elites and moderate elites to help shape education goals. The resulting curricula would better represent the views of the nation. Effective national tests, meanwhile, if their results were fully public, would enable parents under a school-choice regime to make informed decisions when shopping for schools.

Many conservatives object to national boards on the grounds that state governments make wiser decisions than anybody located in Washington. This hallowed assumption is not borne out by the facts. Our current national tests are more rigorous than those of any state except Delaware, New Hampshire, and Kentucky. They expose the low expectations underlying many state tests and the false comfort held out by students' scores. As Bush education official Diane Ravitch points out, 80 percent of Louisiana students passed the latest seventh-grade state test in math but only 10 percent met the expectations of the national NAEP tests. In Wisconsin, 88 percent of students met the state reading standard, but only 35 percent satisfied NAEP. Results like these are replicated in state after state. The NAEP tests demonstrate that high expectations can best be upheld at the national level.

Anybody who has romantic notions about state curricula should read a new report from the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. Sandra Stotsky of Harvard and Boston University surveyed English standards in 28 states. Her work is nuanced and scholarly, and she found some states with relatively high standards—Arizona, Virginia, Massachusetts, and Illinois. But overall her study makes depressing reading. Most of the standards are faddish, jargon ridden, and predictably ideological. We learn, for example, that on the title page of its standards, Kansas no longer calls the subject "English" so as not to give ethnocentric preference to any single language or tradition. English teachers are "communications arts teachers." Many states seem more intent on giving kids a dumbed-down course in advanced linguistics (words are signifiers without fixed meanings) than on introducing them to the fundamental works of American literature.

Obviously, national standards and tests can go astray. If you've watched the leading education experts from the Reagan and Bush administrations over the past year, you've seen them engaged in a tortuous dance. They support national tests and standards in principle, but they find themselves walking away from national efforts coopted and perverted by the forces of the status quo. They know that it is worse to have bad national tests and standards than to have none at all.

But that is no reason to give up and conclude that the struggle should not be waged in the national arena. On the contrary, the national arena is the best place for reformers. The education establishment is a huge and

tireless network that is most successful when it operates below the media's radar. Conservative reformers can hope to win education battles only if they can attract the attention of people without any professional interest in education policy. Conservatives can do this in Washington, where they have built a think-tank and media network far more sophisticated than they enjoy in most state capitals.

A few years ago, former head of the National Endowment for the Humanities Lynne Cheney started a furor when she described the awful national history standards then being devised by Gary Nash and other history professors under the abortive Bush-administration push for standards. Her op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* was picked up in the conservative media and led to a resolution in the Senate that effectively quashed those standards. One might see that episode as proof that national-standard setting is hopeless. Or one might notice that mainstream Americans were able to block bad standards—which, at the state level, might very well have sailed through. The Fordham Institute report makes clear that similar standards have been adopted in state after state.

In 1995, Republicans took over as the majority party in Congress insisting that Americans wanted government to leave them alone. But in 1997, the people who are being left most alone by the Republicans are the educrats at the Department of Education and the National Education Association. If Republicans want to break up the public-sector education trust, if they want to replace multicultural faddism with a serious American curriculum, they need limited but energetic national policies. They have to defeat the opposition where it is, not where they would like it to be.

Beyond that, Republicans should acknowledge that it's not good enough for a few parents to create high-quality havens for their kids by home schooling or finding the right private schools. It matters how the rest of the nation is taught. It matters whether the nation's workforce is well or poorly educated and whether voters have a grounding in American history. It matters whether the children of the nation's immigrants speak English and are inculcated with American values. A nation as heterogeneous as ours suffers if no shared body of knowledge and beliefs is passed from generation to generation through the nation's schools. A national debate about education might remind Republicans of something they seem to have forsaken since Ronald Reagan left office. We are not just atomized actors but are rather American citizens, and our fates and the fates of our children are linked. It would be calamitous if, either in the multicultural fog or in the formless isolation of untrammeled individualism, that sense of nationhood were lost. ♦

How Republicans Helped Clinton and Hurt Schools

By Jeanne Allen and Chester E. Finn Jr.

Whatever the 105th Congress accomplished in other fields, in education it muddied everything it touched. The session ended with a debacle on national testing, confusion on charter schools, and utter failure on school choice. The prospects for reforming American education would be brighter if House and Senate had never gone near the subject.

Granted, any gains would have been hard won on school choice, given Bill Clinton's implacable hostility. The same is true for block grants. But charter schools and testing are another story. Here, Congress created its own messes or made the president's worse. When it took up the fiscal '98 budget, it lavished money on useless and harmful programs, often appropriating more than the administration sought. Education for the disabled, for example—a misguided and out-of-control program that even teachers say is a dead end for most kids who fall into it—wound up with its biggest budget increase ever.

It's now abundantly clear that, while repairing education is at the top of the public's agenda, the Republicans are no better suited than the Democrats

Jeanne Allen is president of the Center for Education Reform. Chester E. Finn Jr. is John M. Olin fellow at Hudson Institute.

to tackle it in Washington. Every time they try, they make matters worse. In the states, by contrast, many GOP governors (and some Democrats) are forging ahead with important reforms, as are anti-establishment education commissioners in Florida, Arizona, Georgia, and elsewhere.

The conclusion seems obvious: Overhaul the entire federal role in education—a great project, for which neither party or branch of government appears to have the stomach—or put education back where the Tenth Amendment placed it, squarely in the hands of the states and of the people.

National standards, combined with national testing, were once a Republican idea, but this go-around it got started at the White House. As always, it proved hugely controversial. To make matters worse, the administration tried to proceed without congressional assent—and the Education Department bungled the project so spectacularly that even pro-testing conservatives had to wonder whether useful tests could possibly result.

A Republican Congress should have responded by setting the program right. After all, neither of the top priorities of serious reformers—choice for families and accountability for schools—can make headway without solid, standards-based measurements of student and school performance. Such measurements should be gathered for the whole country, in a manner that permits both domestic and international comparisons. Today, these data are lacking.

The Senate tried to clean up the mess and restart the standards-and-testing project under an independent board. But a peculiar coalition—linking Left, Right, and establishment—formed in the House to halt the idea in its tracks. Then some senators got cold feet; others decided the issue was ideal for political grandstanding. The White House, as usual, threatened vetoes, which would have shut down three cabinet agencies. Congressional leaders sought compromise, and Clinton, needing GOP support for "fast track" legislation, agreed to bargain. But no senator joined the negotiations, and the program as finally revised by House opponents and White House supporters is as coherent as a camel designed by a committee.

Two things will now happen. First, Clinton's reading and math tests will continue to be developed, supposedly under the aegis of the National Assessment Governing Board. This is a good group, but negotiators scrapped a Senate plan for giving it the independence and bipartisanship it needs. In reality, the secretary of education—hence the White House—remains in charge. Second, an absurd "study" will be undertaken by the National Academy of Sciences to see whether existing commercial tests can be calibrated to a single standard.

This is a psychometric pipe dream, but even if it weren't, "the Academy" would be the worst possible place to lodge such a project. It will spend many months and many millions. It will assemble committees of "experts" that are exquisitely balanced by race, gender, even age, but that lack any balance in their views. These panels will be packed with ed-school professors and psychologists who never met a test that was good enough to use and who don't want standards-based tests or test-based accountability in the first place. Their ponderous reports will set back efforts to impose accountability on American schools and will make it harder for parents to get usable data on their kids' achievement. Why Republicans in Congress can't see this is beyond our ken.

Charter schools are a promising reform strategy with a semblance of bipartisan support, but they can still be choked by a bearhug from Uncle Sam. Both the executive and legislative branches are doing their part to turn this wonderfully messy, entrepreneurial, grass-roots innovation into a tidy, well-regulated Washington program.

For several years, a modest pot of federal dollars has been available to offset some startup costs of charter schools. It typically yields $50,000 or so per school, not a large sum but welcome if you're trying to lease a building, buy computers and textbooks, and train teachers.

The White House proposed to double this program's budget. Congress, however, sought to ensure that the money would flow only to states with "strong" charter programs. That was a worthy goal—in the past, funds had gone to states with sham programs—but it opened Pandora's box. Half of Congress began tinkering with the charter concept. After much jawboning by friends of this reform strategy who understand why charter schools must be allowed to bubble up freely, the bill's sponsors eased off. Still, the measure that the House passed (the Senate has yet to act) is too prescriptive. It charges the secretary of education with ensuring, for example, that states grant charters on the basis of geographic and curricular "diversity," opening the door for mischief when the department crafts regulations, procedures, and forms. It also sets a troubling precedent: What happens when some future Congress decides to favor state programs that, say, require charter schools to honor teachers-union con-

tracts? Why can't Congress understand that sometimes the best way to protect a fragile reform is to leave it alone?

As for the executive branch, its view of charter schools is even more troubling. The Education Department threw a big conference at a D.C. hotel the other week, attended by hundreds of energized charter people from all over the country. Splendid things were said by education secretary Dick Riley about how much the Clinton administration loves these schools and wants to help them. Yet session after session was run by lawyers and enforcers in Riley's employ who instructed charter-school operators and wannabes on the need for their schools not actually to differ from conventional schools when it comes to special education, bilingual education, and all the rest. The administration, in short, loves charter schools so long as they're just like the schools to which they are alternatives. (The department has also begun to share the federal charter money with the greediest vultures of the school establishment, the "regional education laboratories," ostensibly to advance the charter movement. This would be funny if it weren't outrageous.)

School choice was the big GOP education-reform enchilada this session, but Republicans wound up doing more harm than good. By our count, at least four different school-choice measures were introduced, some with the support of Democrats such as Joe Lieberman and Floyd Flake. All died or were put off until next year. The one that came closest to passing would have created "opportunity scholarships" for 2,000 poor children trapped in the dismal District of Columbia schools. It was cynically sacrificed.

Rather than hold hostage the annual appropriation for the D.C. government, GOP leaders huddled with President Clinton and Senator Kennedy to devise a scheme by which Congress would split off and pass the scholarship program and the president would veto it without inconvenience to anyone. (In the end, the final vote was deferred until next year.) This enables members to claim they passed a school-choice measure and the president to portray himself once again as the defender of public education. But it's all posturing. If members of Congress actually cared about the kids, they would force the issue—maybe by cutting off the salaries of the White House staff. But they care about the kids less than they fear Clinton's skill at branding them as anti-education and anti-government.

As for the other school-choice measures, don't ask. There were press conferences and hearings, sure, but nothing real. In the end, choice was not advanced. No child benefited.

Outside the Beltway, America has a robust school-reform movement that celebrates high standards, freedom, choice, enterprise, and accountability. It is slowly shifting power from education's producers to its consumers. Daffy ideas are being sidetracked. Common-sense alternatives are getting a chance. Defenders of the old order are retreating or at least regrouping. Avatars of change are winning elections.

WHILE STYLING HIMSELF A GREAT REFORMER, PRESIDENT CLINTON HAS LARGELY MAINTAINED THE EDUCATION STATUS QUO.

Why, then, is Washington so ineffectual when it comes to the most urgent item on the country's domestic agenda?

Let's give credit where it's due. President Clinton has largely maintained the education status quo while styling himself a great reformer. (Whatever he actually believes, he operates within constraints that block serious change.) He's done that by co-opting the GOP agenda, speaking deftly and often about education, and branding as "anti-education" everything Republicans try to accomplish in Washington. In reality, his administration is doing great damage to the reform movement (witness the continuing depredations of the Office for Civil Rights). But the president sounds like the head cheerleader for change rather than chief guardian of the establishment's crown jewels.

For their part, the Republicans stutter and mumble and generally seem schizophrenic about education. Their philosophy properly calls for shifting control out of Washington bureaucracies to states, communities, and parents. But the Republicans also have a bad case of "programitis," the illusion that only by manipulating federal programs can they accomplish anything good and rebut the Democrats' charge that they're cheap and uncaring. Worse, they lack courage. They're unwilling to confront Clinton on his administration's follies or the school establishment on its self-interestedness. And they haven't figured out how to explain that America's education problems would be eased if Uncle Sam made fewer decisions and parents and governors made more. (It doesn't help that the chairmen of the relevant committees in both chambers

have been in harness a long time and have developed a Potomacentric view.)

We're not naive devolutionists. States often do a lousy job of setting standards. Parents lack information. Some charter programs are phony. The teachers' unions are even stronger in school-board elections than on Capitol Hill. Real change in education won't flow automatically from decentralization. Like everyone else, local school authorities benefit when someone is watching over their shoulder, auditing their performance, and using the bully pulpit to praise, blame, and exhort.

But what a hash the feds have made of it! They're lax where they should be tough-minded, regulation-crazed where they should let up. They throw money at education problems in the archaic belief that this will produce improvement. They trust the producers more than the consumers and the school establishment more than governors and mayors. They fund myriad programs that have been shown not to work. They waste a ton of money on middlemen and managers. They shackle serious reform initiatives that originate outside the Beltway. They refuse to acknowledge that everyone benefits when education's consumers can vote with their feet as well as their ballots.

Taken as a whole, Congress's attempts to enact national education policies this year were so mired in politics and pandering that the results are either irrelevant or harmful. The president has held the upper hand on this issue since he took office. But he's a prisoner of the public-school establishment and the old statist agenda.

Clinton, of course, remains in Washington, as do his education cadres. But the Congress has finished its session and disbanded. May the legislators stay home a long time, reading and fishing and talking with their constituents. When they return, let them try following three simple principles: Uncle Sam should keep out of virtually all education decisions; federal education money should flow to governors and mayors and parents; and dollars should follow kids to the schools of their choice. That's it. It's actually plenty. It would revolutionize thirty years of federal education policy—and advance real reform.

One challenge would remain: to develop mechanisms for encouraging reform across the country without depending on the federal government. Such reform would be national, yet not federal. In Washington, that's still an oxymoron. But think about it. It's got potential. ♦

The Disgrace Commission

Clinton's Race Initiative Aims Mainly to Prop Up Affirmative Action

By Christopher Caldwell

President Clinton's yearlong initiative on race, launched with much fanfare in his San Diego commencement address last June, hits its midpoint this week. The president and his "race advisory board" are marking it with a trip to Akron, Ohio, for a "town hall" on racial issues. Akron for a few reasons: First, it is rich in those race boards and other bodies that the race initiative is eager to foster. The city has a Coming Together Project that unites 200 race-based organizations, along with an annual "Race Walk," whatever that is. The local paper, the *Beacon-Journal*, ran a Pulitzer-winning series on race in 1994. The president's advisers have admitted, too, that it helped that Akron is so *white*—particularly given suspicions, fired by the immoderate language of some board members, that beating up on whites is the board's raison d'être.

The race commission may be hitting its midpoint, but it hasn't really hit its stride. The board has had only two large public meetings since last summer—one in September in Washington with Bill Clinton himself at the head of the table, one in November in Maryland. Clintonites are concerned that the board has few accomplishments to point to, and this week's Akron event is only one of the steps they are taking to

Christopher Caldwell is senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

raise its profile. In October, White House chief of staff Erskine Bowles called together 60 senior officials from executive-branch agencies to urge that they back the race initiative with public professions of support and policy tie-ins. The race commission is now playing a role in a range of other events, like the presidential initiative on "hate crimes." There are plans for involving it in housing policy. And the president clearly intends to talk it up. Even in the midst of the Saddam Hussein confrontation, he devoted much of his speech at his annual ecumenical prayer breakfast to a discussion of the race initiative.

It's the commission's good fortune to be headed by historian John Hope Franklin, author of the classroom-subsidized bestseller *From Slavery to Freedom*, who is above reproach in two ways. First, growing up in Oklahoma in the '20s and '30s, he was a victim of Jim Crow laws and suffered a range of appalling indignities. Second, at 82, he's in his dotage. This has given him cover to run a fact-finding commission that deplores facts, a "forum for discussion" in which discussion of ideas is routinely quashed with impatience and even irascibility. After an early November meeting in College Park, Maryland, to discuss diversity in higher education, Franklin was asked why—at a moment when affirmative action is under fire from the Supreme Court, and our biggest state has deemed affirmative action an *un*suitable way of promoting campus diversity—no opponents of affirmative action were invited to testify. Franklin took the question as an opportunity to attack Ward Connerly, the leading spokesman for Proposition 209, the California Civil Rights Initiative. "The people whom we did invite," Franklin replied, "had something special to say about how to make universities more diverse than they are. The people in California that advocate Proposition 209, for example, are not addressing the subject of how to make the university more diverse. Consequently I'm not certain what Mr. Connerly, for example, could contribute to this discussion."

A national race commission that leaves completely unrepresented the majority position on such a central issue as affirmative action can hardly be designed to "articulate the president's vision of a just and unified America," to use Franklin's description. What, then, is it for?

The board assembled around Franklin is revelatory. Its executive director is Judith Winston, general counsel for the Department of Education, who earlier this year sought to challenge the University of California regents' elimination of affirmative action on grounds that neutral admission requirements have a "disparate impact" on blacks. Other members include Linda Chavez-Thompson, executive vice president of the AFL-CIO (which backs affirmative action); the liberal Democrat ex-governor of Mississippi William F. Winter; the Rev. Suzan Johnson Cook, a Bronx Baptist who heads something called the Sujay "audiovisual ministry" and represents the "faith community" on the board; and Los Angeles criminal lawyer Angela Oh, who rose to prominence as a spokesperson for the (minuscule) community of Korean liberals in the wake of the 1992 Los Angeles riots.

There are two Republicans on the board: former president and CEO of Nissan USA Robert Thomas; and former New Jersey governor (now Drew University president) Thomas Kean. Robert Thomas remains a defender of Nissan's aggressive "diversity" program. Kean is a Republican so complaisant on race issues that he has practically apologized for his partisan affiliation. Asked in July whether he didn't think his party should be better represented on the board, he warned against consulting the "far Right," but owned that the input of "thoughtful Republicans" would be welcome. But even more important than the uniformity of board members' opinions is the uniformity of their allegiances. Whether black or white, Republican or Democrat, all of them have institutional affiliations that lash them to the racial status quo.

THE BOARD WILL ARGUE FOR ITS IMPORTANCE BASED ON BLACK-WHITE FAILURES, AND DECLARE VICTORY BASED ON IMMIGRANT SUCCESSES.

There is unanimity on virtually everything the race commission discusses—a shocking unanimity, given the rhetoric of "deep divisions" and "vexing problems" that gave rise to the race initiative in the first place. All seven witnesses at the Maryland meeting late last month told the board that affirmative action was necessary. There was unanimity as well that the government should be more vigilant in collecting data on incidents of racial bias.

The only departure from unanimity came with Angela Oh's comment last summer that the board should abandon the black-white paradigm of race conflict. She was promptly upbraided by Franklin, who insisted that the oldest of our racial conflicts has pride of place. But Oh and Franklin agree on a more fundamental point: Whether the race problem is black-white or multi-ethnic, whites are to blame, and affir-

mative action is the solution. Describing the position of Asians (America's wealthiest racial group), Oh fears that they're going to be sacrificed to white aspirations. "We stand," she says, "between the African Americans, who are really at the bottom rung, and the white community, which is at the top rung because they are at the top of the power structure. That's why I hate the term 'model minority.' It really makes me blanch. It translates into being a human shield."

Oh quickly admitted that slavery is "the absolute worst mar on our history as a nation," but her feint towards multiculturalism is in sync with President Clinton's thinking. He opened the September meeting by describing his own memories of segregation in 1950s Little Rock, but then he held up 1990s Fairfax County, Virginia—where the school system has "kids from 182 different countries with over 100 different language groups"—as a model of racial comity. This, of course, is an intentional conflation of two issues: the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow, which is the country's greatest shame; and the country's record of assimilating immigrants, which is its greatest triumph. Already we can discern the template that will shape the race commission's "findings": The commission will argue for its importance based on black-white failures, and declare victory based on immigrant successes.

John Hope Franklin

Kent Lemon

So hunky-dory is the agreement among board members that you'd almost forget that race *is* a problem in America. It's easy to conclude that the race commission isn't accomplishing anything because it's not *meant* to. The real purpose of the president's initiative is to assemble a bipartisan, multiracial coalition to defend affirmative action against a legal, legislative, and plebiscitary onslaught. The most instructive comparison to the race commission would be the Little Rock economic summit that the president staged shortly after his election in 1992. The idea of "finding answers" to economic problems was a pretext for the real business of the conclave: identifying and cultivating academics and businessmen who would agitate for the president's economic programs.

So it is with the race commission. Robert Thomas, the most low-profile of the board members, may be the most important, since he is lining up corporate leaders to "support the goals of the initiative." At the Maryland meeting, Ted Childs, IBM's vice president for global workforce diversity, testified that affirmative action "has served us well." Of course it has! For companies like IBM, the administrative and human-resources bureaucratic overhead required by the affirmative-action state is a huge sunk cost and a formidable barrier to entry for smaller competitors.

President Clinton's race initiative is further evidence of how central the Democrats think affirmative action is to their future as a political party. The Democratic coalition of out groups and have-nots is threatened whenever one of these groups winds up succeeding. It's an article of faith among Democrats that the pro-labor policies of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations produced the prosperity that allowed working men to move to the suburbs and buy their own homes—and, alas, become Republicans.

Like patronage, affirmative action is a prize bestowed by politicians, not by markets. Without affirmative action, large chunks of the Democratic coalition who presume themselves to be its beneficiaries—from the black middle class to professional women to Angela Oh's model minority—could tumble into the same electoral bin as all those suburban white people who care about "values" and chafe against taxes. In other words, to use the president's terminology, they risk being "brought together" into "one nation." It just doesn't happen to be the nation the president has in mind. ♦

Ms. Smith Comes to Washington

Grantsmanship vs. Craftsmanship at Arena Stage

By Andrew Ferguson

The performance artist Anna Deavere Smith is the Walter Cronkite of the nineties, if you see what I mean. Of course, *Walter Cronkite* is the Walter Cronkite of the nineties, as he was of the sixties, seventies, and eighties. But as the great anchorman sails into the sunset, Smith is taking on Cronkite-like dimensions, which is to say she has become a public personage festooned with honors and awards, universally revered, a sage to some and a saint to others but to all right-thinking persons a figure whose every act and pronouncement is beyond criticism. She is, like Cronkite, unassailable, though no one can say why.

Smith is not as famous as Cronkite, needless to say, for she plays to a much smaller audience, in a much smaller venue. Now forty-six years old, she spent the 1980s performing a series of one-woman shows—a "body of work," as she puts it, entitled *On the Road: A Search for American Character*. She splashed into public consciousness in 1991, with a one-woman show, *Fires in the Mirror*, about the race riots in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, and followed it up in 1993 with a one-woman show about the race riots in Los Angeles, *Twilight: Los Angeles*. She has now come to Washington's Arena Stage with her first full-blown theatrical production—a more-than-one-woman show, complete with a troupe of actors, stage sets, intermissions, lots of props, the works.

Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor of The Weekly Standard.

It is fitting that *House Arrest: First Edition* debuted in Washington. For one thing, the play is ostensibly about Washington political culture, specifically the office of the president. For another, Washington is a place where people who perform badly in their previous jobs are often rewarded with advancement, acquiring radio shows (Ollie North, Mary Matalin), lucrative lobbying firms (Robert Packwood), even cabinet posts (Robert McNamara, Warren Christopher, et al.). True to the spirit of the city, Anna Deavere Smith has come to Washington and failed up.

But let Douglas Wager, Arena's artistic director, explain: "Anna Deavere Smith holds a vision as a theater artist, which is to search for our American character through the art and craft of acting, using the language and behavior of our historic and present cultural identity. This play promises to take us thrillingly beyond the habitual practice of our craft towards a new American theater." In other words, *House Arrest: First Edition* is a mess. But the mainstreaming of Anna Deavere Smith has been revealing nonetheless.

Smith's failure in her first large-scale effort will surprise the critics, assuming they acknowledge it. Confronted with her work, they are often seized by a delirious case of blurbitis: "dazzling," "extraordinary," "overpowering." She seems never to have gotten a bad review. "She is a performance artist the way the Hope Diamond is a rock," said the *Washington Post* earlier this year. "She is the ultimate impressionist: She does people's souls," said the *New York Times*. "The most exciting individual in American theatre right now is Anna Deavere Smith," said *Newsweek* after *Twilight* opened. "What she has accomplished is an American masterpiece. . . . This is as close as our culture can come to the impact of Homer."

The difference is that Homer never won a MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant. Smith of course did—only one among many honors certifying her as such. Last year, the Ford Foundation named her its first "artist-in-residence." Her last two plays were nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. She is a tenured professor of drama at Stanford, and has held fellowships at Yale and Harvard. She cannot cross a street in New York City without being nominated for a Tony or an Obie. Her shows are filmed and aired by PBS. Earlier this month, Harvard announced that it was spending an initial grant of $1.5 million to create a dramatic institute around Smith, "a hybrid between an artists colony and a think tank."

As with Cronkite, whose portentous baritone and billowy jowls convinced vast numbers of Americans that he possessed a singular intellectual seriousness, however implausibly, there is a kernel of talent around which the cult of Anna Deavere Smith has been constructed. Her gifts are real enough, but they are for mimicry and journalism. To concoct her shows she tapes interviews with scores of people—scholars, celebrities, ordinary Joes and Janes—and then edits the transcripts into brief monologues. She selects thirty or so

of these to perform, and juxtaposes them to achieve various dramatic or comic effects.

Published in book form, the monologues are laid out in broken lines suggesting a kind of free verse, as though archy and mehitabel had suddenly gone nuts. On stage, however, she shifts characters with apparent ease, from Korean shopkeepers to young crack addicts to Lubavitcher rabbis and suburban matrons. Although she's black, the performer she most resembles is the comic Lily Tomlin, minus (alas) the jokes. On occasion the mimicry is uncannily precise, but more often it is simply a distraction. And while she recites her subjects verbatim, the impressions occasionally manifest that greatest of contemporary horribles, the ethnic stereotype. Her impersonation of Al Sharpton, in *Fires in the Mirror*, sounded like Steppin Fetchit after a night of freebasing. And when she played a Jewish housewife from Brooklyn, she might have been a drag queen doing Barbra Streisand.

Fires and *Twilight* were thus not so much plays as impressionistic documentaries—works of journalism, loosely defined, in which a succession of subjects discussed the question of race in America. You could get the same thing from *Dateline NBC*; you'd have to put up with Stone Phillips, but at least he doesn't do the annoying impersonations. By contrast, *House Arrest* is far more ambitious than the earlier works. It is meant to be a real play, like the kind they do, you know, in regular theaters.

"I always wanted to work with a company of actors," Smith has said. "But the thing is, that takes money." Money is no longer a problem. With the success of her recent shows, corporate America has fallen at her feet, joining the already-seduced nonprofit sector. The list of sponsors for *House Arrest* reads like a cross between the New York Stock Exchange and The Foundation Directory. The production at Arena Stage has been made possible by generous grants from the Pew Charitable Trusts, Philip Morris, the Cummings Foundation, Fannie Mae, the Siemens Corporation, AT&T, the Cafritz Foundation—and many others, including you, in your capacity as taxpayer, through the National Endowment for the Arts. As if that weren't enough, a group of "dedicated individuals," co-chaired by Washington socialites Sally Quinn and Ben Bradlee, even formed The Friends of Anna Deavere Smith to push the production's budget over the $2 million mark. Whatever its failings as theater, *House Arrest* is a triumph of grantsmanship.

THE AUDIENCE HAS TO WONDER WHAT SHE DID WITH THE TWO YEARS SHE SPENT WRITING *HOUSE ARREST.*

A skeptic might see in this establishmentarian largesse a resurgence of the 1970s phenomenon of radical chic. In 1997, however, radicalism isn't chic. Smith is obsessed with race—confronting the "tough issues" so beloved of the nonprofit sector and corporate philanthropists—even as she carefully avoids being "judgmental," which would scare off the checkwriters, not to mention the drama critic at *Newsweek*. So she presents rioters and cops, crack addicts and bystanders as equally sympathetic.

Of course, her evenhandedness is itself a kind of editorializing. In her book version of *Twilight*, for example, she notes that, "depending on your point of view," the riot in Los Angeles could be called a "riot," an "uprising," or a "rebellion." It sure looked like a riot on TV. But she prefers the term "events." Riot, rebellion—who's to know? This pseudo-agnosticism suits perfectly the sensibilities of skittish rich people in the late 1990s, who ache to be socially relevant but don't want some performance artist giving the help any crazy ideas.

In Washington, with a larger budget than any heretofore available to her, Smith hired a small army of researchers, historians, personal assistants, and tape transcribers to assist in her work, along with the more conventional actors and technicians. *House Arrest* has become a small industry, operating out of the Arena Stage and a two-bedroom apartment across the street. She wrote much of the play herself, as playwrights do, but she has also interspersed many of her trademark interviews with the fictional material. In all she has taped more than three hundred and fifty subjects for the new work. Under her coaching, her actors impersonate a Who's Who of federal Washington: the spheroid *New York Times* correspondent R. W. Apple, Labor secretary Alexis Herman, the first lady's former chief of staff Maggie Williams, George Stephanopoulos, James Carville, Mike McCurry, Sam Donaldson, Dee Dee Myers . . . and, for balance, Peggy Noonan, a Republican.

Everyone has gone to a great deal of trouble. And after the play closes in Washington on January 4, they will go to a great deal more, as the *House Arrest* industry decamps to theaters in Los Angeles, Chicago, and Seattle. For the play is a work in progress. "I decided for this project I wanted to have a different relationship to the theater," Smith has said. "I wanted one which would not just be about me and the audience. I wanted to look at what was behind the scenes in the theater and to have a nontraditional relationship with aspects of it."

Whatever that may mean, she is apparently still looking. Smith has been writing *House Arrest* for two years, and as you watch the play you can't help but wonder what she's been doing with all her time. The show runs for three hours, as com-

pared with two hours for *Twilight* and ninety minutes for *Fires*. She gets windier as she grows in public esteem. Something similar happened to Cronkite.

There's little point in dwelling for long on the play itself. *House Arrest* opens with a monologue—again, taped and transcribed and performed verbatim—from a tour guide at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. "If this project is a legitimate search for American character," Smith has said, "then somewhere in my journey I had to come to the so-called 'center.' I had to come to Washington and I had to learn something about the presidency." What she has learned about the presidency is that Jefferson did it with Sally Hemings; the theme recurs like a tape loop. When the guide stops talking, we see Sally on the sales block, baring her teeth and flexing her arms for prospective buyers, and then we see Sally about to be bedded by randy Tom, and then, from nowhere, out pops a woman—a *skinny* woman!—impersonating R.W. Apple as he sips Chablis and chuckles pompously. And so it continues, scene by scene. *House Arrest* is hard to follow.

There is a play within the play; this is the part Smith has conjured from her imagination, and it turns out that as a playwright she has a taste for melodrama. She reaches frequently for aphorism and invariably fails. Several of her fictional characters attend a party at the Jockey Club, a favorite watering hole of the political class. "I bet the only f—g that goes on around here is star-f—g," says one actor. "There's no music here," observes another pensively. "Just the smell of achievement."

The made-up plot involves a theatrical troupe searching for grant money ("Write about what you know," say the drama textbooks). It is forced to hire three prisoners on work release to qualify for a grant, and when the actors venture to Washington, trouble ensues. But by the play's bittersweet close, all the loose ends are neatly resolved, leaving only the questions of what, precisely, *House Arrest* is supposed to be about, and why, more to the point, the vast institutional resources of American do-goodery have been mobilized to support a woman of such modest gifts.

Those questions are impolite in any case. In the arts today—to quote the nightly send-off of an earlier sage—that's the way it is. ♦

FREEING EUROPE

The Cold War Is an Open Book

By Jeffrey Gedmin

It was 1987 when my East German friends got the call. Four years after filing their request to emigrate—years in which he had lost his maintenance job at the university, she had been demoted, and their young son had been teased and humiliated at school—their papers were approved, and they could at last leave the "German Democratic Republic."

Two years later, from their home in West Germany, they watched the Berlin Wall come down and the two Germanys unite. But even now, ten years after their leaving, they will not go back to the East. Stefan has seen his file, three hundred pages from the Communists' secret police, and he knows now too well the extent to which he was betrayed: the teacher, the colleague, the waiter, the church worker, the relative—all working as informers, the little "red lanterns" of the "Stasi," the infamous East German secret police. Some have become new capitalists, while others claim the status of victims themselves. But they're all still there, the collaborators who made the Communist oppression possible.

Jeffrey Gedmin is a research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and executive editor at the New Atlantic Initiative.

George R. Urban
Radio Free Europe and the Pursuit of Democracy
My War Within the Cold War
Yale University Press, 256 pp., $35

This plaint is by no means unique. For the millions like my friends—and, Stefan reminds me, for innumerable others whose suffering was "much, much worse"—no reckoning has yet been made of the crimes committed in the former Soviet bloc. It is against this indefinite deferral of justice that George Urban cries in his new *Radio Free Europe and the Pursuit of Democracy*. "Snooping, spying, and denunciations flourished throughout the empire," he mourns, "yet no post-Communist government, with the partial exception of the Czech, has been pressed hard enough by public opinion to cleanse the state completely of that shameful legacy." A former director of Radio Free Europe—and a man with many reasons, some highly selfless and some highly selfish, for not wanting to let go of the past—Urban has composed in this posthumously published volume what is at once a memoir of his role in the fight against communism and a spirited denunciation of "the predominant inclination . . . to close the books on the Cold War."

With the crimes of communism too well documented now to admit much dispute, *Radio Free Europe* rightly spends little energy attacking the Communists themselves. Urban's

reckoning is rather with the less visible but in some ways equally formidable opponent America and its allies faced during the Cold War: those in the West who sympathized, apologized, temporized, and appeased.

"So much of our time and energy," he writes, was spent "fighting off the mischief of those who seemed, formally at least, to be on our side of the conflict but had in reality come under the spell of the Soviet system." As Urban points out, the principal Cold War battles were often fought over "words, ideas, perceptions." It is a remarkably important but little noticed element in the history of America's foreign policy that in such battles the intellectuals—poets, scholars, journalists, analysts, economists, and historians—assumed the importance of admirals and generals in shaping the lines of attack.

In the momentous debates of these intellectuals, Urban was among the few who saw clearly the evils of communism, and he contributed a great deal to the intellectual campaign to defeat it. His interviews published in the journal *Encounter* are legendary; his skills as a scholar and polemicist are renowned. After serving as a middle-level executive from 1960 to '65 and then as a political consultant, he became director of Radio Free Europe in 1983.

Radio Free Europe was, like Radio Liberty, an international broadcasting network created after World War II to fight the battle of ideas through the airwaves. While Radio Liberty transmitted to the Soviet Union, Radio Free Europe's domain was the rest of the eastern bloc. Both aimed their broadcasts over the Iron Curtain. Both were funded by the American government, although they remained largely outside its control. And both were intended to defend unapologetically liberal democracy and the free-market economy.

Urban's account of Radio Free Europe serves one useful purpose in clearing away misinformation that has long circulated about the network. Detractors have often charged, for instance, that Radio Free Europe fomented the tragic 1956 Hungarian Revolt. But Urban, after examining materials made available only after the fall of communism, concludes that the network neither caused the revolt nor encouraged Hungarian freedom fighters with the promise of Western military assistance.

Urban's tale serves a second useful purpose in reminding us just how controversial anti-communism was in the many circles in which muddleheadedness and moral relativism ran rampant. A founding editor of the academic journal *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Urban was once urged by a department chairman at the University of Southern California to include pro-Communist articles for balance—lest the publication be branded unscholarly and biased. During the Carter administration, a chairman of Radio Free Europe's board (eager to illustrate the network's commitment to fairness) proposed that Urban invite Soviet and East European Communist officials to the studio to judge the accuracy and objectivity of broadcasts.

Urban's scathing criticism is bipartisan. During Reagan's presidency, for instance, a senior official vigorously rejected the idea that Radio Free Europe should report the names of Polish prison guards widely acknowledged by dissident sources to be engaged in violent and sadistic acts against political prisoners. Only when the crimes were a matter of public record, it was reasoned, should such incidents be reported. The difficulty of having such matters made public in a totalitarian society seems not to have occurred to Urban's opponent at the network.

Similarly, Urban relates how, in the name of détente, articles by Vladimir Bukovsky, George Will, Paul Lendvai, John Vinocur, and other distinguished anti-Communists were frequently suppressed by Radio Free Europe because their analyses and prescriptions were thought to promote instability in the East. (Cautionary tags such as "oversimplified," "overwritten," "overdramatized," and "unbalanced" were pinned on offending items in the network's daily recommended list.) Too often, an exasperated Urban argues, "the American bureaucracy shared the Kremlin's platform." Milovan Djilas, for example, was censored when he had the audacity to forecast a ripple effect from the rise of Solidarity and the 1981 crackdown in Poland.

The fact remains, however, that whatever useful purposes Urban performs for us in settling these historical accounts, *Radio Free Europe and the Pursuit of Democracy* contains Urban's attempt to settle his own accounts as well. He missed a job early in his career with the BBC Monitoring Service because he was insufficiently open "to the new facts of life in Eastern Europe." He was frequently, as he puts it, "penalized for speaking the truth before it was opportune to do so." When he retired in frustration in 1986, it was after having been defeated at the network on issues of political vetting and censorship, among other things.

To some extent, this is fair enough. There is no doubt Urban took his lumps, a victim of the time's political correctness. But he does not always observe the difference between setting the record straight for the sake of history and setting the record straight for the sake of triumph over old bureaucratic foes. And a certain heavy-handedness and self-congratulation in the book tests the patience of even the most sympathetic of readers: "I had, apparently," he confides, "a reputation for not suffering Communists, appeasers, and fools gladly."

As a result, Urban comes across at times as acerbic and ungenerous. He praises Margaret Thatcher, for instance, when she agrees with him: On Cold War issues, she had a tremendous "thirst for knowledge" and rare "intellectual curiosity." But he tears at her mercilessly when their views part: On European monetary

union, she was "nationalistic," "anti-European," "narrow-minded," "petulant," and "xenophobic." (Urban had this out in his 1996 *Diplomacy and Disillusion at the Court of Margaret Thatcher*; it is a pity he felt obliged to take additional swipes here.)

At other times, however, Urban can be insightful, affectionate, and admiring. In a chapter about the numerous personalities with whom he worked, he shares engaging vignettes about Djilas, Melvin Lasky, Ignazio Silone, and Alexander Zinoviev, among others. And even in Urban's bitter moments, this work composed before his death last October reminds us that a reckoning has not yet been brought home to those who collaborated with and appeased a demented and murderous system.

Certainly for my East German friends—unable to forget the suffering the Communists caused, unable to bring themselves even to visit a homeland full of unpunished and unrepentant informers—this is a reminder we very much need. The books of justice, in both the East and the West, remain open. ♦

PERFECTION BY LAKE ERIE

George Szell's Strict Musical Creed

By Jay Nordlinger

If American orchestras had a golden age, it was the 1950s, when titanic conductors commanded the podiums: Eugene Ormandy in Philadelphia, Fritz Reiner in Chicago, Charles Munch in Boston, Dimitri Mitropoulos in New York. But the most impressive of them all was the one in the least likely place: Cleveland. George Szell made the orchestra by Lake Erie the envy of the world, and no one has heard anything like it since.

The Cleveland Orchestra, celebrating this year the hundredth anniversary of Szell's birth, has issued a remarkable set of seven compact discs, six of them showing off the conductor in live performance, and the seventh reproducing interviews he gave to various broadcasters. Though the recordings must be ordered directly from the orchestra (the larger musical organizations having figured out how to eliminate the middleman of record stores), they are well worth the effort, for they remind us—if reminding is necessary—that the Szell legend is fully justified.

For Szell (pronounced "Sell" in Hungarian, but "Zell" by most English-speakers), the composer's purpose was sacrosanct. He viewed performers not as creators but as servants—priests, so to speak, at the musical altar. The conductor Robert Shaw, who was an assistant to Szell in Cleveland, notes that when Szell threw one of his frequent fits in rehearsal, "he was distressed, not for himself, but for the composer."

Szell reviled showmanship, artifice—any expression of mere personality. When he conducted, the listener was aware, not of an interpretation, but of the piece alone. The word "style" made him cringe, and he cited with contempt an answer the conductor Thomas Beecham gave when asked why he had changed tempo abruptly in the middle of a Mozart symphony: "Oh, just a whim." As Shaw puts it, Szell stood for "structure over color, clarity over sonority, temporal stability over eccentricity, remote control over balletic ecstasy, and right notes over best wishes."

Szell's own version of his credo was, "Freedom and imagination within the musical law"—administered, of course, "by me." He liked to tell young conductors, "Think with your heart, feel with your head," a neat if slightly enigmatic formulation of music's union of art and science. He was conscious of the criticisms leveled by his detractors (who were relatively few, but insistent) that he was a cold, unbending fanatic. Szell responded that "the borderline is very thin between clarity and coolness, between self-discipline and severity," and that he took care to keep to the safe side of it. But if his conducting—of Mozart, for example—was too dispassionate for some, well, "I cannot pour chocolate sauce over asparagus."

Szell was born in July 1897, three months after Brahms died. In a field cluttered with child prodigies, he was extraordinary. He left his native Budapest to study in Vienna, where at age eleven he performed a piano concerto of his own composition with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. When he took his pieces to London that same year, the *Daily Mail* proclaimed him "the new Mozart" (about which Szell later remarked, with wholly uncharacteristic modesty, "Newspapers do make mistakes"). He was a superb pianist as a child, and he would remain one for the rest of his life. While other powerful conductors played the piano in public simply because they could have their way, Szell was the real thing. He thought nothing of shoving acclaimed pianists from the bench during concerto rehearsals, to show them how it was done. They took it, too.

Of his decision to turn to conducting, he would explain (now, this is characteristic), "When I was twelve or thirteen, the three greatest living pianists got together and decided to

Jay Nordlinger, associate editor and music critic of THE WEEKLY STANDARD, *last wrote about Johannes Brahms.*

pay me a lifelong retainer in exchange for my promise not to continue as a pianist." In truth, Szell discovered that the orchestra was the only instrument capable of fulfilling him. He eventually came under the tutelage of Richard Strauss in Berlin. The old master took a shine to the fiercely dedicated young man, remarking in 1916, while listening to Szell handle his *Don Juan*, "I can go ahead and die if this is what the new generation will do."

For the next three decades, Szell made his march through the opera houses, learning reams of music, honing his craft, and earning a reputation as the prickliest man in the business. His standards were fearsomely exacting, and he was famous for walking out on projects—rehearsal time was always insufficient, singers and instrumentalists were offensively lazy, administrators and producers were too thick-headed to grasp what he wanted from them. When Szell stalked out of the Metropolitan Opera in a huff, an aide to the general manager, Rudolf Bing, sighed, "That George Szell—he's his own worst enemy." Answered Bing, "Not while I'm alive."

In 1946, the Cleveland Orchestra undertook to lure Szell to Ohio. He had already made a name for himself in the United States, mainly because Arturo Toscanini, recognizing a kindred spirit, had showcased him with the NBC Symphony Orchestra. Szell was uncompromising with the Cleveland board: He did not need the job, and if the orchestra wanted him, it would have to accept his terms, which included total artistic control.

The orchestra agreed. Szell's aim, as he often said, was to combine "the best qualities of European orchestras with the best qualities of American orchestras"—in other words, the "spontaneity, warmth, flexibility, and tradition-consciousness" of Europe with the "virtuosity, brilliance, impeccable intonation, and smoothness of execution" of America. The recorded legacy leaves no doubt: He achieved what he had imagined. Toscanini used to complain to his own orchestra, "Ah, you spoil my dreams!" The Cleveland Orchestra realized Szell's.

The hundredth-anniversary set begins with excerpts from Wagner, recorded live in 1956, shortly before the orchestra began to tour and to receive worldwide applause. Szell permits no melodrama or emotional indulgence in his Wagner. He dispels some of the Romantic fog that can beshroud that composer, giving the music a Beethovenian punch. Every entrance is clean, every note accorded its proper value. The players all hear one another, as in a much smaller group.

George Szell

Kevin Chadwick

The second disc in the series is a surprising one—it contains twentieth-century music, which Szell was thought, inaccurately, to disdain. (He did, however, declare, "I do not believe in the mass grave of an all-contemporary concert.") Szell makes a compelling argument for Samuel Barber's *Music for a Scene from Shelley*, and he gives the other new music as well the benefit of his customary preparation and enthusiasm. Particularly effective is the violin concerto of William Walton, who was one of Szell's favorite modern composers. (The soloist is Zino Francescatti, a player in the Szell mold.)

Szell was quick to point out that, despite everything, he was no "dogmatist," and the Schubert F-major octet is presented here in unusual form, with an expansion of strings. Szell could be generous toward his principal players: The French hornist Myron Bloom and the clarinetist Robert Marcellus, who shine in the Schubert, became international stars during his tenure.

The weightiest, most consequential works performed in the set are Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* and Mahler's Ninth Symphony. Szell never recorded the *Missa* in the studio, so this disc is a welcome complement to his much-admired recordings of Beethoven's symphonies. He manages the piece's sprawling forces—orchestra, chorus, and vocal quartet—with ease. Capturing the spiritual majesty of the work, Szell is appropriately awed by Beethoven, but never intimidated by him.

Szell's approach to Mahler is, typically, straightforward, as he shears the Ninth Symphony of its many complications. He does not allow the concluding *Adagio* to lag, mindful of the arc of the work. (Lesser conductors, luxuriating bathetically, cause it to die.) In a strange way, an especially fine performance of this symphony is difficult to listen to, as Mahler packs it with struggle, nostalgia, and pain. The *pianissimo* that Szell elicits at the end is astonishing—a clear, heartbreaking whisper.

Personally, Szell was no humanitarian; he was a cutting, caustic, and often intolerable man. Most of those around him lived in constant terror. His judgment and tongue were merciless. He unhesitatingly sacked players who failed to meet his expectations, because, as he put it, "What is the purpose of a symphony orchestra? To have the best of music or to give members unchallengeably permanent jobs?" Szell was a notorious know-it-all, of whom one acquaintance observed, "He teaches expert golfers how to play golf, racing drivers how to drive, Parisian couturiers how to make dresses, writers how to

write, and Mrs. Szell how to cook." If he heard his wife whistling around the house, he corrected her emphatically, reasoning, "If she is going to do it, she might as well do it right." So maniacal was his devotion to music that he even lamented that concert audiences no longer hooted and heckled when something was wrong: "It's like looking on when a woman is being murdered down the street without calling the police."

Szell could probably not survive in today's musical world, where conductors no longer function as absolute dictators, and standards, when they are recognized, are sacrificed to assorted expediencies. But it would not occur to him to capitulate. He insisted, he said, on performances "of which I do not have to be ashamed." "Szell was the conscience of our profession," Robert Shaw once claimed, and "it is not the function of a conscience to be comforting." Twenty years after the conductor's death in 1970, a Cleveland official recalled, "The fact that perfection had to be fought for unceasingly was the *sine qua non* of George Szell's existence." And perfection, for him, was not some unattainable ideal—it was his unquestioned obligation every time he raised his baton. ♦

Commentary, The Movie

The Moviegoer's Diary Reveals Cinema's Secret Neoconservative History

By John Podhoretz

Friday, November 7. I am sitting in a movie theater in Reston, Virginia, watching on a screen twenty feet high the most famous person to emerge from the world of the highbrow New York intellectuals. It's true that Saul Bellow played himself in Woody Allen's *Zelig*, and he once got a phone call from an agent who saw his photograph on the jacket of *Dangling Man* in the 1940s and offered him a screen test (an event that later appeared, much disguised, in Bellow's finest work of fiction, *Seize the Day*). But, no, the man on screen is not Saul Bellow, or Philip Roth, or even David Gelernter, the hot intellectual property of 1997. The man on screen is: Al Pacino.

Al Pacino? Yes, it's true: When Al Pacino was eighteen, he worked as an office boy at *Commentary* magazine. (For worried media ethicists I make the obligatory full disclosure: My father was editor of *Commentary* for a long time. I will receive no compensation, either in the form of speaking fees or Hanukkah gelt, for mentioning *Commentary* in this article. Now go jump in the lake.) Thirty-nine years, three *Godfather*s, and one Oscar later, Pacino the office boy is playing Mephistopheles in the new box-office hit *The Devil's Advocate*. And judging by his rip-roaring performance in this rip-roaring melodrama, Pacino is one happy actor.

This is as unexpected a historical development as the fall of the Berlin Wall. Pacino is the last of the great Method actors: the New York stage performers—most prominently, Marlon Brando—who were taught by Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler and took Hollywood by storm in the 1950s. And for all their talent, they've spent the last forty years handing everybody in America a gigantic pain.

Method actors conduct themselves as though acting and torture were basically the same thing. But then, who could blame them? The philosophy of Method acting is nothing short of horrific: Dredge up the most horrible memories of your life, bring them to the surface, and relive them again and again and again. Only this way can your acting be honest, open, naked, raw. No wonder they all seemed so glum. Laurence Olivier, after watching Dustin Hoffman keep himself awake for days in order to look exhausted in the film *Marathon Man*, asked the young American phenom why he didn't just try acting.

Rather like the New York intellectual world, the Method was imported to America from Europe, and the two share more than just the career of Al Pacino. Method actors hate other actors; New York intellectuals hate other intellectuals. Method actors spend years avoiding the stage and screen because their trade is just too painful; New York intellectuals get writer's block. The only difference is that New York intellectuals are grappling with the most fundamental problems of human existence while Method actors are basically exhibitionists who change clothes and accents and makeup to entertain other people.

After the age of thirty-two, Al Pacino had nothing more to prove, really; he was thirty-two when he played Michael Corleone in *The Godfather*, which is, I believe, the greatest of all screen performances. But after spending most of the 1980s in a sour funk, and starring in some really horrible movies (remember *Revolution*?), Pacino seems to have had a revelation liberating him from Method torment: He became an entertainer, which is what actors really are.

Pacino came to life again on the screen at the beginning of this decade playing a comic-strip villain in the otherwise disappointing *Dick Tracy*. He did a glorious turn as the world's

A contributing editor to The Weekly Standard, *John Podhoretz is editor of the* New York Post*'s editorial pages.*

greatest flim-flam salesman in *Glengarry Glen Ross*. But his breakthrough came with the Oscar-winning role of a blind retired colonel on a wild outing in *Scent of a Woman*. This was such a flamboyant performance that it has become fashionable to deride it for its hamminess, but such derision does Pacino an injustice. His work in *Scent of a Woman* is truly great. No one has ever captured highs and lows as Pacino does: All you need to do is watch the way he shows his character's abrupt and painful descent into suicidal depression after an exciting and memorable few days.

Of course, he can take the hamminess too far, as he did in the endless *Heat*, for example, where he played an emotional foulmouth who would suddenly START SCREAMING AT THE TOP OF HIS $@&!*% LUNGS in an apparent effort to BURST YOUR $@&!*% EARDRUMS. But for the most part, it's a pleasure to watch someone as ferociously gifted as Pacino let himself loose. He's limber, amusing, and so exuberant he seems ready to jump off the screen, land in your lap, and give you a big hug. And he's so good an actor that he elevates the people around him.

In *The Devil's Advocate*, Pacino's Devil is named John Milton, and he is much like the Satan in the original Milton's *Paradise Lost*: You just love it when he's around. He has a great office, a really weird apartment, women go wild for him, and he knows many secrets. Pacino is not actually the main character in *The Devil's Advocate*; its protagonist is played by Keanu Reeves. One of the unexpected delights of this sensationally enjoyable movie is that Reeves manages to hold his own against Pacino. Reeves has excelled at playing good-natured and inarticulate boys, in *Parenthood*, for example, and the *Bill and Ted* movies. But he has been hopeless, until now, at speaking two lines straight. Here Reeves plays a smooth-talking defense lawyer who has never lost a case, and he manages to get across his character's intelligence, his arrogance, and his way with words. In an overwrought and immensely fun climactic scene, Reeves goes head to head with Pacino in a debate about the meaning of it all. It is testimony to Pacino's greatness that Reeves can't win by argument, only by action.

Saturday, November 8. From good acting to bad: On the Upper West Side of Manhattan, once the red-hot center of the opposition to the Vietnam war and a place where guns are subject to a hatred only slightly less virulent than Clarence Thomas, I am packed in like a sardine to see the most mindlessly violent war movie ever made. It's called *Starship Troopers*, and it's set off in the future, as the Earth battles bugs from outer space. We spend two hours in the company of a cast of good-looking nobodies who can't even speak a line like "Kill them all!" without sounding as though they're reading off a cue card.

The computer-graphic bugs are frightening and gross, and the movie is as fast-paced as a bullet train, but it's really appalling—casually vicious, worshipful of mindless regimentation, and depersonalized. Stephen Hunter in the *Washington Post* finds all this very alarming; he calls *Starship Troopers* a "post-Nazi epic," with Earth playing the fascist planet.

Hunter's on to something, but not what he thinks. The Upper West Side audience laughs knowingly throughout the movie because it implicitly understands what Hunter doesn't: The Nazi stuff is a postmodern putdown of the 1959 Robert A. Heinlein novel on which the movie is based.

Heinlein was right-wing when right-wing wasn't cool: He took Milton Friedman's admonition that "there's no such thing as a free lunch" and turned it into a socialist dystopia in *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*. Conservative think tanks around the nation are filled with people whose first exposure to libertarian ideas came from an adolescent reading of Heinlein.

Starship Troopers is Heinlein playing a neoconservative: He tells the story of an Earth that takes the benefits of liberty so much for granted that most people are perfectly happy to give up the vote rather than do the turn in the armed forces necessary for full citizenship. The threat in *Starship Troopers* is a literally faceless, mindless, collectivist alien society bent on universal domination because that is what its genes have encoded it to do. And the war against them is dangerous, bloody, and frightening; as high-tech as you can imagine, but as gruesome as the Battle of the Bulge or Hamburger Hill. There is a cost to defending a free society against a collectivist threat.

This is not your average movie fare, and so it should come as no surprise that Hollywood has twisted Heinlein's novel into a mock Nazi pretzel. The director of *Starship Troopers*, Paul Verhoeven, is an intelligent man with all the gifts to be a magnificent filmmaker. Twenty years ago, in his native Holland, he made a great World War II movie called *Soldier of Orange*. But he is also amazingly perverse: His idea of a morality tale isn't *Starship Troopers* but *Showgirls*, his pornographic study of Las Vegas lapdancers. It's clear Verhoeven purposely cast bad actors and purposely added the Nazi frills to show his disapproval of the novel he spent $100 million bringing to the screen.

Friday, November 14. Hollywood's perversities continue: While *Starship Troopers* says that only Nazis fight socialists, a cartoon for children turns out to be the most anti-Communist movie ever made. The cartoon is *Anastasia*, and not since Disney set the Hunchback of Notre Dame to singing in a high tenor about his love for Paris has there been so unpromising a subject for animation.

Anastasia was the young daughter of Czar Nicholas and his wife Alexandra; with her parents and four broth-

ers and sisters, she was brutally killed by the Bolsheviks at Ekaterinberg during the Russian Revolution. Ten years later, a woman claiming to be Anastasia surfaced in Paris; after some confusion (and a movie starring Ingrid Bergman), we now know definitively that it was a hoax.

What could Twentieth Century Fox have been thinking to choose this story as its opening salvo in a battle against Disney's dominance of the cartoon business? Whatever it was, they should continue to think it, because *Anastasia* is wonderful. It's beautiful to look at and well paced by directors Don Bluth and Gary Goldman. It benefits from a witty script, sensational voice work by Meg Ryan, John Cusack, and Kelsey Grammer, and a character named Bartok the Bat (given hilarious voice by Hank Azaria) that may be the single most adorable critter ever to appear in a cartoon. (Second obligatory disclosure: Twentieth Century Fox is owned by News Corporation, which owns THE WEEKLY STANDARD as well as the *New York Post*, my current employer. Now drop dead.)

But even more fascinating than the quality of *Anastasia* may be the fact that its anti-Communist politics rival Alexander Solzhenitsyn's. This is the first piece of popular culture I've seen that challenges the validity of the Russian Revolution itself.

Though it uses the names of real people and has a real-world setting, *Anastasia* begins in a fantasy world of Czarist enchantment: balls, general gaiety, and a happy populace. Then the evil Rasputin comes and casts a magical curse on the Romanov family. His curse stirs up discontent in the Russian people, and they revolt; in the world according to *Anastasia*, the October revolution was solely the result of an evil spell.

Flash forward ten years, and (in one of the many terrific numbers by Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty) "there's a rumor in St. Petersburg" that the princess Anastasia survived the revolution. The populace has long since awakened from Rasputin's spell to find their lives "grim," "bleak," and "depressing." One character spits out the word "comrade" as though it is a curse in itself. If *Anastasia* succeeds, it will mean that at last, eighty years after the civil war that followed the Russian Revolution, the Whites have defeated the Reds in the battle for the hearts and minds of the world's children.

At the end of the movie, Anastasia renounces her title to live as a commoner with her true love, Dimitri. Maybe she should move to America. She can always get Al Pacino's job at *Commentary*. ♦

The Christmas "form letter" is making a comeback.

—News Item

Parody

3 Grosvenor Square, London W1

Yuletide 1997

Dear Intimate Friend (or current resident),

1997 was such a busy year it seems Marcy hardly got back in the door from accepting the 1996 Pulitzer for photojournalism when it was time to write again! It's been a year of many changes; with much regret for the many happy memories, we sold the houses in St. Tropez and Lake Tahoe and found a lovely oceanside cottage in Newport formerly owned by the Sultan of Brunei and Madonna. Harold of course is unbudgeable from the Park Avenue townhouse but Marcy spent most weekends in Lucerne. Harold retired this year (bought himself out) and received a gold-plated 1958 Cadillac Sedan de Ville from Marcy and a lovely marble paperweight from the regional sales managers. Touching, really. He sailed our 74-foot yawl *Patrician* to the villa in St. Kitt for some much-needed "R and R" with his "fishing buddy" Senator Christopher Dodd, pausing only to win the prestigious Montgomery Challenge Cup at the Cinqueports Regatta and to send Dad a "get well soon" card at the nursing home in Duluth.

Daughter Chloe was made senior partner of Ropes & Gray last spring while finishing her dissertation on Velasquez and helping Mom in the garden. She took time from her hang-gliding and glass-blowing (Grand Prize at the Leipziger Festival!) to vacation in Cap d'Antibes and Loch Skegg, where she re-designed the Pratt & Whitney fan-jet engine, wrote her third novel, and "met lots of new friends." In July she was named Archbishop of Canterbury (the first American to receive the honor--congrats, Chloe!) but turned it down in favor of the conductorship of the Vienna Philharmonic. Where DOES she find the time? She conceived a lovely child in October through frozen semen said to be donated by the Duke of York and if the sonogram bears this out and she finishes recording *Parsifal* for Deutsche Grammophon by the end of March she'll go through with the birth, even though it'll mean missing the Masters (she led all amateurs last year) and dropping her yoga.

Jeffrey--I'll always think of him as "Jeff" somehow, even though he is 24 years old--is living with AIDS in the 18ième arrondissement and producing a documentary on Algerian peasants in the time the Embassy spares him. He was infected by a charming Italian rear admiral with salt-and-pepper hair and family estates near San Gimignano that produce a scrumptious vin santo, which took the Medaille d'Or in Bruges for the third time running last summer. Two graduate students (one from Fribourg and one from the Ecole Superieure de Medicine) did their doctoral research on Jeffrey's lower intestine, and the June *Lancet* featured an electron micrograph cross-section of his villi! He flew his own Learjet to Monterey in April to host a party at the beach house and spent a week painting the deck and kitchen and writing the new constitution for Angola. Old friends Barbra Streisand and Caroline of Monaco stopped in to chat and he made new friends with a Brittany spaniel named Puffy.

Marcy was elected president of the American Medical Association, the Rockefeller Foundation, and Santa Barbara Garden Club this year, but as she says it takes most of her talent and energy "just being Mom"! She made new curtains and slip covers for the condo in Vail and her filly Just My Luck was named Thoroughbred of the Year by *Bloodlines* magazine. Between doing consulting for the IMF and serving as chair of the board of trustees of Princeton she fixed tasty meals for Harold and gave a harpsichord recital. One sad note is that our Siamese tom Huang-Tzu of Royal Xanadu II bit our Taiwanese handyman Ho and he had to be put down--Ho, that is.

We hope you all had a comparably fulfilling 1997. There's so much more to tell but, as Harold said, "I doubt many of them can read anyway."

Love you bunches!

Harold & Marcy