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POOR NEW YORK
WILLIAM TUCKER

HORROR IN THE COURT

An investigation of the judges, lawyers, and other experts who went to bat for a murderer

by Tucker Carlson

D.C. Woman Who Killed Daughter Is Awarded Custody of Young Son

By Steve Vogel and Bill Miller
Washington Post Staff Writers

Latrena D. Pixley, a District woman who killed her 6-week-old daughter in 1992 by smothering the child with a blanket, has been awarded legal custody of her young son after prevailing in a bitter court fight in Montgomery County with a woman who wanted to adopt him, according to attorneys involved in the case.

Pixley, 23, has been in and out of jail since pleading guilty in March 1993 to second-degree murder. Now she is to be reunited with her son, who turns 2 next month, within 60 days under a ruling issued last week by Montgomery Country Circuit Court Judge Michael D. Mason.

For most of his life, the boy has been in the care of Laura Blankman, a Montogomery County Police trainee who filed papers to adopt him. The decision to revert custody to a convicted child murderer has sparked surprise and outrage among child advocacy groups, which say the need to protect children has been wrongly sacri-

See PIXLEY, A7, Col. 1

The Washington Post

Democrats with Brains
David Brooks

A Stranger Camus
Christopher Caldwell

the weekly Standard

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Books & Arts

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About Your Place in History . . .

Among the group of conservatives who recently met with Bill Clinton in the White House to discuss the president's "race initiative" was Ward Connerly, who headed the successful 1996 ballot drive known as the California Civil Rights Initiative. Much was made in the press of the friendliness of the meeting—as if reporters had expected the president's critics, foes of racial preferences for the most part, to misbehave in the Oval Office.

Nonetheless, comity does not always mean compromise. And in a gracious thank-you letter to the president last week, Connerly spelled out important differences that deserve airing. Some excerpts:

"I renew my complaint that the efforts of your Advisory Panel on Race are not likely to be productive or widely embraced by the American people because of the lack of balanced perspectives on the Panel. It seems to many of us that the Panel is unanimous in its support of race-based preferences and that the perspective of [panel chairman] John Hope Franklin—that the race problem in America is largely a function of 'white racism'—is the dominant view. That perspective is narrow, inherently flawed, and guaranteed to result in a Final Report which will be readily dismissed by most Americans. . . .

"Closure about race matters can no more be reached in our time without resolving the issue of race-based preferences than the leaders of the 1960s could improve race relations without ending Jim Crow laws and government segregation. Those matters were at the heart of our race problem. Today, it is the issue of preferences—they stand in the way of America becoming 'one nation.' In our personal lives, race relations are improving dramatically. It is in the public policy arena that race is the source of much frustration and anger. You simply must come to terms with that reality. . . .

"Recently, I read the transcript of our meeting. The incongruity of American citizens meeting with the leader of the greatest democracy in the world and trying to convince him and his vice president that all citizens should be treated equally did not escape me. I believe history will not be kind to the fact that you are on record as trying to rationalize your support of racial preferences by comparing them to 'preferences' for athletes. Any serious student of American history will tell you that your position will eventually be overtaken by the realities of a diverse society dedicated at its core to the proposition of equal treatment under the law. The responsible thing to do is to prepare the American people for that day when preferences will either be struck down by the courts or the American people demand an end to them through the political process."

Sell Them Anything

One of the hallmarks of the Clinton administration's foreign policy has been the eagerness with which it allows American companies to export high-technology products that were once restricted for national security reasons. The Commerce Department's top export official, William Reinsch, aptly summarized the new mindset when he boasted to Congress, "Yesterday's adversaries are today's customers."

And how. It's true that most high-tech exports from U.S. companies have gone to allies, but 47 high-performance supercomputers have also been sold to China. The administration acknowledged this for the first time last year, under pressure from congressional Republicans. These computers—some of which are the same as those used in the Pentagon's High Performance Computing Modernization Program—provide the technological capability to help construct an array of new weapons systems, including nuclear weapons.

Reinsch last year defended the Commerce export policy, declaring that "there is a lot you can discover with prelicense checks. There is a lot you can discover just by wandering around a plant to determine the nature of their real business, which they may or may not want to tell you." Presumably so. But under recent questioning from Sen. Thad Cochran of Mississippi, the administration has now acknowledged that no such effort was made to investigate how the computers would be used before they were shipped to China. And having neglected the pre-export investigation, the administration also failed to exercise its right to inspect how the 47 supercomputers are being used. All this is revealed in "The Proliferation Primer," a report released last week by the Republican members of Cochran's subcommittee.

We do know that one supercomputer was illegally diverted to a military facility—that emerged last fall when congressional committees pressed the administration to investigate. But the other computers? Who knows? It's a sorry record of lackadaisical enforcement by the Clinton administration, and Congress should keep the investigative heat turned up.

Scrapbook

Moral Equivalence Watch

The papal trip to Cuba hasn't even begun, Martha Stewart hasn't yet arrived in Havana, and already the *Washington Post* has published a story on John Paul II's trip that for sheer, tone-deaf political fatuousness will be hard to surpass. "Castro and the Pope: Opponents With Shared Values," read the headline, under which ran this unforgettable subhead: "While Differing on Religion, Both Embrace Altruism and Reject Unbridled Capitalism." Castro, we learn "is no dogmatic anti-religionist." Indeed, he has said "it is possible for Christians to be Marxists as well, and to work together with Marxist communists to transform the world."

It's going to be a long week.

What Time Is It?

Shortly before last fall's elections, a Haitian immigrant was brutally beaten by some bad cops in New York City. The Abner Louima case quickly became notorious because four days after the beating it was reported that the cops had taunted Louima as they tortured him with the words, "It's Giuliani time." That, it turns out, was a lie. Louima has now told a grand jury under oath that he heard no such thing. What he apparently meant to say was that it's propaganda time. Mayor Rudy Giuliani's desperate political foes—who seized on the Louima anecdote as proof of Giuliani's dark side—were ignored by voters then and look even more foolish now.

Diversity Doesn't Rule

The Minnesota state board of education has voted 5-3 to kill proposed statewide "diversity rules" that would have cut off funding to school districts that failed to implement an Orwellian scheme dreamed up by educrats in Minneapolis. As reported a couple of months ago on this page, schools would have been required to measure their progress towards a "multicultural, gender fair, and disability aware" Utopia.

The plan, which would have led to rampant politicization of the curriculum in public schools, was six years in the works. It was derailed in just three months, thanks to a bit of old-fashioned muckraking by columnist Katherine Kersten in the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*. To paraphrase Kojak, sometimes it's a good day for the good guys.

Help Wanted

The Weekly Standard has a full-time position available for an entry-level staff assistant. This is an administrative position working with the business and circulation staff. Please send your résumé to: Business Manager, The Weekly Standard, 1150 17th Street, NW, Suite 505, Washington, DC 20036. Or fax us at (202) 293-4901.

Bounty! Attention Green Bay Fans!

The Scrapbook will personally award a one-year, complimentary Weekly Standard subscription to the first reader who sends in a photograph taken in Wisconsin of a certain executive editor wearing embarrassing headgear (see page 6 of this issue for details). Mail to Cheesehead, The Weekly Standard, 1150 17th Street, NW, Suite 505, Washington, DC 20036.

Casual

Cheese in My Super Bowl

Somewhere in Green Bay Packerland, also known as Wisconsin, there's a photo I want suppressed. It captures me in an embarrassing position, not only eating crow, but also looking ridiculous. Packer fans—I was standing before hundreds of them at a Milwaukee hotel—laughed, cheered, and generally enjoyed my humiliation. But, geez, I hadn't done *that* much to rile them. All I did was write that the Dallas Cowboys are America's team, and a conservative team to boot.

But I'll get back to all that later. First, I want to talk about the great conservative event coming up on January 25, the Super Bowl. Real conservatives never miss a Super Bowl. Liberals often spend Super Sunday at the movies or browsing at Borders. They loathe the event, the game, the whole bit. Of course, some sports events are liberal, notably the World Series. It's liberal because baseball is non-violent, fairly boring, and loved by liberals. Football is faster, very violent, and loved by conservatives. So it follows that the ultimate conservative sports event is the Super Bowl.

Now, in addition to conservative and liberal events and sports (boxing is conservative, soccer liberal), there are conservative and liberal teams. This year we're in luck. Both teams, the Packers and the Denver Broncos, are conservative. I don't say this off the top of my head. I've got criteria: home, owner, fans, style of play. Plus, teams get credit if they've got big-time conservatives on the roster (both of these do).

We'll start with home. Green Bay is a small, conservative Wisconsin city. Denver is liberal. It sent Pat Schroeder, Tim Wirth, and Federico Peña to Washington. Advantage Green Bay. The Pack is community-owned. That's not as socialist as it sounds, since the nearly 1,800 people with shares are middle-class and business types. The Broncos are supposedly owned by a rich guy named Pat Bowlen. Actually, two off-shore trusts controlled by his 80-year-old mother own the team. Bowlen once apologized to the fans for wearing a raccoon coat to a game. No conservative would have felt guilty about that. But Bowlen has a redeeming feature: He's a tax rebel. He whipped the IRS in a $1.35 million tax dispute.

I'll stipulate that fans in both towns are conservative. And while the Packers and Broncos have different playing styles, both are conservative. Both have a mean, brutal, and relentless (thus conservative) defense. Green Bay, with Brett Favre at quarterback, is more flamboyant on offense. Favre, a working-class guy from Mississippi, looks to me like a Reagan Democrat. He's wild and woolly, the Billy Tauzin of pro football. John Elway of Denver is a disciplined and always effective quarterback. And he really is a conservative Republican. "As a business owner, I couldn't imagine being anything else," he told Rep. Bob Schaffer, Republican of Colorado. Elway, who owns six car dealerships but zero Super Bowl rings, is the Steve Forbes of pro football.

It shouldn't surprise anyone that Elway wants to get into politics after football. He visited Capitol Hill last year to get a briefing from six Colorado Republicans about life in the elected lane. For the time being, though, Elway is keeping a low political profile. "Democrats buy cars, too," he once said.

Elway is no Mark Chmura. An all-pro tight end for the Packers, Chmura does not hide his two-fisted conservatism. When President Clinton dropped by a Packer practice in September 1996, Chmura stayed away. Later, he said he hoped Bob Dole would be president should the Packers win the 1997 Super Bowl and get an invitation to the White House. When both things happened but Clinton was still president, Chmura skipped the White House ceremony to play in a charity golf tournament. His wife, Lynda, said it wasn't a big political thing. "It's a small political thing," she explained.

Okay, back to my moment of distress. Paul Gigot of the *Wall Street Journal* played a role here. A Green Bay native, he used his column to insist the Packers, not the Cowboys, are America's team, and to zing me. A few months later, with the Packers installed as Super Bowl champs, I addressed a Wisconsin Right-to-Life dinner. I was seated, not coincidentally, at the table of Bob Harlan, the president of the Packers.

After my speech, the emcee, author and talk-radio host Charles Sykes, invited me back to the stage for a special presentation. I thought maybe I'd get a nice plaque. Instead I got a cheesehead, the yellow headgear of Packer fanatics. I thanked Sykes sheepishly and started to leave the stage. Not so fast, Sykes said. Put it on. I'll do it later, I suggested. Now, he said, and the audience cheered wildly. I realized I wasn't going to get off the stage until I put the cheesehead on. So I did. I stood there in a dark blue suit, white shirt, rep tie, and cheesehead. And some guy snapped a picture. Fortunately, the photo hasn't gotten around. So far, so good.

Fred Barnes

You Say You Want an Evolution

Andrew Ferguson attempts to use evolutionary psychology's theory of infanticide to continue a mixed complaint as old as recorded history: The new knowledge offered by scientists is simultaneously implausible and morally dangerous ("How Steven Pinker's Mind Works," Jan. 12). But he in fact demonstrates the opposite. Evolutionary theory predicts that parents, including mothers, are more likely to kill a child when caring for that child will interfere with other reproductive opportunities that have a higher probability of leaving descendants. This claim is confirmed not only in humans but in other species of mammals that invest in the post-natal care of children, making the theory far more robust than the typical findings of social science. Knowledge of the circumstances in which infanticide is most likely to occur can then be put to the excellent moral use of helping to prevent this crime. Thus, the progress of evolutionary science itself rebuts any claim that it generates a pitiless philosophy of genetic determinism: new information changes the environment, and a changed environment may systematically alter the behavior of animals, including members of our own species. Indeed perhaps the coming use of evolutionary psychology to save lives will curtail the common impulse to assail science in the name of morality.

John O. McGinnis
Williamsburg, VA

Defending Harry Damelin

Your item about Harry Damelin reeked of gutter gossip and tabloid journalism (Scrapbook, Dec. 29/Jan. 5). The gratuitously titled "Good Enough for Burton?" was little more than a cheap slur on a fine public servant who was afforded no opportunity to respond.

The mean-spirited character assassination of Harry Damelin—who, contrary to your report is a highly effective, professional, and well-regarded senior counsel of the Special Senate Investigation on campaign-finance abuses—may have been one disgruntled person's opinion. But to my knowledge, your reporter (as anonymous as your unnamed source) called no one on the committee or special investigation to look further into the matter.

Harry Truman once said that if you want a friend in Washington, buy a dog. Politics is a tough business in a tough town. Your piece reminded many of us how true this is. You can do better.

Paul Clark
Communications Director
Special Senate Investigation
Washington, DC

I had never felt the need to respond to an article in any publication until I saw the item "Good Enough for Burton?" Your article was a baseless cheap

shot at one of the best attorneys with whom I have ever worked, Harry Damelin.

I served as deputy chief counsel to the Thompson Committee and worked seven days a week with Damelin. Your sourceless accusations concerning him could not be further from the truth. Simply put, there is no one who worked harder for, or contributed more to, the investigation than Damelin.

You owe him an apology, and you owe your readers more diligence and research before writing a story.

J. Mark Tipps
Nashville, TN

It was with great shock that I read your recent comments about Harold Damelin, one of the senior counsels on the Senate Governmental Affairs Investigation under Sen. Thompson. I worked with Harry for seven months as counsel to the same committee and in my experience he is an extremely talented attorney who taught me, as a young attorney, a great deal about the practice of law. I am a better attorney for working with him and hold him in the highest regard, both professionally and personally.

Harry and the other senior counsels worked tirelessly to bring the facts of the investigation to light. If you wish to characterize the investigation as a failure, and I disagree with that characterization, you need look no further than the White House, the DNC, and the other entities who refused to comply with subpoenas served on them, and the Democrats on the committee (with the possible exception of Sen. Lieberman) who impeded the investigation at every turn. With the level of obstruction coming from these arenas, as well as the Justice Department, it would be more productive for you to continue to enlighten your readers about them, instead of spreading false information about a dedicated attorney who conducted himself in an exemplary fashion under the circumstances.

The Burton committee would be much improved if they were to add Harry Damelin to their ranks.

Brian M. Connelly
Concord, NH

Round Two on Russia

In his article about Russia, Anders Åslund mixes apples and cucumbers ("Why the Doomsayers Are Wrong About Russia," Dec. 29/Jan. 5). The report by CSIS's Global Organized Crime Project on Russia's organized crime syndicates, which Åslund takes to task, did not deal with routine crime rates, but rather with the troika of corrupt officials, dubious businessmen, and organized crime bosses that controls most of Russia today.

The fact that crime rates are declining in Russia simply reflects a consolidation of the power of organized crime syndicates, as foreign correspondents based in Moscow have been reporting, and which is precisely what our report, released Sept. 29, 1997, said would

occur. Four days before this report was made public, President Yeltsin himself told the upper house of the Russian parliament that "criminals have entered the political arena and are dictating our laws with the help of corrupt officials."

Åslund complains that our report contains no crime statistics. In fact, it was full of stats. Russia's own Ministry of Internal Affairs estimates that approximately 40 percent of private business, 60 percent of state-owned enterprises, and between 50 and 80 percent of the banks are controlled by organized crime.

Our Russian Organized Crime Task Force members scoured the world from Buenos Aires to Berlin and from Hamburg to Hong Kong to investigate the activities of Russian crime syndicates and their new transnational alliances. Their sources included intelligence and law enforcement agencies the world over. Our report provided ammunition to those who want to get really serious about the problems posed by organized crime and corruption.

Arnaud de Borchgrave
Center for Strategic
& International Studies
Washington, DC

Don't Cry for Me

Like all other quick-study artists who visit a country rarely to lunch at a swish eatery with a local expert, in this case "a young Argentinian investment banker," to be fed, along with lunch, a fast-track hot shot's version of what's really going on, Michael Barone presented the sort of roseate picture that makes the world's investment bankers, business persons, and even government officials involve us in all manner of wrong-headed enterprises ("The View from Argentina," Dec. 29). He should visit Argentina more than once in the 12 years he confesses to, for he surely does not know what's going on in that country.

The façade of a booming economy the Argentine spinmeisters contrive for public consumption has some elements of truth in it, but it paints over many of the concerns for that wonderful country. Concerns like unemployment, low wages, and a miserable standard of living for most of the lower classes. Like justice and legislative systems that function under the thumb of a chief executive who governs to a great degree by edict (the sitting president has issued more edicts in his two terms than all his predecessors since the Argentine constitution was adopted in 1853—250 by one recent count). And like how they will replace the pathetically backward or missing elements of the infrastructure needed for the proper functioning of society—transportation, communications, water and sewer, schools, and so on across the entire spectrum.

Stephen G. Saltzman
Manchester, VT

It's His Party

Perhaps some clarification about local politics will explain why some people have reservations about Norm Coleman ("A Hybrid Grows in St. Paul," Dec. 29/Jan. 5).

In Minnesota there is already an anointed Democratic political leadership: Skip Humphrey, Ted Mondale, and Mike Freeman (son of former governor Orville Freeman), known locally as "My Three Sons." All three are establishment Left, active in state politics, and ambitious. It is widely believed that there is no one in either party who can successfully challenge them because of their name recognition and Minnesota's political traditions. Though Norm Coleman may be brighter, more capable, and attractive than any of the triumvirate, there is certainly no future for him in the DFL, regardless of his political views.

In the Republican party there are two serious candidates for the nomination. Jo-Anne Benson, currently the Republican lieutenant governor, is the protégé of the party apparatus. Though she claims to be conservative and endorses all the conservative hot-button issues, from abortion to welfare reform, she has had a problem persuading the grass-roots party members to trust her. Many Republicans outside the party apparatus believe she is a "moderate pragmatist" at heart, who will find excuses to abandon conservative positions if elected. She is especially mistrusted by the religious Right, the best-organized and most powerful of the Republican factions.

Her main rival is Allen Quist. He is outspokenly uncompromising about his positions and has been widely portrayed as an "extremist." Though Quist does not dissent from any of the standard conservative or Republican issues, his single-minded devotion to the religious and moral issues worries some conservatives, who fear that their agenda items might get the short shrift. He is hated by the intellectuals and the media, who seem to consider him a meaner, more extreme version of Jesse Helms. The Republican party apparatus is terrified of him, dreading that he will hijack the convention and take the entire ticket to disaster with him in the general election.

It seems as if the Republicans were in need of a candidate to ride in on a white horse. So when such a candidate rides up, answering to the name Norm Coleman, there should be no surprise if he is greeted with ambivalence. Many of the party activists and the wishful thinkers have received him as a messiah. Others are more skeptical, worried by his seeming opportunism, and concerned that he might leave behind his new loyalties as easily as he did his old ones when it became convenient. The presence at his party-switching announcement of Republican Rep. Jim Ramstad, Frank Luntz, and Jack Kemp, together with the absence of the state party's leading conservatives, Sen. Rod Grams and Rep. Gil Gutknecht was hardly a reassuring signal. It leaves some Minnesota Republicans worried that Norm Coleman might be a coalition builder more interested in building those coalitions with the opposition party than with the factions of his own.

George M. Mellinger
Richfield, MN

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welcomes letters to the editor. Letters will be edited for length and clarity and must include the writer's name, address, and phone number. All letters should be addressed:

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the weekly Standard

Asia: To Bail Out or Not to Bail Out?

Every day brings a fresh bad report from Asia. That region's go-go mid-1990s, fueled by giant Western investment and loans, have run aground. It turns out that great chunks of the money were converted to local business deals driven not by market imperatives but by controlling elites operating in—how shall we put it?—a rather less than "transparent" political and financial climate. Many of those deals have since tanked. Overseas money has fled. Local economies, sucked dry of cash, have retrenched. Asian governments have devalued their currencies. And Wall Street, worried about its own ongoing stake in the East and concerned that the export-dependent U.S. equities it trades will suffer, is jittery.

So the word on everybody's lips in Washington is: "bailout." And whenever the prospect of American participation in such an international financial exercise arises, a certain reflexive debate arises with it. Your leftward-leaning populists say "no," decrying U.S. support for Asian regimes that will use outside support to despoil the environment—and maintain their job-destroying exports to America. Rep. Bernie Sanders of Vermont calls it "socialism for the rich," since it protects from loss those American fat-cats who made bum Asian investments in the first place. And if there's going to be any such socialism, he says, apparently without appreciating the irony, it must be heavily regulated.

Your rightward-leaning populists embrace most of the Sanders line, minus the enviro element, in keeping with their overall push for American withdrawal from the world stage. Further up the ladder of policy-wonkery, conservative think tanks use the bailout question as an opportunity to advance longstanding complaints against multilateral financial institutions in general, and the International Monetary Fund in particular. They want us out of the IMF, and by extension they want the IMF to die—that the global free market might work its magic more efficiently.

We're not altogether comfortable with this talk. Environmental regulation is irrelevant to Asia's present woe. The deflationary spiral on that continent promises more cheap exports to the United States, not fewer, so casting Asia adrift might actually constitute a *threat* to Pat Buchanan's factory workers. Above all, a Washington that pretends to world leadership cannot simply refuse all aid to struggling Asian economies if such aid can be provided intelligently and effectively. In fact, against the very small but hardly nonexistent risk that the "contagion" will spread outside Asia and produce a painful global slowdown, an American ostrich act just now would be positively irresponsible. "Whatever happens, happens" is not a foreign policy, however temporarily consistent with free-market principle it might appear.

In any case, notwithstanding the particular merits of the flat-out "Just say no" argument, it is most probably a loser. When confronted with large and complicated questions in a crisis atmosphere, American politics almost always defaults to the "grown-up" position. And if plain-and-simple rejectionism is allowed to occupy one half of the coming bailout debate, then the "grown-up" position will be that of the Clinton administration and the "world community" and financial "experts" everywhere. It seems to us these people should not be granted such an easy win. Because their record, frankly, stinks.

If blame for the Asian meltdown can be apportioned fairly, after all, then the Clinton administration must surely eat a healthy plateful. Flooding that continent with Western investment—and insisting that the character of the locals who'd be spending it didn't matter—was the president's principal foreign-policy accomplishment from 1994 through 1997. The administration was very late to discover what now seem, with benefit of hindsight, the predictable results of that initiative. As late as November, the president was still describing the metastasizing slump in Asia as a mere "glitch." And the president's grown-up friends, who have more immediate obligations to help repair this "glitch," have hardly done better. The collapse of the South Korean economy took the IMF completely by surprise. And by its own recent concession, the Fund actually made things worse in Indonesia.

Yet here we have Treasury secretary Robert Rubin flying around the globe, having meetings intended to "restore confidence." And secretary of state Madeleine Albright speechifying vaporously about how "the world economy is so interconnected" and how our international organizations "must have the resources required to leverage reform, restore stability, and spur new growth." Pressed for details—what does all this *mean*, exactly?—they do little more than invoke the "successful" precedent of Mexico.

The analogy is imprecise. That earlier crisis involved country-to-country debt, and the United States could not "repossess" the Mexican government. The Asian crisis is a much subtler circumstance of misbegotten *private* investment. In which the Mexican precedent, truth be told, is partially implicated. Any time Washington declares some financial arrangement "too big to fail," it implicitly offers the same guarantee—and the same spur to irresponsible investment—for every bigger financial arrangement. The whole of Asia, for example.

There is, as it happens, underneath all this cosmic conversation about "engagement" and its opposite ideological pole, a concrete issue facing Congress: What's to be done? The White House wants very badly to do it, but can't or won't say what it is. In fact, the administration wants to do it so badly that it is doing it already. The Treasury department, as its legal authority allows, has committed $8 billion from the "exchange stabilization fund" to a large-scale, multilateral financial rescue plan for Asia.

Last year, the administration also sought from Congress a $3.5 billion appropriation for a brand new, supplemental IMF reserve fund. That request, by itself, was not particularly controversial, since it was essentially "cost-free": Every U.S. dollar in the proposed fund would represent a U.S. credit against existing IMF gold reserves. The appropriation was blocked, however, amidst unrelated debate about the administration's international population-control policies. And it is still on the table. As soon as Congress returns from recess, the White House will want it passed. So that the IMF can spend it in Asia.

Most important, the administration will want to speed up a much larger, roughly $14.5 billion American contribution to general IMF operating accounts, again so the Fund can spend it in Asia. Every few years, the United States "re-ups" to the IMF. Under ordinary circumstances, this regular appropriation would be debated in May, voted on during the summer, and signed into law with the rest of the budget this fall, for ultimate disbursement during the 1999 fiscal year. But the White House can't wait. It will attempt to attach the IMF money to a supplemental defense bill, maybe as early as next month. We think Republicans should refuse to go along. For now.

American international economic policy has operated on "responsible" auto-pilot for too long already. A fresh, immediate, unthinking infusion of cash to that policy is a bad idea. But rather than foreclose U.S. influence and options in Asia by killing off the possibility of such aid outright, Republicans in Congress should demand that the Clinton administration explicitly state its plans. In other words, Republicans in Congress should offer the country what we have never had: a real debate about precisely what economic reforms are necessary elsewhere in the world, and under what circumstances we are prepared to fund them.

Where a big new pot of IMF money is concerned, better late than never. And much better late than right away.

—David Tell, for the Editors

The Asian Bubble Trouble

by John Mueller

OUR GREAT DIFFICULTY IN UNDERSTANDING the Asian financial bubble and its implications for the United States is not that we have too few explanations, but far too many. The crisis has been blamed, variously, on greedy speculators (by an Asian head of state), on the failure of Asian governments to appreciate the important social function of greedy speculators (George Soros), on the folly of pegging exchange rates (monetarists), on the folly of not defending pegged exchange rates to the last ditch (supply-siders), on not deregulating Asia's financial institutions quickly enough (conservative economists), on deregulating Asia's financial institutions too quickly (liberal economists), on IMF bailouts (libertarians), on failure to follow IMF advice (the IMF), on Clinton administration myopia (GOP presidential hopefuls), and on the failure of countries like Japan to follow the Clinton administration's farsighted advice (the Clinton administration)—and this list omits technical arguments too stupefying to summarize.

The appeal of each of these partial explanations is that it boils down a complicated situation into a simple drama, whose tragic outcome can be traced to a flaw in one or more players. And there are kernels of truth in many of these theories. What doesn't make sense is the tremendous series of coincidences. Why did so many of the tragedians apparently fly off the handle all at once? And why these particular tragedians? After all, government policies in the Asian Tigers have been, on the whole, much more market-oriented than in Latin America or Eastern Europe. Also, most of the explanations amount to advice to various players as to how to deal more deftly with speculative bubbles and their aftermath. But where did all the bubbles come from?

I'd like to suggest that, if the crisis is to be considered a drama, it is less a Greek tragedy—a story in which abnormal people mess up a normal situation—than a story in which a number of relatively normal people are thrown into a thoroughly abnormal situation, more like a fairy tale (or nightmare).

For an understanding of Asia's predicament and its disturbing implications for the United States, the first step is to grasp the Through-the-Looking-Glass nature of our international monetary system. This peculiar system is based on the U.S. dollar—at least for all the countries involved in the present crisis. To appreciate what it means that the dollar is the "reserve currency" for the world, imagine that all the people you met not only would accept your personal checks, but actually carried your uncashed checks around in their wallets to use instead of money. This would have two effects on your personal finances. First, you'd no longer need to carry any cash, just your checkbook. Second, when you received your bank statement every month, you'd find a lot more money in your checking account than you had actually saved. The extra money would equal the value of the uncashed checks floating around. Under this arrangement, your personal purchases and investments would no longer be limited by your savings, only by other people's willingness to hold your checks.

This is what being a reserve currency means for the United States. The fact that other nations' central banks hold dollars to back their currencies means that our country doesn't need to hold much, if any, foreign money in reserve; it also ensures that the United States makes more investments and purchases of goods and services abroad than are made in the United States—the difference equaling the amount of dollar reserves acquired by foreign central banks.

IMAGINE THAT ALL THE PEOPLE YOU MET WOULD ACCEPT YOUR PERSONAL CHECKS INSTEAD OF CASH—AND THEN CARRY THEM AROUND UNCASHED.

Some Americans consider this a neat arrangement; what they overlook is that it gives foreign governments partial control of the U.S. "checking account." What the dollar-reserve-currency system does, in effect, is turn participating foreign central banks into so many Federal Reserve Banks of Tokyo, Seoul, and Bangkok. These banks conduct open market operations, buying and selling U.S. Treasury securities in the New York money market, exactly as the U.S. Reserve Banks do (in fact, the New York Fed acts as their agent). The only difference is that the foreign currencies issued in this way—unlike those issued by the Reserve Banks of Chicago, Richmond, and San Francisco—may not be permanently fixed in dollar value.

This creates at least two policy headaches for the United States. First, monetary policy in the United States is determined not by the Federal Reserve alone, but by all the central banks in the world that buy or sell dollar assets. Second—and this headache is more remote but potentially dire—there is always the chance that too many "checks," or foreign dollar reserves, will be cashed at once. When foreign dollar reserves are sold, the same amount of U.S.-owned goods or securities must be sold at once, at whatever price they will fetch. If the amount is large enough, it causes a U.S. recession. That's what happened between 1929 and 1932, when virtually all dollar and sterling reserves were liquidated by central banks, triggering deflation and depression.

The postwar Bretton Woods system was intended to prevent such a crisis. After 1971 and until just recently, the U.S. Federal Reserve still set the pace for monetary policy, despite the end of fixed exchange rates. When the Fed lowered interest rates, the dollar sank, inducing foreign central banks to ease also. When the Fed hiked rates, the dollar rose, inducing foreign central banks to tighten. But because it no longer controls all central-bank activities, the Fed is often astonished at the magnitude of the response to its policies—the severity of the inflation in the 1970s, for example, and the depth of the recessions in 1974, 1982, and 1990. But at least the timing used to be pretty regular. Now, the Asian crisis has revealed a new twist for the United States. By 1992, the total holdings of U.S. Treasury securities by foreign central banks began to exceed those of the U.S. Federal Reserve. And by 1995, the holdings of some individual foreign central banks were large enough to rival the importance of the Fed.

In 1995, the Bank of Japan began to act like a

regional Federal Reserve Bank that had declared independence. After the Federal Reserve started hiking interest rates in 1994 and sharply curtailing its own purchases of Treasury bills (incidentally triggering the Mexican peso crisis and a sharp U.S. slowdown in 1995), the Bank of Japan not only didn't join in; in an effort to restart its economy with a cheaper yen, it began actually buying Treasuries, ultimately over $100 billion worth. To Japanese banks, however, the rest of Asia looked like a better bet than Japan itself. Monetary authorities in mainland China, meanwhile, purchased another $80 billion of Treasury bills; Hong Kong and Singapore about $22 billion each; Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines scraped together another $30 billion or so. All told, these Asian countries account for virtually the whole $260 billion increase in the world's foreign dollar reserves between the end of 1994 and early 1997. The flow of dollars back and forth between New York and the Far East, and the Asian bubble, continued more than two years after the similar bubble had collapsed in Latin America.

This dollar buying enlarged the already growing Asian bubble. When Americans invest abroad, the foreign country receives the dollars that finance the investment—but its central bank promptly turns around and invests them right back in the United States. Mostly, it invests in Treasury bills held in custody at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. The original investor's money is effectively cloned: ostensibly lent at one and the same time both to foreigners and to the U.S. government. But one thing doesn't change with this transaction: There is no more real wealth than before, and somewhere in the world, the price of something will go up without the prices of other things going down. The dollars may bid up stock prices in the United States, as in the 1920s; they may bid up commodity prices on the world market, as in the 1980s; or they may bid up real-estate prices in Tokyo or Hong Kong. But the process leaves the same amount of money sloshing around New York as before.

As foreign stock-market or real-estate prices start going up, it seems attractive to borrow still more dollars and invest more; so more loans are made and more dollars go abroad, only to wind up right back in New York. In the process, the assets of the foreign country become more and more expensive, which typically results in a growing trade deficit in goods and services; but the flow of investment can be kept going as long as the expectation persists that the items rising in price will become more expensive still.

Judging the turning point is a fine art. (George Soros's response to the head of state who accused him of assaulting the currency in question was that he, Soros, was on the wrong side of the market at the time.) But once investment funds start flowing out faster than in, the local central bank is forced to make a choice: either slam on the monetary brakes until prices deflate back to their starting point, or devalue the currency, which accomplishes the same thing in terms of foreign, though not domestic, currency.

Whether the country manages to keep its currency fixed to the dollar at this point becomes secondary: Either way, the country's economy will go through the wringer. There have always been speculative investors greedy or shrewd, foreign businessmen making fortunes or going bust, foreign policymakers corrupt or virtuous, and American and international bureaucrats adept or inept. But what the Asian crisis demonstrates is that the reserve-currency system vastly magnifies and prolongs the impact of their mistakes.

How will the crisis play itself out, and what will be its effect on the U.S. economy? Conventional wisdom, adding up Asia's share in U.S. trade, says that the impact will be negative but limited. Maybe, but the outcome actually depends on certain unknowns. Since the Asian currency crises began in mid-1997, foreign central banks have sold about $50 billion worth of U.S. Treasuries. This has tightened monetary conditions at a time when the Fed is trying to keep things on an even keel. How much further the process goes depends not only on the Fed, but on those foreign central bankers who still have the most policy discretion.

Think about the Bank of Japan, which started the ball rolling. After nearly doubling its chest of dollars, the Japanese government confronts a loss of confidence in its currency. It is also up against the political problem of how to finance a bailout of its banking system costing $80 billion or more, in the face of strong objections to using taxpayers' money and without causing a collapse of the yen. The temptation will be strong to sell some of the $100-plus billion in dollars acquired since 1994. The Bank of Japan started doing this in December.

The second question-mark is China, whose dollar holdings have more than doubled to nearly $140 billion (not counting the $70 billion held by Hong Kong, now under mainland control). China's currency has weathered the storm so far, partly because the yuan was already devalued in 1994. But the Chinese economy is being hit heavily by the current crisis, and the leaders in Beijing don't seem to feel they owe Washington any favors.

A third though smaller question-mark is Latin America. In Mexico, for example, both the economy and foreign reserves have recovered in dollar terms roughly to levels they attained before the 1994-95 peso

crisis. But in the process, Mexico has started to flash warning signals of the same sort as before the last crisis. The devaluation made Mexican goods cheaper for a brief period, but inflation has reversed that change. As a result, the current account balance, which shifted sharply from a large deficit to a small surplus, is likely to head back into deficit.

The U.S. economy is in better shape to weather a monetary storm than at any time since the mid-1960s, when a surge of growth in industrial capacity like the one we're seeing now meant that the monetary crunch of 1966-67 produced only a "growth recession"—a slowdown but not a decline in output. Even so, despite all the talk of a "new economy," the business cycle has not been tamed any more than it was by the much-ballyhooed "new economics" of the 1960s. A large enough cashing in of America's "checks"—say, the sale of $100 billion worth of Treasuries by Japan and China—would suffice to cause not just a U.S. slowdown but a recession. Stay tuned.

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Wacky Tabacky Politics

by Robert A. Levy

WHAT A CAST OF CHARACTERS! Lumbering tobacco companies cowed into submission by 40 Medicaid recovery suits rigged to deny them any chance to defend themselves. Politically ambitious attorneys general out to replenish their states' depleted Medicaid coffers without raising taxes. Private contingency-fee lawyers padding their wallets by wielding the sword of the state. And public-interest health groups bent on imposing their stern agenda on every facet of our lives. Recent tobacco politics would be the stuff of farce but for its profound implications for the bedrock of a free society: the rule of law.

Out of that motley group of players emerged a single defender of the civil-justice system—one state attorney general, opposed to the corruption of traditional tort law and its retroactive application to extort Medicaid funding from an unpopular but deep-pocketed industry. Alabama's Bill Pryor was the only attorney general with enough guts and scruples to reject easy money from the tobacco companies and, further, to instruct his brethren on their proper role as guardians of the law.

Unhappily, however, this is a story of greed and power exercised by politicians who lacked Pryor's courage and ignored his advice. What they did have was sufficient clout to fleece a friendless industry. To make matters worse, the tobacco companies, whose right to due process Pryor so diligently and defiantly defended, caved in at every opportunity. While Pryor warned that neighboring states were unjustly oppressing a single industry, the purported victim was busy striking deals with its oppressors. Here's how events unfolded.

In May 1996, more than a year before the tobacco companies decided on a national settlement of the Medicaid recovery suits, Alabama's governor, Fob James, and its then-attorney general, Jeff Sessions (who is now a U.S. senator), appointed a task force headed by Pryor, who was then deputy attorney general. Its purpose was to study whether Alabama should join the other states that had sued for reimbursement of smoking-related Medicaid outlays. No such suit had ever been successful. Juries understood that the industry may sell cigarettes—which are, after all, a legal product—but if a smoker is aware of the associated risk and nevertheless assumes that risk, he is responsible for the consequences.

To overcome the assumption-of-risk defense, states suing for Medicaid recovery came up with a creative plan: simply abolish that provision of the law and, for good measure, make the change retroactive, as if the new law had been in force decades ago when a smoker purchased his first cigarette. Leaving no stone unturned, the states went a step further to guarantee victory in court: They sought the elimination of any requirement to demonstrate a causal link between smoking and a particular Medicaid recipient's illness. Instead, the states would prove causation merely by producing aggregate statistics indicating that certain illnesses are more prevalent among smokers than nonsmokers. So tobacco companies could be held accountable for Medicaid expenditures related to burn victims who fell asleep with a lit cigarette or cancer victims who never smoked.

To be sure, if a smoker paid his own medical bills, the industry would not be liable. But if the smoker happened to be on the public dole and his bills were paid by Medicaid, the state could sue on his behalf and recover. Liability would thus hinge on the smoker's Medicaid status—a circumstance totally irrelevant to any misconduct by the industry.

Bill Pryor examined these issues and others, and his task force found, in October 1996, that the arguments for Medicaid reimbursement were "at best weak and at worst bizarre." The Pryor report characterized Florida's much-touted suit as a "bottomless quagmire" and added that it "should operate as a serious warning to a state like Alabama which still recognizes more traditional legal doctrines." The task force concluded that a lawsuit "would advance weak legal or novel equitable theories which, even if the State won the suit, would threaten to undermine Alabama law generally."

Under Pryor's chairmanship, the task force also explored whether the tobacco industry, in light of excise taxes already imposed on cigarettes, should have to cough up more money to pay for the social costs of smoking. That is, even if the industry duped a Medicaid recipient into smoking and the smoker thereby contracted a covered illness, wouldn't the state still be required to show harm to its treasury? Drawing on authoritative research, the task force found that "smokers pay cigarette taxes to the State and federal government that equal or exceed the most widely cited estimates of the publicly financed costs of medical care." Accordingly, Pryor's group concluded, the state would have difficulty meeting its burden to prove injury.

So, backed by the law, reinforced by economics, and, most important, buttressed by a refined sense of justice, Pryor declined to join in the growing Medicaid shakedown.

Fast forward seven months, to June 1997. Faced now with legal coercion by 40 states, the tobacco industry elects to disgorge $370 billion, pay additional penalties if targeted reductions in youth smoking don't materialize, submit to regulation by the Food and Drug Administration, cease all vending-machine sales, and rein in advertising allegedly directed at children. In return, the industry is to receive partial immunity from litigation that over four decades had not cost it a single cent in damages.

That proposed settlement cut the rug out from under Bill Pryor and everyone else who believes that disdain for the rule of law—particularly by attorneys general—is far more destructive of civil society than the sale of tobacco products. Instead of pressing their legitimate legal and constitutional arguments all the way to the Supreme Court, tobacco companies opted for a political deal—a myopic resolution that, as we shall see, has already returned to haunt them. Pryor's only consolation was that the tobacco settlement, if enacted into law, would send some dollars Alabama's way, because each state was to participate, roughly in proportion to population, whether it had sued for Medicaid recovery or not. That consolation, however, was short-lived.

Less than two weeks after initialing the national settlement (which still awaits congressional approval), Mississippi's attorney general settled that state's Medicaid suit against the tobacco industry for roughly $3.6 billion. By the end of August, Florida had also settled, for $11.3 billion. Both deals were structured as insurance policies: They would be nullified if and when the national settlement were ratified. Almost immediately, the tobacco companies announced price increases averaging about seven cents per pack to cover front-end payments to the two states. So Alabamans are now paying higher cigarette prices to bail out the Medicaid programs in Mississippi and Florida. Naturally, that doesn't sit well with Alabama smokers, whose discontent is likely to be reflected in Bill Pryor's political future, or lack thereof.

INSTEAD OF PRESSING THEIR LEGITIMATE LEGAL ARGUMENTS, TOBACCO COMPANIES OPTED FOR A POLITICAL DEAL.

But it gets worse. In mid-September, President Clinton weighed in with his version of the tobacco settlement: Payments by the industry would no longer be tax-deductible, the FDA would gain near-plenary power to regulate product content and advertising, and the price of cigarettes would soar by $1.50 per pack, to cover a combination of lump-sum assessments and, if youth smoking didn't abate, stiffer penalties. With the release of the Clinton plan, prospects for a national settlement plummeted. Alabamans could see their share of the booty going up in smoke.

If all of that didn't unnerve Bill Pryor, the event that proved to be the last straw occurred closer to home. Seizing the opportunity afforded by Pryor's principled stance, Alabama's part-time lieutenant governor, full-time trial lawyer Don Siegelman, filed a private suit against the tobacco companies to recover $3.9 billion in damages, roughly the amount that the state would be entitled to if the national settlement were enacted. Although he filed suit nominally on behalf of Alabama's taxpayers, Siegelman stood to snatch his share of a cool billion dollars as one of the attorneys for the plaintiffs. Not surprisingly, the local trial court ruled that a private plaintiff has no standing to sue for the taxpayers. But instead of dismissing the case outright, the court took the extraordinary step of postponing its dismissal for 21 days—to give Pryor an opportunity to legitimize the litigation by filing on behalf of the state.

The court's blatant politicization of the judicial process, ratcheting up the pressure on Pryor to do what he knew was wrong, brought an unexpected response. Instead of joining the suit, Pryor proposed a bill that would exact Alabama's $3.9 billion pound of flesh by legislative fiat. That's right: The Alabama legislature will be asked to assess the tobacco industry to the tune of $3.9 billion—in annual installments ranging from $80 million to $200 million over 25 years—without a jury, without trial, without evidence. Each year, the tobacco companies doing business in the state would have to file a return and pay their portion, based on market share, of that year's plunder.

Reportedly, prospects for passage of the bill are very good. The only dispute among Alabama lawmakers is over how the money will be spent. Never mind that Pryor's task force concluded the state had no legitimate claim against the industry. Never mind that he had decried the poisonous effect of such a claim on Alabama's legal system. Never mind that he had presciently warned of "claims being made against the purveyors of other allegedly unhealthy products." Indeed, Pryor had cautioned that "the logic of the tobacco cases, once adopted, could be carried to new heights that are limited only by the imagination of the plaintiffs' language."

Bill Pryor had finally been co-opted. And to add insult to injury, his political opponents found yet one more way to link him to the hated tobacco interests. Former Republican National Committee chairman Haley Barbour co-hosted a fund-raiser in Washington for Pryor. Seven tobacco lobbyists were on the host committee, including the vice president for federal relations at Philip Morris. Four of the seven made contributions to Pryor's campaign despite his insistence that he accepts no money from tobacco or gambling interests. Pryor explains that the lobbyists were acting as individuals in their role as RNC patrons, not as tobacco representatives. Nonetheless, the Alabama press had a field day. Reporters seemed unmoved by obvious evidence of Pryor's independence: his bill proposing, in effect, to confiscate $3.9 billion from the industry—introduced a month before the fund-raiser.

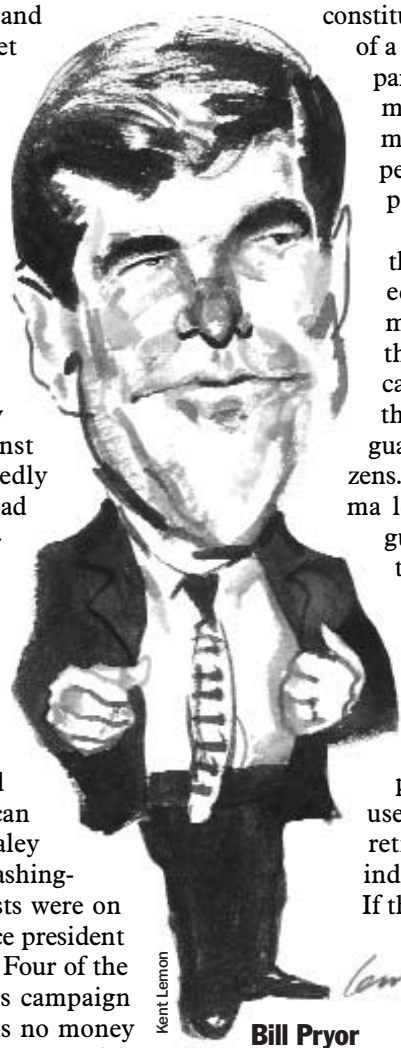
In fairness to Pryor, he has maintained from the beginning that the tobacco issue is mired in public-finance questions, which are ordinarily resolved by state legislatures. As a matter of actual practice, he is undoubtedly correct. Notwithstanding half-hearted protestations to the contrary, legislatures have always used the tax code not just to raise revenue but to dispense favors and administer punishment. But of course, that is not the manner in which laws ought to be made.

A legislature's imprimatur cannot transmute extortion into evenhanded justice. An act unconscionable if taken by 100 percent of a jury does not magically constitute due process if blessed by 51 percent of a state's legislators. More fundamentally, participatory democracy does not permit majorities to trample on the rights of minorities. And when the rule of law is perverted to serve the special interests of politicians, we all pay the price in time.

If the only downside to all this were that an upright public official was isolated by shabby political maneuvers and mistreated by the industry he defended, that would be bad enough. But the implications are far more pernicious. One of the hallmarks of this nation is that it safeguards the rights of its least popular citizens. When it comes to tobacco, the Alabama legislature will be put to the test. Its guidepost should be the one set out by the Supreme Court in 1994's *Landgraf* v. *USI Film Products*:

"The Legislature's unmatched powers allow it to sweep away settled expectations suddenly and without individualized consideration. Its responsivity to political pressure poses a risk that it may be tempted to use retroactive legislation as a means of retribution against unpopular groups or individuals."

If the legislature rejects that admonition, it will have bequeathed to Alabama's children two messages more noxious than cigarettes: First, you may change the rules after the game has begun. Second, you may engage in risky behavior, then force someone else to bear the costs—even someone who has already paid to cover your bills and was not, when all is said and done, the real cause of your injury. A nation concerned about its future should not be teaching its children such lessons.


Kent Lemon

Bill Pryor

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Horror in the Court

How a Mother Who Murders One Child Can Keep Another

By Tucker Carlson

One Friday morning in June 1992, six-week-old Nakya Scott woke up in an apartment in southeast Washington, D.C., and began to cry. Nakya's mother, 19-year-old Latrena Pixley, gave the girl a drink of water, but the crying continued. Frustrated, Pixley put the baby back into her crib. As Pixley later told police, "This is when I put the blanket over her face. I just killed her."

In fact, it wasn't that simple. Nakya Scott's murder took a long time. While her 2-year-old son played with his toys in the other room, Pixley smothered the girl for half an hour, pulling the blanket away periodically, then pressing it down again on the child's face. Autopsy photos show Nakya's lips mashed against her gums from the force of her mother's hand.

Once she finished killing her daughter, Pixley stuffed the little girl's body into a plastic trash bag, threw it into a dumpster outside her apartment building, and went back upstairs to sit in her bedroom. Her boyfriend (who is not Nakya's father) came home that afternoon. The two had dinner, then went to a relative's house to play cards. They stayed until after 2:00 a.m.

The next morning, Pixley had breakfast and watched television. Sometime before noon she woke her sleeping boyfriend and told him what she had done to the baby. Pixley's boyfriend checked the dumpster. "I can't believe that you did that," he said when he returned. Then he called the police.

Much has been written about what happened next. The following June, Pixley pleaded guilty to second-degree murder. Judge George W. Mitchell of the D.C. Superior Court sentenced her to probation and ordered her to spend weekends in the city jail for three years. A few months later, Mitchell reduced Pixley's jail time, and she took a clerical job at a vocational training center in Washington. In the spring of 1995, it was discovered that Pixley had been stealing Social Security numbers from office personnel files, applying for credit cards in the names of co-workers, and using the cards to buy VCRs and stereo equipment. Pixley was fired and later convicted in federal court of mail fraud. But she had no problem landing a new job. (Nor did her mood seem darkened by her brushes with the law. In July 1995, she wrote a bubbly fan letter to *Ebony* magazine praising Aretha Franklin. "I have her whole collection of music on tapes and CDs," said Pixley. "I sing them all the time. Aretha, keep up the good work and keep singing. I love it.") Jerome Miller, the head of the city's child welfare agency, hired Pixley as a receptionist in his office. "This agency is about offering care, concern, and help," Miller said.

In January 1996, Pixley had another child, Cornelious, her fourth by four boyfriends. (Pixley's oldest child, now 8, has lived with relatives since infancy; the second, the boy who was playing when Pixley killed Nakya, is in a foster home.) Pixley might have drifted off into obscurity from there, had she not been interviewed that month by a local television reporter doing a story about young mothers on welfare. The story that aired said nothing about Pixley's murder conviction. But it did catch the attention of an assistant U.S. attorney who remembered Pixley and was infuriated to see her on television with another child. A brief media storm followed, during which Pixley's credit-card scam was reported in the papers. Before long, Pixley wound up back in George Mitchell's court for violating the terms of her probation.

Under heightened public scrutiny, Mitchell sent Pixley back to jail in May, only to release her eight months later to a group home in Washington called Hannah House. Pixley, however, never bothered to show up at Hannah House, and the judge was forced to send her back to the lockup. He released her for good in November 1997.

During her time behind bars, Pixley left Cornelious with a casual acquaintance, a 25-year-old intern at the Public Defenders Service named Laura Blankman. Blankman, who is now a police trainee in

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the Washington suburbs, has cared for the boy, at her own expense, since he was four months old. Eventually, she filed papers to adopt him. Pixley accused Blankman of trying to "steal" Cornelious and challenged the adoption in court. In December, Michael D. Mason, a circuit-court judge in Montgomery County, Maryland, awarded full custody of the child to Pixley, explaining that Cornelious would be best off in a black household (Blankman is white) and in the care of his biological mother.

Judge Mason's decision made the front page of the *Washington Post* and was widely denounced as outrageous. Laura Blankman is appealing the decision, partly on grounds that there is no evidence that transracial adoption harms children. Cornelious, now a 2-year-old, is scheduled to be returned to his mother in a matter of weeks.

Pixley's lawyer argued that a combination of economic desperation and depression pushed her into killing her child.

How did a child-killer wind up with custody of another child? The answer begins with a group of psychiatric experts who have worked on Pixley's behalf since her first arrest. Asked by homicide detectives the day after the killing why she had murdered her daughter, Pixley answered, "I don't know." (Nor did she know how old her daughter was when she was killed.) By the time Pixley was sentenced a year later, an explanation emerged. Latrena Pixley, her lawyer argued, had been suffering from postpartum depression. The most severe, and rare, form of postpartum depression can result in psychotic episodes, during which a new mother experiences hallucinations. Had Pixley been afflicted with postpartum psychosis, she might plausibly have pleaded insanity. She might also have wound up in a mental institution.

Instead, Pixley's court-appointed lawyer argued that her client had been pushed into killing her child by a combination of economic desperation and a form of non-psychotic depression linked to giving birth. The diagnosis never got much more specific than that, nor could various experts even agree on what the diagnosis was. In a subsequent hearing, at least one therapist testified that Pixley suffered from "post-traumatic stress." But that was enough for Mitchell. At sentencing, Mitchell said that he had special sympathy for Pixley, who, not being "some high-class society woman," had been unable to mount a sophisticated defense. "People understand those psychological phenomenons in high-level people, but it becomes ununderstandable in a poor person sometimes," explained the judge, who is head of the D.C. Superior Court's family division. "I don't want to be victimized by that kind of thinking."

Actually, the public defenders who represented Pixley assembled a team of court-savvy psychiatric experts that would have been the envy of many rich criminals. One of the first experts Pixley's lawyers hired, for instance, was Dr. Nuha Abudabbeh, a forensic psychologist well known for her "stress disorder" defenses of accused murderers. Abudabbeh's evaluation of Pixley was not made public, though in a recent interview she described her perceptions of the defendant. "This was not a child murderer," Abudabbeh says, but instead a woman who acted "under duress, under certain conditions. This was a baby she didn't even want. Her boyfriend made her keep the baby. She ended up having to take care of this child. You have to weigh all of these circumstances." Plus, Abudabbeh says, the murder "was understandable because [Pixley] was mentally ill."

The mental-illness defense worked well enough initially, but it presented an obvious difficulty later when Pixley tried to convince Mitchell that she should be released from jail to take care of Cornelious. In the spring of 1995, Pixley was arrested for physically assaulting her boyfriend. In May 1996, a psychological evaluation determined that Pixley still had difficulty managing her anger. Pixley's lawyers were forced to explain how and when her violence problem had been solved. In addition, there was the question of the fraudulent credit cards—was that the result of depression, too?

Pixley's excuses began to get tangled in one another. "Suffice it to say that I declined to be involved in the second case," says Carol Kleinman, a Washington psychiatrist who has testified in a number of cases related to postpartum depression, and who first diagnosed Pixley as having the disorder. Stealing money, says Kleinman, "is not part of postpartum depression." Moreover, she says, "I found some of [Pixley's] behavior outrageous, beyond the postpartum business. I felt I had reached my limit. It was just enough for me."

Ever resourceful, Pixley's public defenders turned

to a Yale-trained psychiatrist named Susan Fiester for help. Fiester had become famous in 1994 during the Lorena Bobbitt trial, when, in gripping televised testimony, she argued that years of abuse and "poor self-esteem" had led Mrs. Bobbitt to "attack the instrument that was the weapon of her torture—that is, her husband's penis." At various times, Dr. Fiester has described herself as an expert on premenstrual syndrome, and on the "epidemic of nicotine addiction among women." In Pixley's case, Fiester testified as an authority on postpartum depression.

At a hearing in January 1997, Fiester testified that Latrena Pixley was now perfectly sane. Fiester then gave her definition of postpartum depression: "Postpartum depression in and of itself is often thought to be a fairly biologically based disorder that's related to, to at least in part some of the significant hormonal changes that women go through during the postpartum period. . . . So there may be an independent sort of biological piece and also some pieces in the social environment that can affect the, you know, whether the disorder occurs or not and make it worse in essence."

Even with a roomful of helpful experts, Judge Mitchell never appeared to fully understand what was going on in his court.

In other words, no one is sure exactly what postpartum depression is. Nevertheless, after evaluating Latrena Pixley for less than a day, and performing no psychological testing, Fiester produced a diagnosis. "It's my professional opinion," she testified, "based on a reasonable degree of medical certainty, that she is not currently a danger to herself or others, and that specifically that she would not be in any danger of harming children, either her own or other people's children, were she to reside in the community." Pixley, Fiester added, has "worked on improving her self-esteem."

It was an authoritative performance. Outside the courtroom, however, Fiester's "medical certainty" doesn't seem quite so certain. Asked if Pixley's son will be safe once he and his mother move into their own apartment, Fiester admits she doesn't know. "I'm giving my opinion about this point in time," she says. "If you want my opinion about what happens two years from now, I'd have to see her again and see how things went when she was in the transitional housing facility. Assuming things go well and there's no problem, I don't think [the child] would be at high risk."

What happens to Cornelious two years from now hardly seems the most pressing issue on Fiester's mind. But she is happy to reel off a list of the programs she has appeared on recently to talk about the Pixley case: "*The Today Show*, CNN, *Talk Back Live*. I've been on radio, WTOP, Channel Four, NBC News." Going on television, Fiester explains, has given her "an opportunity to educate the public about psychiatric issues as relevant to criminal stuff and about these disorders: How frequently they occur, how serious they are, and what they can lead to." How frequently *do* they occur? Fiester pauses, then admits she isn't sure. "Call the American Psychiatric Association," she suggests.

Fiester and her fellow therapists are easy to mock, but they had a profound effect on Judge Mitchell, who often seemed lost in the fog emitted by Pixley's hired shrinks. At one May 1996 hearing, the judge explained to Pixley why he had been so lenient with her: "I tried to understand the drama that the—your life had been very bad. You had gone through the kind of crisis that would cause a person to do things, and your mind get warped, and you get depressed, you get down, you get oppressed and you do things."

Even with a roomful of helpful experts, Mitchell never appeared to fully understand what was going on in his court. Years after he ruled in the Nakya Scott murder, the judge was still wondering why Pixley had killed her daughter. "I don't know why these women put these children in these trash bags," he grumbled. "That's a phenomenon that I would like to understand." At one point, he turned to Pixley's lawyer for illumination. "But how," the judge asked, "does one, how does one come to kill—the basic nature, as I understand it, of, of the, of the—even the syndrome that they described derives itself out of being a woman—how does she come to kill her child? That's what is my first hard thing to overcome. And I, obviously, at some point I decided that I would accept certain propositions about this postpartum syndrome."

And not just postpartum syndrome. Mitchell seemed open to just about any theory Pixley's therapists felt like tossing out. In January 1997, the judge interrupted Susan Fiester in the middle of her testimony to ask a question: "Is there any punishment, if you will, from a societal point of view in the nature of the crime itself, that is the killing of one's child, of

one's own child, is there, is there a form of punishment that comes about as a result of being involved in that wherever you be? Whether you be in prison or you be on, in the community?"

An ordinary witness might have asked Mitchell to repeat the question. But Fiester didn't miss a beat. "Yes, your honor," she answered. Killing one's own child "is, I think, one of the most severe sorts of internal punishment that any woman can have to live with. . . . I think society at times takes a very simple sort of punitive view toward it and lacks an understanding of some of the underlying factors that can be involved." Mitchell was sold. Before letting Pixley out of jail yet again, he speculated aloud about the nature of baby killing: "Isn't that the kind of crime, isn't that the kind of crime that has a punishment in it itself?"

The assistant U.S. attorney on the case, Deborah Sines, countered Fiester's testimony with an eloquent plea that Pixley be kept away from her children. Sines pointed out that one of Pixley's older sons had been assessed by a psychiatrist and found to be "an extremely psychologically messed up little kid."

The judge was unmoved. At a final hearing in late January 1997, Mitchell concluded that "it would be in the best interest of the youngest child that this mother continue the bonding process that she has started with this baby," and he let Pixley out of jail so the two could be reunited. Even before he came to his decision, however, the judge explained that there was little he could do to keep Latrena Pixley from her son. "The law in this area works towards reunification of mothers and families if at all possible. As a matter of fact," Mitchell said, "our Court of Appeals seems to put its fingers, its hands down on judges who even consider taking children from drug-abusing mothers, and you are likely to be reversed as the trial judge if you start taking babies from mothers who have a little drug problem, as they say."

Latrena Pixley doesn't have a drug problem, but Judge Mitchell was right about one thing: Thanks to the philosophy of "family reunification," enshrined in federal law since 1980, it is frequently next to impossible for the state to take children away from their biological mothers, no matter what those mothers do or have done. Consider another case: that of Mahala Irene Page.

On the same day in 1992 that Latrena Pixley was being arraigned in Washington for her daughter's death, police less than 20 miles away, in Prince George's County, Md., were in the process of charging a woman named Mahala Irene Page with a similar crime. Firemen responding to a call at Page's house in suburban Forest Heights had arrived to find Page standing in the doorway of a second-floor bathroom. Behind her, according to the police report, a fireman "noticed a placenta on the floor and an umbilical cord leading to the toilet. Inside the toilet was a baby wedged in the water canal. Applying pressure to the skull, the baby was extracted." Doctors later determined that the child, a boy, had been under water for 25 minutes. There was evidence that Page had attempted to flush him down the toilet. "The defendant also stated she had touched the infant and saw movement," says the report, but gave him "no assistance."

Rushed to the hospital, the boy survived. A grand jury indicted Page for assault with attempt to murder,

and four other felonies. Page's only explanation for her behavior was that she had not known she was pregnant. The boy, however, was close to full term at birth; Page is 5′1″ and normally weighs 125 pounds. It seemed like a sure conviction. Then, in April 1993, a county circuit court judge, Audrey Melbourne, inexplicably let Page off. She received 21 days in jail for second-degree child abuse (all of which she had already served), two years of probation, and was ordered to attend parenting classes.

According to her lawyer, Page completed the parenting classes and "initiated therapy" at the local department of social services. Yet it was obvious that Page still wasn't equipped to handle the demands of motherhood. A confidential state psychiatric evaluation conducted in July 1993 suggested that Page remained mentally unstable. Her "prognosis," the report concluded, was "poor to guarded." Subsequent events confirmed the diagnosis. In 1995, Page, who was and is unemployed, was rearrested and jailed for failing to pay less than $100 in court costs.

Nevertheless, Page was allowed to keep her children. According to court documents filed by her lawyer, by early June 1993, less than two months after she was convicted of child abuse, Page had custody on weekends of the child she abused "with the hope of one day attaining full custody of that child." Some time after that, Page did indeed get full custody. Most records pertaining to juveniles are hidden from public view, so it's not clear when or why Page's son was returned to her. "I wouldn't give you the information if we had it," says Karen Lynch, acting director of the Prince George's County social-services department. Reached at her home last week, however, Page confirmed that all three of her children, including the son she left in the toilet, live with her, and have for years.

How did this happen? County officials don't know or won't say. Ron Povich, who oversees foster care and adoptions in Prince George's County, says he has never heard of Mahala Page, but he does concede that it is not uncommon for children to be returned to parents who have abused them. The federal Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 requires that before placing a child in foster care, state agencies make "reasonable efforts" to "prevent or eliminate the need for removal of the child from his home, and to make it possible for the child to return to his home." The statute has been modified in the years since it became law, but in most states it is still interpreted strictly.

Before attempting to place a child in an adoptive home, Povich says, social workers in Prince George's County are required to prove they have done everything possible to make the negligent mother a better parent. It's a difficult standard to meet. To unfit parents who insist on keeping their kids, Povich's agency offers daycare, therapy, counseling, and subsidized housing. "In some situations," he says, "we've transported the parents to and from therapy sessions, to and from different types of treatment. We even have some funds to purchase supplies for families—bedding, clothing, things of that nature."

And Povich's agency is not unusually generous by the standards of other states. Several years ago, a Rhode Island couple beat their young daughter so badly that by the time the girl was placed in foster care, she had suffered severe brain damage. Yet even when the couple's younger son began showing signs of neglect, the state's child-protection agency did not remove him from the home. Instead, according to Richard Gelles, a child-welfare researcher who has written a book on the case, social workers simply made arrangements to provide the family with a housekeeper to allow the mother to get out more often. The boy was murdered by his parents soon after.

Defenders of family reunification argue that a few well-publicized tragedies don't by themselves warrant wholesale changes to the country's child-welfare system, and they have a point. Making strong efforts to reunify families isn't a bad idea. Most of the time it's probably the right thing to do. Even abused children generally want to live with their biological parents. And the state should always hesitate before removing a child from his home. The problem is that many parents take a long time to straighten out. Others will never be capable of raising children. How long should children wait—in foster care or in dangerous circumstances at home—before their biological parents are fit to take care of them?

It's a question responsible social-service agencies have asked for a long time. Or did. Increasingly, the theology of family reunification allows therapists and social workers to avoid making such difficult judgments. If a child is always better off living with the woman who bore him, then any biological parent is a potentially good parent. Even Latrena Pixley.

Nuha Abudabbeh agrees wholeheartedly. "Of course" a mother who has murdered one child could be a good parent to her other children, says Abudabbeh, one of Pixley's many psychologists. "People are always assuming that because a person is mentally ill or has been incarcerated, she can't be a good mother," Abudabbeh complains. "There are schizophrenic mothers who could be very good mothers. Who decides what's a good mother?"

As it turns out, sometimes nobody does. ♦

The Democratic Party Gets a Brain

—and Loses Its Mind

By David Brooks

Some people collect baseball cards, and others collect race horses, but I collect books that rethink liberalism. I've got books with titles like *The Next Left* and *The New Liberalism*, *Who Needs the Democrats?* and *They Only Look Dead*, stretching all the way from the mid-sixties right up to the present. If you spend enough time with these tomes you become a connoisseur of the genre, savoring the way each era's intellectuals envision a new liberal majority; how, like war-game generals, they assemble different groups to form imaginary coalitions; how they identify their errors (the diagnoses change but, deliciously, the self-flagellation stays the same). After a while, you can smell an invocation of Herbert Croly five pages in advance. And just by looking at a book's cover you can predict how early its author will cite the Gautreaux program, the HUD operation that successfully moved Chicago welfare mothers to the suburbs.

For most of the past decade, my collection has allowed me to explore the joys of higher *Schadenfreude* (I still happily reread a 1983 volume entitled *Rethinking Liberalism* that holds up the nuclear-freeze movement as the cornerstone of the coming progressive era). But the past few years have presented conservative connoisseurs with a dilemma. This is a golden age of liberal reinterpretation. Virtually all of the best progressive rethinking books of the past half century have been written in the 1990s, by E.J. Dionne, Michael Tomasky, Stanley Greenberg, Dick Morris (in his own way), and others. And lately the politicians seem to be paying attention. The Clinton administration has unleashed a flurry of proposals that draw, at least superficially, from this new literature. In recent weeks, the Clintonites have moved to expand Medicare, create new child-care programs, multiply job-training programs, raise the minimum wage—all policy initiatives that get bruited about by the current crop of rethinkers. So while the intellectual rewards to be gained from the literature of liberal revivalism are greater than ever, the aficionado's *Schadenfreude* is endangered. These books are too good. Perhaps the Democratic party is growing a brain.

That would be a problem for the Republicans. GOP types are willing enough to concede that the Democrats, especially Bill Clinton, can be tactically smart. But most conservatives are still sure that liberalism is intellectually bankrupt. History is flowing our way, goes the right-wing mantra; it's just a question of hurrying it along. But maybe that isn't so. Maybe with an era of federal surpluses in sight, historical breezes really have shifted. Maybe conservatives will find themselves facing a headwind, bracing against an intellectually revived foe.

In the old days, liberal rethinking suffered from a series of debilitating flaws. Most authors couldn't cede any moral legitimacy to American conservatism, didn't know anything about the American Right, and couldn't explain conservatism's rise. (They guessed it had something to do with Ronald Reagan's charm or Lee Atwater's malevolence.) Furthermore, many of the writers had guilty consciences about people to their left. They knew the Democratic party had moved too far left for the voters. But they couldn't quite bring themselves to make a principled case against the Left, and something about them still smacked of the graduate-student group home, the Greenpeace bumper sticker, the used Volvo. Finally, there were just too many rethinkers. Liberals were asked to redefine their creed every few weeks. Robert Reich alone seemed to produce a redefining book every month, sometimes applauding globalism, sometimes opposing it, sometimes celebrating Japan, sometimes deploring it. So despite all the verbiage, no liberal vision cohered. The incessant reappraisals used to make liberalism seem like a person who had had his face lifted 27 times; all the natural contours were gone.

These flaws have now been at least partially corrected. The editors of the *Nation* may still believe that everybody who disagrees with them is scum, but the

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best new liberal rethinkers, like Dionne, Tomasky, Greenberg, John Judis, Jacob Weisberg, Alan Brinkley, and Harold Meyerson, are fair and sophisticated about American conservatism. They've read the conservative sources and they understand the reasons for conservative successes. They don't think we're just a bunch of greedheads adept at playing the race card.

More important, most of the current liberal rethinkers do not have a no-enemies-to-the-left mindset. On the contrary, for many, the primary task is to distinguish liberalism from the cultural left, to drive a wedge between the political and economic progressivism they defend and the identity politics of the culturati. The best new liberal rethinkers have undisguised disdain for the liberal elites of the sixties, seventies, and eighties who, seduced by the comforts of the campus, so indulged in transgressive-lifestyle theorizing that they lost touch with ordinary people. A proper liberalism, these rethinkers say, jettisons all that elitist stuff and focuses on the real-life concerns of the middle class.

A series of theoretically inclined liberals like Todd Gitlin (ambivalently), Theda Skocpol, Arthur Schlesinger, and Michael Tomasky (forcefully) have mounted assaults on the cultural left's identity politics. These writers tend to argue for a return to Enlightenment universalism and against the sectarian nationalisms of the multicultis. They invoke Thomas Paine, Voltaire, the Declaration of the Rights of Man. They emphasize the rights and duties that unite people, not the race and gender differences that divide them.

In the sacred troika of race, class, and gender, the post-sixties liberal elites put class a distant third. Most of the new liberal thinkers, by contrast, put class first. Magazines like *Mother Jones*, the *Nation*, and the *American Prospect* now expend much of their ink on working-class economic anxieties: wage stagnation, downsizing, and the minimum wage. Today's liberal rethinkers are more concerned with union organizing than with Rigoberta Menchu, bell hooks, or Robert Redford. As Betty Friedan wrote recently in the *New Democrat*, "I sense the need for a paradigm shift beyond feminism, beyond sexual politics, beyond identity politics altogether. . . . There's a mounting sense that the crises we are now facing . . . can no longer be seen in terms of gender."

Having learned from Christopher Lasch, the new rethinkers project genuine respect for middle-class and working-class values. You can now find liberal writers who do not automatically heap scorn on the Promise Keepers. You can read an entire issue of a liberal magazine these days without anyone telling you that the Ozzie and Harriet nuclear family never existed and wasn't any good anyway. Law-and-order talk is no longer automatically seen as code language for racism.

You wouldn't know it from watching the president, but many liberal thinkers are even having second thoughts about affirmative action. (As you read this literature, it's crucial to remember that whatever the Democratic brain may say, the Democratic body obeys its own imperatives.) Magazines like *Mother Jones*, the *Progressive*, and even *Ms.* have argued that the emphasis on affirmative action has taken liberalism off in the wrong direction, separating liberal thinkers from their working-class roots. An influential figure here is sociologist William Julius Wilson, who concludes that affirmative action has done almost nothing to help the poor. Wilson does not come out foursquare against affirmative action—he thinks current programs should be made more flexible—but he does argue that economic inequality is more important than racial discrimination. The correct strategy for liberals, he writes, is to pursue redistributive economic policies that unite working Americans across racial lines.

Many liberal thinkers, then, are trying to accomplish in the realm of ideas what Clinton accomplished in the realm of presidential politics. They seek to perform highbrow Sister Souljah repudiations and thereby to distance themselves from the cultural left and reestablish their credibility with the middle class. This sets up an odd paradox. These days, conservatives have political power and dream of gaining cultural power. The liberals have cultural power and would repudiate it in hopes of gaining political power. Which goes to show that in the intellectual-activist world, nobody is ever happy.

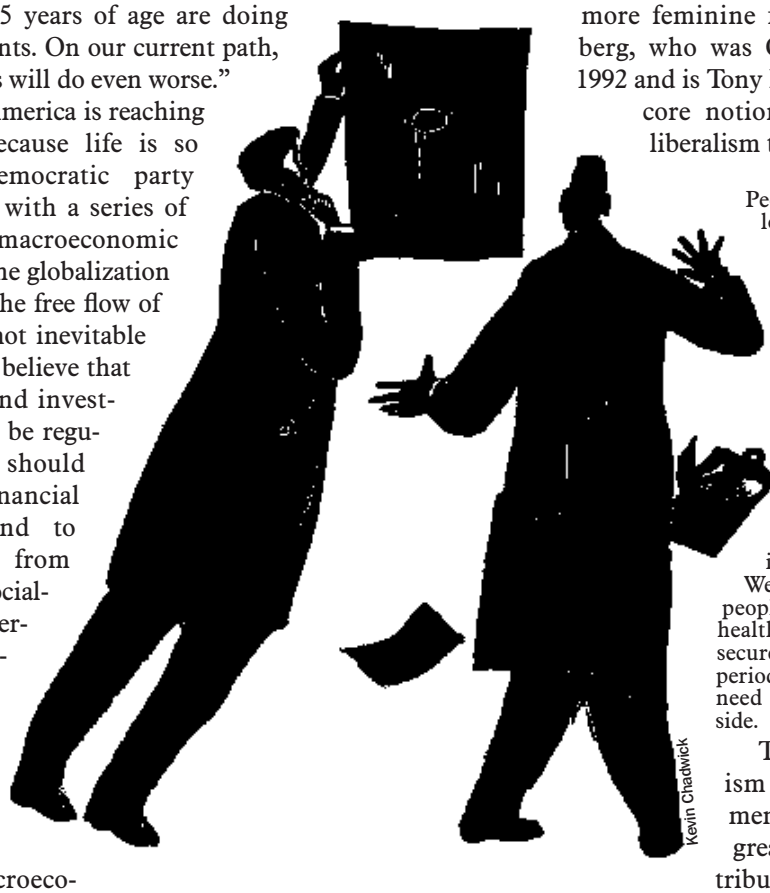
The recent liberal rethinking has crystallized into a coherent storyline. According to this tale, the key fact of contemporary life is the transition from an industrial economy to a menacing global Information Age economy. American workers are now forced to compete with low-wage Chinese workers. Families have to work longer and harder just to stay in place. Educated elites prosper as never before, but for the bottom two-thirds or three-quarters of Americans (different writers have different numbers), life is rough. This creates an opportunity: The Democratic party, these rethinkers argue, should forget about the upscalers and rebuild its majority from the bottom up.

This premise underlies two different streams of thinking. One is a macroeconomic liberalism, which focuses on wages and workplace issues; the other, a

family-security liberalism, which emphasizes social and parental issues. The two streams are different in mood and give priority to different policies, but politicians like Ted Kennedy and Dick Gephardt blend them freely in their platforms.

Jeff Faux, the president of the Economic Policy Institute, is a leading spokesman for macroeconomic liberalism. He suggests that the Democratic party should tell the country: "The American dream is fading. More Americans will have to work harder to prevent their living standards from falling further. People now under 35 years of age are doing worse than their parents. On our current path, the future generations will do even worse."

Then, just as all America is reaching for the gas pipe because life is so depressing, the Democratic party should step forward with a series of big solutions. The macroeconomic liberals assume that the globalization of the economy and the free flow of capital and jobs are not inevitable facts of history. They believe that international trade and investment can and should be regulated. Governments should assert power over financial markets (which tend to withdraw capital from nations that pursue socialist policies, like Mitterrand's France). Diplomats should negotiate social charters that set basic labor and environmental standards to be met as a prerequisite for trade. Macroeconomic liberals believe that central banks worry too much about inflation and so strangle growth and job creation. The central banks should loosen up.



Domestically they are neo-New Dealers. They believe in big public-works projects, a higher minimum wage, massive retraining schemes, jobs programs to guarantee full employment, and nationalized health care. They are not averse to tax simplification—Dick Gephardt has a plan—but they passionately defend progressive taxation.

This line of thinking is present in all the global-economy stories in the *Nation* and the *American Prospect*. It is tirelessly explicated not only by Faux's EPI, but also by Robert Borosage's coalition, Campaign for America's Future, and the many offshoots of the AFL-CIO. Its spokesmen include Robert Kuttner, John Judis, John Sweeney, Linda Chavez-Thompson, Richard Trumka, Robert Reich, Alan Brinkley, and literally thousands of others. This argument informs Richard Gephardt's proto-presidential campaign and the coalition that defeated fast-track trade authority.

The family-security liberals, on the other hand, concentrate less on people as workers and economic beings and more on Americans as parents and social beings. This is liberalism with a softer, more feminine face. Stanley Greenberg, who was Clinton's pollster in 1992 and is Tony Blair's now, states the core notion of family-security liberalism this way:

> People are working longer hours, rarely getting real raises, and can't keep up. Democrats want to help families succeed in this period of change. We should ensure expanded access to education and college. We should help parents keep their kids safe and help with family leave and flextime. We should ensure that people have adequate health insurance and secure retirement. In this period of change, families need somebody on their side.

This stream of liberalism emphasizes government not so much as the great employer or redistributor of income, but as a buffer, offering families safety and security in the midst of the stresses of the Information Age economy. If the macroeconomic liberals talk in the gruff voice of John Sweeney, the family-security liberals sometimes sound as soothing as Mr. Rogers.

Though fewer writers explicate the family-security message (Harvard's Theda Skocpol is one), liberal pollsters and politicians love it. They appreciate its non-threatening language and its appeal to married women voters. It's easy to find family-security plans of action if you cruise around the Web sites of the Democratic party. The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, for example, put together a program in 1996 called "Families First." When the Clinton

administration wears its liberal-activist face, as it is doing now, it eagerly promotes its family-security proposals.

Strategically, all of the current liberal rethinkers, whether of the macroeconomic or the family-security branch, are populists. They believe there is an inchoate majority out there waiting to be tapped. The Democratic party, they are convinced, could mobilize this majority if it would just break with the big donors, the Robert Rubin fiscal types, the Dick Morris triangulators, the entitlement-cutting Democratic Leadership Council moderates, and instead aggressively promise the working class big programs. In the short run, they hang their hopes on the labor movement. They'd like to see more grass-roots organizing and class-warfare rhetoric. As Barney Frank argued in his 1992 book *Speaking Frankly: What's Wrong With the Democrats and How to Fix It*, the Democrats should worry about values and the cultural issues only to neutralize Republican attacks. That accomplished, they should play on economic anxiety and family insecurity. They should be willing to offend the college-town enlightened liberals and upper-middle-class deficit hawks in order to make plain to the middle class that the Democrats are true populists. Eventually, middle-class Americans, enraged by wage stagnation, widening inequality, and the injustices of the global economy, will revolt. Liberal populism will prevail.

All of this is thrillingly audacious. American creeds have usually tried to ride waves of optimism to majority status, but this liberalism aspires to ride pessimism about the global economy. The current political climate encourages incremental measures and symbolic gestures, but the liberal populists describe huge problems and call for sweeping remedies. They aim at nothing less than the regulation of the entire world economy. The liberal populists are standing athwart history and yelling, Stop! What conservative would not feel a frisson of pleasure at such radicalism? For connoisseurs of political writing, this is exciting stuff.

It also, of course, may be nuts. The liberal populists claim that alarming levels of middle-class frustration over wage stagnation and widening inequality are simmering below the surface of American life. But if this frustration exists, it has a funny way of showing itself. Consumer confidence is at a 28-year high. There is relatively little hostility toward the corporate sector. In the last election, Americans said the country was basically on the right track and reelected incumbents in large numbers. Bill Clinton, who preaches that the economy is good and improving and fights for free trade, has the highest approval ratings in the land.

Moreover, the liberal populists utterly misread the populist sentiment that does exist. They assume that working-class Americans were so offended by the cultural liberalism of the Democratic elites, they forgot they actually liked the big-government liberalism the Democratic party was also offering. Get rid of the Woodstock Nation whipped cream, these rethinkers hope, and working families will flock back to the Eugene V. Debs apple pie.

But the evidence suggests that the white middle class rejected liberalism on both economic and cultural grounds. You can spend a lifetime cruising the outlet malls without detecting a single whiff of class consciousness or impulse for collective action. In the 1930s people may have identified themselves with "the common man," but nobody speaks that language today. Everybody these days thinks he is better than the common man, and nobody sees his destiny linked to that of his fellows. There is scant evidence that great pools of opinion still favor huge government employment programs or global regulation schemes.

In 1996, Stanley Greenberg asked a sample of working-class men and women how they were doing. They consistently overestimated where they stood vis-à-vis the median income. They had no faith in government to help them improve their economic status, but assumed they would have to make any gains on their own, by taking a second job, working overtime, or starting a business. If they had any larger view of society, these people divided the world between those who work and those who live off those who work. As the relentlessly honest John Judis wrote in reporting on Greenberg's findings, "The workers Mr. Greenberg surveyed retain a commitment to earlier achievements of progressivism, but they have moved dramatically away from collective and institutional approaches."

This mindset has created a brand of populism all right, but not the kind the liberal rethinkers like. It is a virulently anti-government populism. The liberal rethinkers sometimes argue that the working classes gravitate to people like Ross Perot, Pat Buchanan, and Rush Limbaugh only because the Democrats are too timid to offer true economic populism. In other words, the working classes seek out the most vicious government bashers because they cannot find the big-government boosters they really want. If this were true, it would amount to false consciousness on a startling scale.

The liberal rethinkers also see the resurgent labor movement as a sign that the middle class may be rediscovering collective action. The AFL-CIO is

indeed more aggressive and more intelligently led than it has been for a while. But the liberal populists draw an unwarranted conclusion. They seem to have forgotten that labor's might comes from compulsory dues, not from rank-and-file fervor for the Democratic party. If the unions were not strong enough to stop Ronald Reagan, they are not strong enough today, with their ranks reduced and still dwindling, to form the basis of a new majority politics. "Who builds this class based liberalism?," Harold Meyerson asks in a recent survey of liberal books in the *American Prospect.* "There is a missing link in this scenario—some institution that could promote greater racial solidarity among American workers and could challenge the power of business in Congress, that could help [organize and guide] the party." The liberal populists lack an agent of change.

Moreover, the liberal rethinkers are going to find it more difficult than they imagine to jettison the liberal elites. If you look at liberalism from the outside, economic liberalism seems like a flea; it has had relatively little influence on American life over the past quarter century. Elite cultural liberalism, on the other hand, is a giant elephant. It has been massively influential. Employers now worry about getting the right number of women and minorities around the table when they hold a meeting. Journalists casually assume that a senator's or a cabinet secretary's mindset can be inferred from her sex. Public schools don't teach labor history, but they do fall for every multicultural fad under the sun. William Julius Wilson wrote a book called *The Declining Significance of Race*; yet all around us, American life offers evidence of the declining significance of class.

In part this is because the working class (whatever that means these days) is no longer the most influential group in society. That distinction belongs to the educated upper-middle class. There are now 7 million households in America with incomes over $100,000 a year, and their influence on the marketplace, the culture, the media, and the categories of thought is enormous. This mass upper class—even its many liberals—does not think in terms of class conflict. Its members think in bohemian-versus-bourgeois terms (if they think in terms of conflict at all).

Maybe it was possible to build class consciousness at a time when reporters, broadcasters, movie producers, and teachers came from working-class backgrounds. But now these people are college graduates, the children of college graduates even, and they are reading Scott Turow, not John Steinbeck. Maybe you could build a class movement when the Democratic party was staffed by proletarian ethnics organized into urban machines. But now the Democratic party is staffed by lawyers and media consultants.

The upper-middle class has taken over progressive opinion just as it has taken over everything else, and its causes are affirmative action, a tobacco ban, cam-

paign-finance reform, gay rights, global warming, the balanced budget, and multicultural recognition, not class war or trade restrictions. That's why liberal groups like Greenpeace collapse when they try to move beyond their upper-middle-class base and gin up working-class support. That's why the politically astute Bill Clinton has decided that race and affirmative action are more salient issues than the class struggle.

There are even signs the liberal rethinkers secretly know that the world has changed and that their vision is out of step with the age. If the global economy really is a menace, and Americans will recognize this someday, then it is in the long-term interest of the Left to distance itself from a Clinton administration deeply implicated in free trade and globalization.

But the liberal populists have little of the adversarial fire that characterized the conservative movement when it was trying to upend its own party's centrist establishment. Ronald Reagan ran against Gerald Ford in 1976 and energized conservatism. Conservative-movement leaders from the 1970s into the 1990s waged full-throated war on the Republican elites before finally gaining a measure of control over the party.

Liberals, on the other hand, decided not to run anyone against Bill Clinton in 1996, and the liberal argument essentially dropped off the radar screen. Mario Cuomo and Jesse Jackson stood up at the Democratic Convention in Chicago and effectively endorsed the party's shift to the center. Today, the liberal populists and House Democrats fall in line with the Clintonites every time the administration drops them a few crumbs, like an expansion of Medicare for affluent people and a neoliberal day-care program. Meanwhile, it's not even clear that the liberal populists will launch a serious campaign against Al Gore in 2000. Dick Gephardt hedges his anti-globalization message to preserve his bona fides with the elites; in any case, some labor leaders apparently are urging him not to run in order to give Gore a clearer shot at victory.

The Left made a few stabs at opposition with its fight against NAFTA and its work to defeat fast-track trade authority. But the liberal populists have been too timid to mount any clear and comprehensive assault on Democratic internationalism. Maybe they believe their own rhetoric about how evil the Republicans are. Maybe they think a Republican president—the possible result of a temporary Democratic split—really would destroy the nation. Maybe the liberals have been down so long they have terminally low expectations. Or maybe the liberal populists have simply been coopted by the Democratic elites. But just possibly, liberals know deep down that liberal populism is not the wave of the future. They write audacious books but practice tepid politics.

Needless to say, most Republicans would like to see the liberal populists take over the Democratic party, because they're confident the liberals would lead the Democrats to disaster at the polls. The deeper you read even in the smart 1990s literature of rethought liberalism, the more it seems that the liberal populists, in their heart of hearts, believe that too. ♦

New York City, Economic Backwater

By William Tucker

The Forbes 400 list published last October gave a rude surprise to anyone who thought the Northeast Corridor was still the nation's economic center of gravity. Of the 20 richest people in America, two live in Bellevue and one in Mercer Island, Wash., two live in California, four live in Arkansas (the Walton family), two live in Colorado, two in Chicago, and one apiece in Atlanta, Omaha, Austin, Charlottesville, Honolulu, Beaverton, Ore., and New York City.

New York's decline in wealth has been particularly notable. "Where Have All the Rich People Gone?" asked *New York* magazine in a tongue-in-cheek evaluation that suggested the trend wasn't really such a big

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deal. In 1997, only 36 New Yorkers made the Forbes list—down from 74 in 1982. In fact, barely over a quarter of the 400 now come from the entire Northeast, from Maine to Washington. When Forbes first published the list, in 1982, one third did. And the numbers tell only half the story. Those who remain in the Northeast tend to be the "old rich"—people who made their fortunes a generation ago. David and Laurance Rockefeller, Robert and Laurence Tisch, the Newhouse brothers, Donald Trump, Sam LeFrak—all have fortunes tied to inheritance, real estate, or older technologies. Others, like George Soros and Rupert Murdoch, use New York City only as an address. "New York is simply no longer a place where people are becoming wealthy," says David Birch of Cognetics, a Cambridge, Mass., firm that tracks economic growth. "There is a lot of old money there, and most of it will probably stay put. But no new fortunes are arising. All that is happening elsewhere."

With the arrival of the Information Age a few years ago, pundits began predicting that business and industry would decentralize and spread out across the countryside. It would now be possible to run a stock brokerage out of a converted barn in Vermont. That prediction has largely proven true. Of *Inc.* magazine's "500 Fastest Growing Companies in America," only 178 are located in the nation's 100 largest cities. Overland Park, Kan., is better represented than Boston, Philadelphia, or Washington. The Bureau of the Census announced recently that, since 1992, for the first time in the nation's history, job growth in the suburbs has outpaced growth in either urban or rural areas.

Modern industrial progress no longer requires large pools of relatively unskilled labor. Companies can set up in the remotest parts of the country. In fact, there is a positive payoff in escaping regulation and other costs of doing business in older urban areas. Businesses can be located in "greenfields" blissfully free of environmental problems. Silicon Valley is the best example. Lying in the long peninsular corridor between San Francisco and San Jose, it is only marginally connected to either city. Its spiritual center, if anywhere, is on the Stanford campus in Palo Alto. Its employment centers are Mountain View and Cupertino, quiet suburban communities that just happen to contain the largest aggregation of technological might ever assembled.

Ted Waitt was a 22-year-old Iowan when he moved to more remote South Dakota to set up Gateway 2000 in 1985. Last year the company netted $250 million. Michael Dell chose his hometown, the sleepy Texas capital of Austin, in setting up a mail-order computer business. Far from the major routes of transportation or any retailing hub, he grossed $7.8 billion in fiscal 1997, selling $2 million worth of computers a day on the Internet. "Many of these successes in the Midwest and Mountain states are tied to one individual," says Birch of Cognetics. "The question is, where is that individual?"

The pattern was graphic in *Forbes ASAP*'s "Technology 100," announced last fall. Of the 100 richest people in Information Age companies, an astonishing 66 were from California or Washington state. None was from New York City, Boston, or Washington, D.C. Only three were from New York state (one being Lou Gerstner of IBM). Four were from the suburbs of Boston and three from the suburbs of Washington. Huntsville, Ala., Grand Forks, N.D., and Rochester, N.H., were better represented than any northeastern metropolis.

> OF THE 100 RICHEST PEOPLE IN INFORMATION AGE COMPANIES, 66 WERE FROM CALIFORNIA OR WASHINGTON STATE, NONE FROM NEW YORK CITY.

The creation of new wealth is beginning to show up in investment figures as well. The Fortune 500 list measures firms by their gross revenues. Thus, long-standing giants such as General Motors ($168 billion), Ford ($146 billion), and Exxon ($119 billion) still dominate the list. But when corporations are measured by their market capitalization (the value of their outstanding stock)—which reflects flows of investment and thus indicates likely future growth—the information companies are already dominant. Microsoft (172nd on the Fortune 500, with revenues of $8 billion) now has a market capitalization of $116 billion. This makes it larger than General Motors ($49 billion), Ford ($38 billion), and Chrysler ($21 billion) combined. Cisco Systems (332nd, with revenues of $4 billion), the San Jose firm that makes switching systems for the Internet, has a market value of $33 billion, almost as large as Ford's.

"What people in New York and Washington don't seem to grasp is the scale of things happening beyond their horizon," says Joel Kotkin, an urban analyst and Brooklyn native who followed the Dodgers to Los Angeles. "The whole economy is growing out from underneath them." Kotkin points to the quarterly figures for new industrial construction compiled by Grubb & Ellis. The Pacific Southwest regularly aver-

ages about 10 million square feet, the Pacific Northwest 7 million, the Mountain states 15 million, the Midwest 13 million, the Southeast 10 million. The whole Northeast averages only 2 million square feet a quarter. "People on the East Coast think all the smart people in the world are assembled in Manhattan, Boston, and Washington," says Kotkin. "There are a lot of smart people in those cities, don't get me wrong. But what they don't realize is that there are smart people almost everywhere you go in this country today."

City enthusiasts have always argued that thinly populated settings can't provide the "face-to-face" contact that stimulates creativity and nurtures new ideas. Yet the techno-suburbs seem to be doing very well in that respect, too. The Internet, of course, shortens all distances and provides virtual face-to-face contact in any setting. But Silicon Valley seems to be generating its own informal contacts as well. *Business Week*'s special issue on Silicon Valley last August described business deals struck at coffee shops and important scientific collaborations born at school-board meetings.

FOR PROBABLY THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY, NEW YORK FIRMS WILL BE CROSSING THE COUNTRY LOOKING FOR VENTURE CAPITAL.

One of the saddest chapters in the tale of the East's decline is the sputtering of "Silicon Alley," which was supposed to represent New York City's challenge to California in the Information Age.

Around 1993, a group of Web-oriented start-ups began to appear in lower Manhattan. New York's abandoned industrial districts in TriBeCa and SoHo proved perfectly suited for the Information Age. While heavy manufacturing had left the city because of space limitations, the old 19th-century industrial buildings were ideal for high-tech firms. Soon companies such as Musical Pen (producer of "The Magic Schoolbus" CD-ROM) and Razorfish were functioning out of converted manufacturing space. Real-estate magnate Lew Rudin turned the abandoned headquarters of Drexel Burnham at 55 Broad Street into a high-tech center.

In January 1995, Peter Huber wrote an enthusiastic article for the *City Journal* entitled "New York, Capital of the Information Age." "Without question," he enthused, "New York remains the unrivaled telecom hub of the planet. In electromagnetic terms, the city is both a huge, quivering antenna—a giant receptor of telephone, radio, and photonics—and also the brightest beacon on the planet, a cyber-quasar pumping out vast amounts of energy in the form of radio waves and glass-encapsulated light." Eleven months later, *New York* magazine picked up the story with a special issue: "High Tech Boom Town: It's 1995, and Suddenly New York is Cyber City."

"Content is King" became the Silicon Alley rallying cry. Once the hardware was in place, it was argued, New York's greater ability to produce intellectual content would overcome Silicon Valley's ability to produce hardware. "California makes boxes," proclaimed Mark Stahlman, a one-time soldier of Lyndon LaRouche who is now Silicon Alley's unofficial press officer. "New York produces culture."

Three years later, the euphoria has waned. Lower Manhattan has produced some interesting start-ups, and Silicon Alley now employs about 125,000 people, according to a Coopers & Lybrand study. But the same study noted that Silicon Valley's Big Five—Intel, 3Com, Cisco, Netscape, and Sun—annually produce more than 22 times as much as all of New York's New Media companies. While there are 200 initial public offerings across the country each year, raising $12 billion for new businesses, Silicon Alley has yet to float its first IPO. "It's nice for New York to pretend it has a booming high-tech industry," says Omar Wasow, president of New York Online and an MSNBC commentator. "But until the environment changes—the taxes, the regulation, the crappy public-education system—it's going to be a struggle."

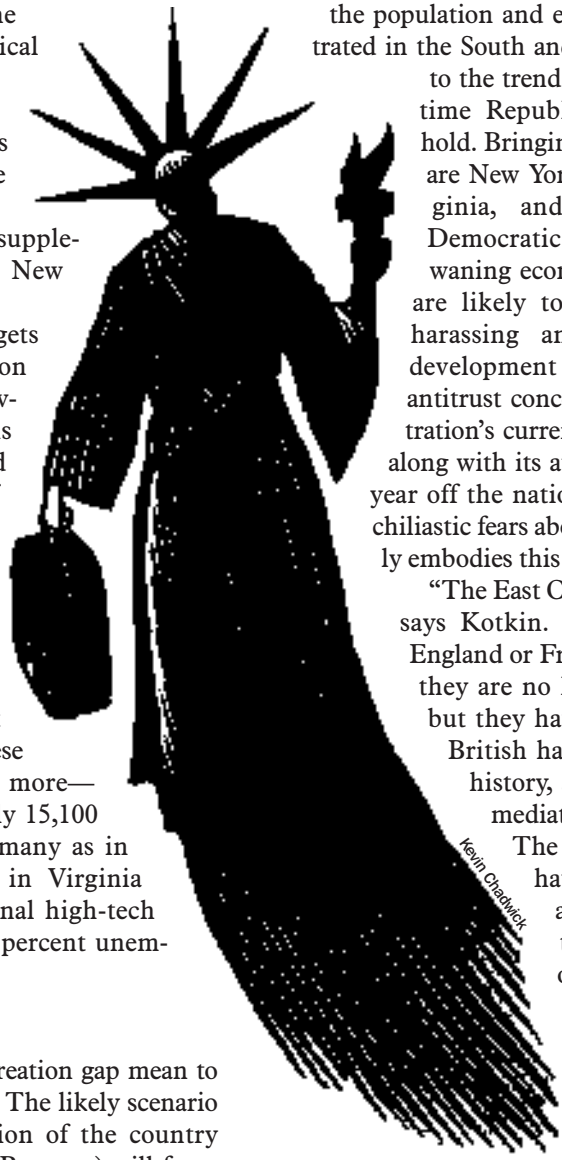
As technological success moves west, banking resources are sure to follow. New York commercial banks still have $1 trillion in assets—more than double California's and 22.5 percent of the national total. But venture capital is rapidly congregating around San Francisco and Silicon Valley's Sand Hill Road. This March, *AlleyCat News*, a New York technology newsletter, plans to take the CEOs of 24 Silicon Alley start-ups to San Francisco looking for financing. "We want to show the California investors what's going on back here," says Anna Copeland Wheatley, editor-in-chief of *AlleyCat*. Nonetheless, it will probably mark the first time in history that New York firms have crossed the country en masse looking for venture capital.

One thing that critics unanimously point to is the lack of technical understanding in East Coast cultural circles. "The folks here didn't seem to understand the 'Browser Wars' and were befuddled at how Microsoft can put buggy software on the market," wrote Gary

Andrew Poole in *Forbes ASAP* after spending a few evenings among New York's techno-elite. "[I]t quickly becomes clear that this could be any town in America with a few multimedia startups."

Some months back, the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* ran a special edition entitled "What Technology Is Doing to Us." The cover featured Michael Richards, of *Seinfeld*, helplessly trying to operate his TV's remote control. Staff writer John Tierney's opening piece made a game effort to promote the technological revolution, but the rest of the issue quickly degenerated, with an account of Laurie Anderson's first LSD trip, a meditation on the politics of the sixties, and a story about people who use food supplements to try to live forever. In New York, they still seem not to get it.

Boston's Route 128 complex gets better reviews. "The only place on the East Coast that is really surviving the Information Age is Boston," says Kotkin, who is based at Pepperdine University. MIT, of course, is a center of technological discovery, but even most of its graduates quickly head west. A recent study by Bank of Boston found that MIT graduates had created 732,000 jobs around the country over the past ten years. Although 125,000 of these were in MIT's home state, far more—162,000—were in California. Only 15,100 were in New York, one fifth as many as in Texas (84,000) and fewer than in Virginia (15,300). In the midst of a national high-tech boom, New York City still has 9 percent unemployment.


Kevin Chadwick

What will this widening job-creation gap mean to the nation's politics? Plenty. The likely scenario is that the entrepreneurial portion of the country (which really begins south of the Potomac) will forge ahead while the envious Northeast watches. "New York and Washington are like the British in 1770 looking across the Atlantic and wondering how their American possessions ever got so wealthy," says George Gilder, who has become a prophet of the Information Age while living in Tyringham, Mass. "What they don't realize is that they are about to lose their political hegemony as well."

In retrospect, the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994 appears to be very much a result of this cultural and economic shift. "Democrats may be winning a few seats in the Northeast, but whatever gains they make will be quickly erased by population growth in the South and West," says Stephen Moore of the Cato Institute. *State Policy Reports*, which issues quarterly figures tracking "economic momentum," finds that all the population and economic growth is concentrated in the South and West. The only exception to the trend is New Hampshire, a longtime Republican, free-market stronghold. Bringing up the rear for the nation are New York, Rhode Island, West Virginia, and Vermont—all longtime Democratic strongholds. Given their waning economic power, Eastern elites are likely to play a rear-guard game, harassing and obstructing economic development with environmental and antitrust concerns. The Clinton administration's current harassment of Microsoft, along with its attempt to lop $350 billion a year off the nation's economic growth over chiliastic fears about global warming, perfectly embodies this strategy.

"The East Coast really has two choices," says Kotkin. "They can become either England or France. Both countries realize they are no longer world-class powers, but they have reacted differently. The British have said, 'We've got a lot of history, a lot of culture, let's play a mediating role on the world stage.' The French, on the other hand, have chosen to ignore reality and retreat into a hallucinatory world." The third way, of course, would be to sweep away government regimes and embrace the future. "What we're seeing is not so much a geographic migration or even a migration away from urban populations, but a migration away from excessive government regulation and taxation," says Cognetics' David Birch.

How does Birch feel watching all this unfold from his desk in Cambridge? "Heck," he says, "we've already opened another office in Atlanta. I'm thinking of moving out of here myself." ♦

The Stranger in a Strange Land

The Gaul of Albert Camus

By Christopher Caldwell

On January 4, 1960, Albert Camus lay dead at age forty-six, next to the car that his friend Michel Gallimard had driven into a tree just south of Paris. In the trunk, unharmed, sat the manuscript of his nearly completed last novel, atop its first page the dedication he had scribbled nights before: "To you, who will never be able to read this book."

That dedication was to Camus's mother, who had scraped by as a cleaning lady in Algiers after the death of her husband in the opening days of World War I, when Camus himself was a year old. Mrs. Camus was still very much alive, but she would never be able to read the book because, as her son once told a professor who had inquired about his work, "Nobody around me knew how to read. Keep that in mind."

It is worth keeping in mind. That Camus should today be among the best-known novelists in the French literary tradition was achieved against high odds: African origins, poverty, a short life, tuberculosis, and a fictional output of only five-hundred pages. Millions of students have read *The Stranger* (1942), the novella that put one critic in mind of "Kafka written by Hemingway." French journalist Olivier Todd's authoritative new biography—even awkwardly translated, and chopped to half the length of its original French edition—shows that Camus was more than a fiction writer. He was perhaps the most influential essayist of his day, widely

Henri Cartier-Bresson

Olivier Todd
Albert Camus
A Life
Knopf, 434 pp., $30

(if wrongly) viewed as a leading exponent of existentialist philosophy; a stage director, writer, and actor; a decorated hero of the French resistance; and one of the first intellectual renegades of the Cold War. In 1957 he won the Nobel Prize for Literature—at forty-four, the youngest writer besides Kipling to get it. In death, Camus loomed over the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. Thanks to Todd, we now have a very different idea of what he would have been like had he lived through them.

For all our tendency to think of Camus as French, he was rooted in Algeria. Apart from a short vacation, he never set foot in Europe until his late twenties. His passions were local soccer, local politics, and local women. He chose his favorite contemporary writers—André Gide, Henry de Montherlant, and André Malraux (all of whom he would later befriend)—largely because they had written evocatively about Algeria. When he won a university scholarship, he chose to study Plotinus and St. Augustine, partly out of an interest in metaphysics, but partly, too, because they were fellow Africans.

At twenty, Camus married Simone Hié, a modish morphine addict, only to divorce her when she began trading sex to doctors and pharmacists for drugs. He joined the ragtag Algerian Communist party (without, it seems, having much idea what communism was) and soon got thrown out for deviationism. That was the end of his illusions: By 1939, he would write that "everything leads us to believe that the Soviet Union is now an imperialist power." Left-wing politics, however, connected him with both the theater and journalism, and Camus wanted to write. He was hired as the assistant to Pascal Pia, a French leftist who ran the *Alger*

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Républicain newspaper, and he might have stayed in Algeria had the government not closed it down.

Newly engaged to a piano teacher named Francine Faure, Camus emigrated in 1940 to a France on the verge of war, taking a job Pia had found him with the government-friendly *Paris-Soir*. He used his spare time to finish *The Stranger* in May 1940, just as the German tanks rolled in. Despite grumbling, Camus stayed with the paper even when it moved to Clermont-Ferrand, the new capital of Marshal Pétain's Vichy puppet state; even when it began to expel its Jewish employees; even when its editor became high commissioner of propaganda. Camus, by now married again, didn't leave the paper until he was laid off, at which point he returned with his wife to Algeria to save money on rent.

It would be a long time before Camus made any sacrifices for political principle. When Gallimard, France's most prestigious publishing house, accepted three major works—*The Stranger*, the play *Caligula*, and *The Myth of Sisyphus*, a collection of linked essays—Camus appeared unbothered that the firm had made a pact with the Germans to appoint a Nazi to edit its flagship magazine. When the novelist Raymond Queneau, one of Gallimard's readers, wrote to say that a fifteen-page chapter in *The Myth of Sisyphus* on (the Jewish) Franz Kafka posed "local difficulties," the author readily cut it.

Camus had been eager to return to France, not to resist but to build a career. He didn't get the opportunity until his health failed. Camus had first spit blood at the age of seventeen, and a particularly severe tuberculosis would imperil his life for its remaining thirty years. Painful pneumothorax treatments—which involved inflating and collapsing the lungs repeatedly—incapacitated him for weeks, and bouts with Koch's bacillus would leave him near asphyxiation and subject to panic and claustrophobia. In late 1942, he spent several months at a sanitarium in the Haute-Loire, where he came into contact with Protestant *résistants* active in the woods there.

Albert Camus, pictured at left with his second wife Francine Faure.

Pictured at right, his petites amies: *Maria Casarès, Catherine Sellers, and the Danish model Mi.*

By the time he arrived, without his wife, in Paris, *The Stranger* had become the bestselling novel of the war. What's more, with *The Myth of Sisyphus,* it was backed by a remarkable explication of the principles behind it. Even taken together, the books do not form a philosophy. (Those who have judged Camus from the standpoint of academic philosophy have found him severely wanting, like Jean-Jacques Brochier, who in the 1970s wrote *Camus: Philosopher for High-School Students*.) But the books are not far from philosophy, either. Civilization offers advantages, but it never takes on the central problem of existence: that we are going to die. In noting the absurdity that results—an absurdity that increases as civilization progresses—Camus neither cowers before death nor whines about civilization. "The absurd," he wrote, "is not in man . . . nor in the world, but in their common presence." So far, he is in line with existentialism. But Camus differs from the existentialists, and from the surrealists and the "absurdist" playwrights for that matter, because of his claim that the absurd is not an endpoint, but a beginning—the beginning of a plausible moral system for those without God:

> We have seen that men will conscientiously go about their work in middle of the stupidest of wars without believing themselves in contradiction. . . . There must be a metaphysical happiness in undergoing the absurdity of the world. Battles, games, unnamable love, absurd revolt—these are homages man offers to his dignity on a field of battle where he is routed in advance.

In Paris he was welcomed and fêted by Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, who were both having a good war, if not exactly an honorable one. Sartre had contributed to the collaborationist journal *Comœdia*, and de Beauvoir, after being fired from her university post for seducing a student, had taken a job with Vichy-government radio.

It was not until late 1943 or early 1944, a hundred-some days before the Allied armies landed in France, that Camus himself entered into active resistance, as editor of *Combat*, a clandestine newspaper. Although he was nearly taken in a surprise roundup while carrying proofs of the paper, surveillance seems to have been limited and the danger to Camus slight. Otherwise he had the time of his life. The wealthy Gallimards not only took him into their social set, they took him on as an editor (a job he would hold for the rest of his life, publishing Jean-François Revel and, posthumously, Simone Weil). Most important, Camus wrote

Photographs from *Albert Camus* / Knopf

and directed a new play, *The Misunderstanding.* Although the play was a flop, he launched a life-long affair with its star, the Spanish expatriate Maria Casarès, while Francine waited incommunicado across the Mediterranean in Algeria.

Herbert Lottman's excellent 1978 biography of the writer had to reckon with the still-living Francine Camus. Todd's does not, and his most stunning revelation is the extent of Camus's womanizing. It was Camus's central preoccupation, greater than politics or writing, and he would drop either of these to pursue new "talent." Francine's sister Christiane Faure described Camus as looking "like a little monkey," but others compared him to Humphrey Bogart—a comparison that made him purr with pride—and the evidence is that women found him formidably attractive. Once he had developed a sexual relationship with a woman and had her in a position of abject dependence, Camus would renegotiate his responsibilities, explaining that monogamy was impossible for him. Romance turned him into a compulsive liar. Even by today's decadent standards, Camus was goatish, predatory, and dishonorable.

Around the time he was mulling aloud to friends about a divorce, Francine was admitted to an asylum, where she spent her waking minutes mumbling about Maria Casarès. Camus seems to have viewed her behavior as some kind of purely physiological fluke. "I found that her depressed mood had deepened into clinical depression, complicated by signs of anguish and obsession," he wrote a friend. "I am very worried and I blame myself . . ."—For abandoning her? No—". . . for not having taken the first symptoms more seriously." When Francine attempted suicide, the course of treatment was several weeks of electroshock. Camus, meanwhile, saw a series of doctors himself, settling on one who prescribed for him "freedom and self-fulfillment."

In 1956, Camus acquired a second mistress, the actress Catherine Sellers. When he received the Nobel Prize in 1957, Francine was able to ban Sellers and Casarès from the celebration party. But by then Camus had taken a third on board, the mysteriously named Danish fashion model "Mi." He spent the last days of his life writing letters to his three active mistresses, explaining to each how empty the lack of her made him feel.

In the years after the war, Camus finished his only full-length novel, *The Plague*. He was awarded one of the four-thousand rosettes the government gave out to honor those in the resistance, and used his kudos to good effect. With publication rights granted only to papers with non-collaborationist war records, Camus found himself one of the most powerful journalists in the country. He developed a taste for public polemic that would set him against practically all his friends.

The feud with Sartre that defined Camus's last decade began at the apartment of avant-garde novelist Boris Vian. Camus stormed out after attacking philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty for defending the Soviet Union's Bukharin show trials. Sartre defended Merleau-Ponty, and it's easy to see how he would break with Camus over communism. With one foot still in Algeria and a resistance rosette of his own, Camus felt no need to adopt an apologetic leftism in atonement for France's wartime collaboration.

Camus established himself as a critic of totalitarianism and hardened his rivalry with Sartre in his extended essay, *The Rebel* (1951), which began with a distinction between revolt and revolution. Revolt he described as a visceral reaction of refusal (a "no"); revolution was a mental state, a conscious construction of a new world out of man's creative powers (a "yes"). This required a rigorous look, from a neutral stance, at existing institutions, and the upshot was what Todd correctly calls "a radically original questioning of revolution in general and the French and Russian revolutions in particular." When Sartre commis-

sioned a hostile review of *The Rebel*, Camus wrote that he was tired of taking lessons from one "who never placed anything but his armchair in the direction of history." Sartre responded by attacking Camus for generalizing about Marx without having read him (a fair criticism, although an authority on Marx, the political philosopher Raymond Aron, would declare the two "equally incompetent" on the subject).

In the herdlike intellectual climate of Paris, opinion was virtually unanimous, even among Camus's Gallimard colleagues, that Sartre had got the better of the argument. Camus started avoiding his Left Bank haunts and increasingly viewed the French intellectual world as corrupt. When Sartre attended a "peace" meeting in Prague just months after the anti-Semitic purges of Stalin's "Doctor's Plot," Camus remarked that French leftists' only work "is to carefully distinguish between good and bad concentration-camp jailers and good and bad anti-Semites."

By the 1950s, Camus appeared worn out by tuberculosis, women, and politics. In 1956, he published his excellent novella *The Fall*, a dark monologue set in an Amsterdam barroom and loosely patterned on Camus's state of mind after Francine's suicide attempts. As Camus put it, the narrator Clamance shows the debilitating weakness of "a modern heart, that is: he cannot stand to be judged." Todd shows us that Clamance is more autobiographical than we had hitherto expected, and properly praises *The Fall* as Camus's best work of fiction.

At the time, readers missed how radical a departure *The Fall* was from Camus's previous work. But thanks to the 1995 publication of *The First Man*, the unfinished novel left in the car at his death, we can see that Camus was at a turning point in his career as a novelist. Since he was a dogged reviser, it's hard to say how good *The First Man* would have been. But it certainly shows him writing in his strongest idiom and seemed to promise a way around the fiction-writing impasse Camus had reached—indicating that more could have been expected from the writer had he lived into his fifties.

But Camus's energies were so wrapped up in ephemeral matters that little else he wrote in the 1950s will last. His stance on France's guerrilla war in Algeria disappointed almost everybody. Camus never held the mainstream leftist intellectual position that France ought to give up the colony and let the ethnically French *pieds-noirs* like his relatives fend for themselves.

But he was silent on the matter for long periods, largely for fear that his family would be targeted. At his Nobel speech, he answered a fanatical Algerian who asked why he hadn't taken a stand: "I believe in justice, but I will defend my mother before justice."

Camus urged broader democratic rights for Arabs and toured the country hoping to establish a "truce party." He thought about Algeria as both a blue-collar native and Cold Warrior. Particularly after the Suez crisis of 1956, he feared that a Cairo-directed "Arab empire" would serve as a cat's paw for Soviet expansion. When, toward the end of his life, compromise became impossible, Camus was slowly coming around to the hard right-wing position: The Algerian terrorists should be fought in an all-out colonial war.

Camus's isolation and unpopularity among the French intellectual establishment persisted long after his death. "Civilization had been stuck on top of him," Sartre said, "and he did what he could with it, which is nothing." When Herbert Lottman published the first full-length biography of him in 1978, it was viewed in intellectual circles as a work of resuscitation, even if Camus remained popular among rank-and-file readers and certain Cold War dissidents. What most infuriated Camus about Sartre and other leftists is that they used such popularity against him, taking the positive reviews he received in "bourgeois" publications like *Le Monde* as proof that Camus has been co-opted by the right.

Camus thought the accusation said more about the French left than about himself. "One doesn't decide the truth of an idea according to whether it is left- or right-wing, and even less by what the left or right wing decides to make of it," he wrote. "In fact, if the truth seemed to me to be with the right wing, I would go along with it."

Had Camus lived, he would have done just that. By the time of the Hungarian uprising of 1956, his positions were drawing him more and more into agreement with the Catholic Right (he protested the Soviet intervention with Roger Martin du Gard, François Mauriac, and T. S. Eliot) and the philosophical Right (he protested the imprisonment of the writer Tibor Déry with Eliot, Ignazio Silone, and Karl Jaspers). "If the words 'left wing' no longer have much meaning," he wrote, "it's because leftist intellectuals in particular have chosen to be the gravediggers of freedom."

As it happened, it was Raymond Aron who lived to carry forward the Cold War rivalry with Sartre and to gather the laurels when world events exposed the latter as a power-worshipping apologist for killers. Whether Camus would have had, like Aron, the intellectual firepower to continue to confront Sartre is not clear.

What is clear is that the end of the Cold War has destabilized a lot of literary reputations. In France, certain conservative writers have come back into vogue in the 1990s. Alain Finkielkraut's book on the Catholic nationalist Charles Péguy comes to mind, as does Antoine Compagnon's recent biography of the wholly forgotten liberal anti-Dreyfusard Ferdinand Brunetière.

One would think that those whose views were vindicated in the conflict

would see their reputations rise, but the calculus is more complicated than that. Consider George Orwell: Does anyone believe *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm* will be read at all once they cannot be read as ideological *romans à clef*? Something similar is happening to Camus. His reputation cannot stand on a fictional output of one novel, two novellas, and a handful of stories. His journalism rarely rose above the run of the mill, and his plays are *bad*. His brilliant essays will continue to attract readers, particularly *The Rebel*. But his image is destined to fade along with the ideologies to which he was an antidote. People will remember Camus as a hero of the Cold War—a brave critic of mid-century malaise and violence and intellectual corruption. In short, a writer who is owed part of the credit for the fact that we no longer need him. ♦

B&A

Do-It-Yourself

A Guide to Fixing Up America's Cities

By Fred Siegel

Some things just aren't supposed to happen. The crime rate, according to the experts, will not drop until narcotics have been decriminalized. Of course, crime in America has fallen dramatically in recent years, despite the illegality of drugs, but the legalizers carry on as though nothing had changed.

Similarly, according to the urban experts who passionately believe in centralized authority, the possibility of reviving America's cities depends entirely on financial aid from the federal government. The last few years have seen some urban rebirth despite the decline of federal aid, but the fact remains invisible: the Ford Foundation consultant Karen Paget, for instance, began a recent article in the *American Prospect* with the assumption that such cities as Detroit and Cleveland are still sliding sharply downhill.

Paget isn't alone, for many politicians seem to share her views. About a decision by the Clinton administration to eliminate cost-of-living adjustments for Medicaid reimbursements, Westchester congresswoman Nita Lowey declared, "Once again, New York is taking it on the chin." And she is right about that particular decision hitting the cities hard. Like most conventional politicians, however, even while complaining about Washington, she can't seem to shed her shop-worn assumption that the cities have a friend in the federal government.

Stephen Goldsmith
The Twenty-First Century City
Resurrecting Urban America
Regnery, 250 pp., $24.95

There has been some acknowledgement of the failures of federal policy. Henry Cisneros, President Clinton's former secretary of Housing and Urban Development, admitted to Congress in 1993 that his agency has "in many cases exacerbated the declining quality of life in urban America." Or, in the more forceful words of the *Chicago Tribune*, "No natural disaster on record has caused destruction on the scale of the government's housing programs."

But in fact, faith in the powers of big government remains so strong that even while analysts and politicians rattle off the long list of ways Washington has undermined urban America—from its role in redlining inner cities and subverting stable neighborhoods, to the highway and mortgage subsidies that draw off population to suburbia—they always somehow manage to conclude with the necessity for further federal intervention. Citing such occasional successes as the Community Reinvestment Act (which forced banks to increase profitably their inner-city investments), they always come back to drink again from that federal well they know is poisoned.

What seems to drive this irrational outlook is a dated sense of the city as a swamp of unmet "social needs." It all started in the 1960s, when everyone—social workers, advocates for low-income housing, and race-relations leaders—saw the city as a tangle of pathologies rather than an economic engine. Cities, in the memorable words of Milwaukee mayor John Norquist, were reduced to "the tin-cup strategy" of peddling for pity in Washington.

The great virtue of Stephen Goldsmith's new book, *The Twenty-First Century City: Resurrecting Urban America* (written for the Manhattan Institute) is that it explains why declining federal support for the cities may be a blessing in disguise. "The natural draw of a big city, the diversity, culture, amenities, architecture," Goldsmith explains, "is today outweighed by an enormous artificial cost that has been placed on urban economies by bad government policy."

A highly successful mayor of Indianapolis who reduced taxes while increasing infrastructure investments, Goldsmith is renowned for introducing market competition to city services. His widely praised man-

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agerial accomplishments were chronicled in such books as William Eggers's *Revolution at the Roots*. What makes Goldsmith's own book invaluable is his account of the perverse effects of federal policy—regardless of whether Democrats or Republicans occupy the White House.

The book opens with an amusing account of New York's racial racketeer, the Reverend Al Sharpton, leading a rally protesting the takeover of some Indianapolis bus routes by private companies. Sharpton had federal policy on his side. The Urban Mass Transit Act not only limits competition from private providers, but entitles any transit worker "negatively impacted" by competition to six years' salary as compensation. Like the federal government, writes Goldsmith, Sharpton was fighting "to head off a nationwide epidemic of improved bus service" for inner-city residents.

The problem, as Goldsmith shows, is that the old municipally run bus system would not recognize the changing patterns of work in Indianapolis. Refusing to rearrange routes when faced with sharply declining ridership and increasingly dispersed jobs, the Metro transportation authority simply kept raising local taxes to support the status quo.

Here again the feds only made the problem worse. One way to get inner-city residents to the new jobs was to sell off the old forty-foot buses and replace them with vans and minibuses cheaper to run along lightly traveled routes. Congress, however, requires local transportation authorities to repay the feds (at well above the market value) every time a bus is sold. Eventually Goldsmith found a way to outflank the regulations. But, he explained, "as is all too often the case for local governments, improving service in Indianapolis required us to find a way around a series of obstacles imposed by the federal government."

The perverse effects of federal policy are not a problem only in Indianapolis. A study by the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority found that federal mandates cost the system $100 million annually, while federal aid adds up to only $80 million. Similarly, Goldsmith points out, the Fair Labor Standards Act orders cities to pay a 50-percent bonus for the overtime that police officers often used to work at their regular payrate—with the result of removing "more street hours than federal grants to local departments produce."

In part, the problem is that federal legislation rarely considers local impact. Regardless of the government's intention, cities are disproportionately hurt by regulations regarding asbestos removal, environmental cleanup, and access for the handicapped. The Small Business Administration, for instance, was supposed to create new work by serving as lender of last resort for struggling start-up businesses. But its loans in New York, reports *Crain's: New York Business*, are directed much too often to medallion taxis—which creates no new jobs, since the number of medallions is fixed by a law unchanged since 1937. The sole effect of such loans has been to drive up the price of a medallion franchise and thus the cost to the taxi rider.

Goldsmith proposes the experiment that for two years a major city be allowed to forgo all federal aid in return for relief from federal regulations and taxes. It is a bold idea, but packaged properly it might garner some support.

The seniority of congressmen from urban districts used to mean that the cities had chairmanships of some key congressional committees. But the Democrats' loss of the House of Representatives in 1994 meant that the cities were deprived of their last federal stronghold, and the next census will only confirm their declining electoral clout. What better time, then, to give up the old game? I suspect all city leaders will eventually do what Mayor Goldsmith has done: look less at how to bring in money from Washington and more at how to get the feds off their backs. ♦

A Streetcar Named Desire

Carolyn Graglia's Brief Against Feminism

By Norah Vincent

Carolyn Graglia is right to take on feminism: It bred its share of extremists, and it must shoulder part of the blame for the demise of the family. She is also right to defend domesticity: American society has relegated it to second-class status, forgetting its true meaning and value. But there are glitches in her thinking, ones that mar her "brief against feminism" (a portion of which appeared in this magazine a little more than a year ago). Graglia is less keen to extol the joys of nesting than she is to malign the sexual revolution and the working woman's world. And this is an imbalance that weakens her argument.

F. Carolyn Graglia
Domestic Tranquility
A Brief Against Feminism
Spence, 480 pp., $29.95

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When she does address domesticity, Graglia gives us a garden of delight. An "awakened Brünnhilde" is her paradigmatic wife, roused to the wonders of a man's love. Her own homey world, into which she offers brief glimpses, is a veritable "Eden." She portrays the ideal home as a kind of metaphysical atelier, in which children are works of art every bit as precious as the most prized Titians or Van Goghs. She writes that leaving a child in a nanny's care is like Van Gogh's asking a bystander to paint *Starry Night*, imagining that it will come out the same.

The notion, as Graglia makes clear, is absurd—yet some parents are more willing to consign their children to surrogates than to relinquish the prejudice that caregivers are fungible and housewives dolts.

Graglia takes a further step in the right direction: Feminists deny in vain that, broadly speaking, biology is destiny. In order to make women equal in the workplace, feminists tried to sever the links that bind mother and child, denying that, because of her pregnancy, a mother is a better nurturer than her husband. Feminists were obliged to fudge clear differences between men and women—to pretend that a woman's anatomy does not predispose her to caregiving, while a man's disqualifies him.

The probable truth that, on average, a woman makes a better mother than an executive, and a man a better executive than a father, is a hard one for non-nurturing women to swallow. To them, it feels too much like appeasement: first, the determinism of wombs, then the tyranny of gender roles.

This is not an entirely unwarranted complaint, and Graglia is wrong to pooh-pooh it. Anatomy may be irrefutable, but it need not be the only arbiter.

So too is Graglia overly fond of extremes. As a result, her androgynous feminists collapse into straw men, and her stallion Siegfrieds (model males) too closely resemble "blond beasts." Nietzsche and Wagner are not ordinarily a critic's best allies, especially when, as Graglia does, she has already made Stalinists of her foes. Graglia's associations tend to be dubious, her dilemmas false. She posits co-opted caricatures of fascism and communism—in her lingo, "spiritual virgins" (feminist harridans) and "Angels in the House" (Stepford wives).

Moreover, her tone is too harsh. She is too categorical to be heard by more than the converted, and at times she sees only what she wishes to see. Her evidence, therefore, is selective, the choicest bits plucked from their rightful place within the mix of good and bad. She blunders, for example, when she picks Stanley Kowalski as her Siegfried, pitting him against what she regards as the feminists' emasculated male, the type of man whom Blanche DuBois describes as "gentle, nervous, beautiful, with a softness and tenderness which [is not] like a man's." Graglia reveres Kowalski's brawn: "We garnered fodder aplenty for our fantasies when Stella walked down the stairs, not into the arms of a gentle, nervous, beautiful boy of unmanly softness and tenderness, but into those of the traditionally masculine, animalistic, aggressive Kowalski in the torn undershirt."

But in her reverie, Graglia fails to remind us that Stanley stands at the bottom of the stairs, cajoling his wife, the first time because he has just beaten her, and the second time because he raped her sister. Kowalski's crimes blight the virtues of his masculinity and impair Graglia's point.

No one doubts the allure of Brando's torso, his raw power, and, yes, even his aggressiveness. No one would prefer, at least for dramatic purposes and pure sex appeal, Karl Malden at the bottom of those stairs, his bow tie askew.

But to keep this Adonis, Stella and Blanche must submit to abuse—hardly a fair trade. And this, more than Graglia cares to admit, is the argument that most feminists would make (including Graglia's *bête noire*, Andrea Dworkin, herself a battered wife).

Likewise, when Graglia wants to exalt homemaking, she invokes the writings of Chinese women, who "validate . . . maternal longings" and endeavor to give "full rein" to a woman's "role as wife and mother at home": "Li Xiaojiang has learned what Leo Tolstoy knew—and Western feminists have yet to discover—about how critically important are the particularities of daily life and how affirmative of her femininity a woman's attention to these particularities can be."

As before, Graglia is right to remind us that daily chores and a mother's million small nurturing gestures are inestimably good for the soul. She is also right to argue that many feminists have wrongly derided homemaking as parasitic, thankless drudgery.

But she leaves out a crucial detail: China is a gruesome place for women. Many Chinese females do not grow to womanhood, because, if not first aborted, they die from malnutrition and neglect in state orphanages.

Both Graglia and her adversaries deserve more credit than either will give the other. Indeed, we should not be so quick to estrange them. *Domestic Tranquility* deserves a thorough and fair hearing, and, much as its author may dislike the idea, it earns a place alongside the works of Dworkin, Betty Friedan, and Gloria Steinem as a bold, critical statement—this time from the right. "Feminist" has always been a slippery term, but it should describe someone who stands for women's equality—and Graglia does want to show that so-called women's work is worth as much as men's. Still, she insists, equal does not mean the same. In her view, women are unquestionably equal to, but also unquestionably different from, men—and no sensible person can disagree with that. ♦

WAGGING THE WORLD

The Moviergoer's Diary Finds Serious Ideas & Cynical Ignorance

By John Podhoretz

Sunday, January 11. The Film Forum is a Greenwich Village theater so solemn its lobby is painted black and its fare consists largely of documentaries. Going there seems less like an outing to the movies than a homework assignment, or maybe even a visit to the dentist. There's a hectoring tone even to the entertaining stuff, like this month's Chaplin retrospective: You are supposed to laugh, but you are also supposed to come away with breathless respect for a Great Artist who cared deeply about the human condition and was persecuted for his leftist views.

It is out of duty (the homework-assignment thing) that I arrive at the Film Forum to see *Arguing the World*, a documentary about four New York intellectuals who in the 1930s and 1940s attended City College, where they were members of a Communist cell that met in one of the school cafeteria's alcoves. They then broke with communism and became writers and editors. One ended up a neoconservative, one stayed a socialist, and the other two ended up somewhere in the middle. For people who know about such things, this is old news, and it's hard to believe anybody else would care.

So imagine my surprise to find a long line outside the Film Forum and its black lobby stuffed with people buzzing about the film like teenage girls. The theater has only two-hundred seats and this is New York, but still, *Arguing the World* is a documentary about four old Jews who read a lot of books. Mostly, I expect, the full theater is due to the *New York Times*, which has devoted a remarkable amount of attention to the film, but there must be something else at work here.

There is. *Arguing the World* turns out to be a very entertaining movie—an immigrant romance about four boys from the New York slums who lived interesting and exciting lives in the world of ideas. What's more, filmmaker Joseph Dorman has actually gotten the details right; no easy task when you're dealing with who said what about whose essay in which quarterly, or what it means to break with communism but stay on the left, or even what "left" means in that context.

Most surprising of all, *Arguing the World* is fair. This may be the only time in the history of Greenwich Village that "liberal anti-communism" has ever received a respectful hearing. The four intellectuals are Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, Irving Howe, and Irving Kristol. Each is given his due, even Kristol, who is shown twice in photographs with Ronald Reagan and is

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discussed in flattering terms by Jeanne Kirkpatrick (whose appearance on screen provokes the only obnoxious leftoid scoffing from an otherwise polite audience).

The movie is so fair, in fact, that it becomes a sort of Rorschach test. To me, the late Irving Howe seems by far the least attractive of the four—dour, sour, bitter. Bell, Kristol, and Glazer are all amusing and lively; there's a wonderful bit in which Glazer goes back to the South Bronx tenement where he grew up and has a conversation about Harvard with one of the current residents. Kristol talks about how no parent in his neighborhood ever spoke the words *I love you*. "You would have been embarrassed," he says, adding that what they did have was absolute loyalty inside the family.

By contrast, Howe spent his life committed to the ideas he believed when he was seventeen years old, and on screen he clearly yearns to kick Irving Kristol out of the national discussion of ideas—just as he had kicked Kristol out of his Trotskyite cell fifty years before. Even though the movie ends with Howe's funeral and gives the unctuous Michael Walzer the last celebratory word, I didn't think of Howe as the hero of *Arguing the World*. But then I opened up *New York* magazine and found David Denby's review, which ends: "I am devoted to Irving Howe . . . ; the movie brings his severe but humane consciousness back into focus with startling force." Severe and humane? Would that include the scene in which Howe restates, with the blind fervency of a flat-earther two centuries after Galileo, his belief in the nationalization of industry?

Like I said: *Arguing the World* is a Rorschach test.

Wednesday, January 14. *Wag the Dog* is a political satire from director Barry Levinson, whose last political satire was a horror show called *Toys* with Robin Williams (and no, it wasn't a horror show because it starred Robin Williams, though that helped). *Toys* was about a happy and wonderful toy factory that gets taken over by the military in order to make toys that fire real bullets and video games that train kids to fight in the next nuclear war.

Those fascists. How chilling.

Toys lost about a billion dollars (okay, not a billion, but grant me my little fantasies), so you might think Hollywood wouldn't give Levinson another billion to make a second political satire. It did, largely because Levinson agreed to make it on the cheap in one month. *Wag the Dog* does move quickly, and it has a terrific performance by Dustin Hoffman, but otherwise it's awful: a comedy with almost no jokes, a satire whose makers know nothing about the subject they're making fun of.

Here's the central idea: It's eleven days before the election, and the president is caught molesting a fourteen-year-old girl in the White House. (Sure.) His advisers, led by Robert De Niro, need to come up with a story that will supersede the story of a pedophile president. (Right.) So they decide to invent a war between the United States and Albania, based on staged film-footage of a girl carrying a cat through some war-torn rubble. They write a few songs, come up with a war hero, and get the president reelected.

The movie, written by the wildly overrated David Mamet, is full of speeches in which De Niro explains that the plot will work because: (a) the 1969 lunar landing was staged, (b) the 1983 war in Grenada was undertaken because Ronald Reagan wanted to get the story of the 240 marines killed in Lebanon off the front page, (c) the American people supported the Gulf War because they saw footage of a smart bomb going down a chimney and thought it was cool, and (d) the public will believe anything as long as a picture and a song go with it.

There is nothing more repugnant than ignorant cynicism. Watching *Wag the Dog* is like having a conversation with a conspiracy nut who rolls his eyes and smiles contemptuously when you tell him that you don't believe Bill Clinton personally killed two teenagers near the Mena airport. Even a satire has to get the details right, and the simple fact is that if a president of the United States were accused of molesting a teenager, it would be big news. One of my colleagues at the *New York Post* pointed out that between a girl in rubble carrying a cat and a girl at a press conference accusing a president, you can guess what front page our paper would go with. Besides which, wouldn't somebody place a phone call to Albania to see whether there's a war on?

An honest parody of presidential politics would show how chaotic and stupid most decisions are, how mediocrity rises to the top, how conspiracies exist only to cover up mistakes and crimes. An honest parody of the media would play off their love of salaciousness, not their hunger for patriotic gore: Maybe Barry Levinson didn't notice, but tens of thousands of people were killed in Bosnia before a single U.S. soldier set foot there.

There is one really disgusting moment in *Wag the Dog*. The spin doctors put their war hero in a shirt whose tatters spell out "Courage, Mom" in Morse Code. They got the idea from one of the greatest acts of bravery in this century, when, during an infamous press conference staged by the North Vietnamese, Jeremiah Denton blinked a message home in Morse Code. Some things are beyond the pale. This is one of them. Let's see Barry Levinson spend ninety seconds in a POW camp without praying for deliverance by the U.S. military for which he has long displayed such loathsome contempt. ♦

"As a child of the Depression, Morrison jokes, 'I have bad dreams about eviction.' So she maintains three residences. At right, her triplex apartment in Manhattan."

—photo caption in Time *magazine's cover story on novelist Toni Morrison, January 19, 1998*

Parody

Song of Salomon Brothers

So badly the IPO had turned out. The debentures debased, the stock issues that stiffened and then softened and then fell. Toni M balanced the telephone receiver in her hand, felt its weight and lightness like snow. And listened with her heart.

"Ain no man wanna shift his assets into tech stocks right now, Miss Toni," her broker said. "Wid a 61 percent discount on current valuations, da pharmaceutical sector jes too 'ttractive for a man to bear."

"So what do we do now?" she asked.

"Well, for starters, I'd like to stop talking like a character from one of your books."

"Fine."

"I mean, I'm a Harvard MBA."

"That's fine."

"Okay," the broker muttered. "Now, the Nobel Prize money's gone. We need to work on a new investment strategy."

She sighed and returned it to its cradle, an infant so silent, without strength to cry, so mute now. The receiver, I mean.

From the wellspring of her soul the long-ago memories stirred: she a shivery young girl, narrow-shouldered, gingham-dressed, and the landlord's broad hand holding the crumpled paper, stamped with a white man's notary seal, stained with his masculine manhood musk. Eviction. Is this again eviction? She turned and began to walk through the living room of her triplex. Within minutes she had made it halfway across the room. Maybe not eviction; this was a condo; the condo was paid for; in cash, actually; but she might, now, have to forgo maybe the cabana she was building around the pool at the farm upstate.

In the foyer of her apartment, the superintendent's daughter squatted, having a baby. Blood, partutem, afterbirth on the marble.

Toni M thought of her portfolio. The white man at Salomon had assured her she was sufficiently diversified—tax-free munis, sector-specific mutual funds, and plenty of liquidity. She looked at the marble floor of her foyer. Liquidity was clearly the problem. And real estate was the solution.

Toni M called the doorman downstairs. She didn't trust him. The color of licorice; midnight skin. She had seen him beat young girls, many young girls, by the lamplight while the hawks circled overhead, symbolizing freedom or something.

"Yes, Miss Toni," the doorman answered, pounding his head violently against the mahogany paneling.

"Charles, have my car brought around."

"Where you off to?" he said, spitting blood, sputum. Teeth.

"To the realtors," she said, pleased. "This woman is in a mood to buy."