the weekly
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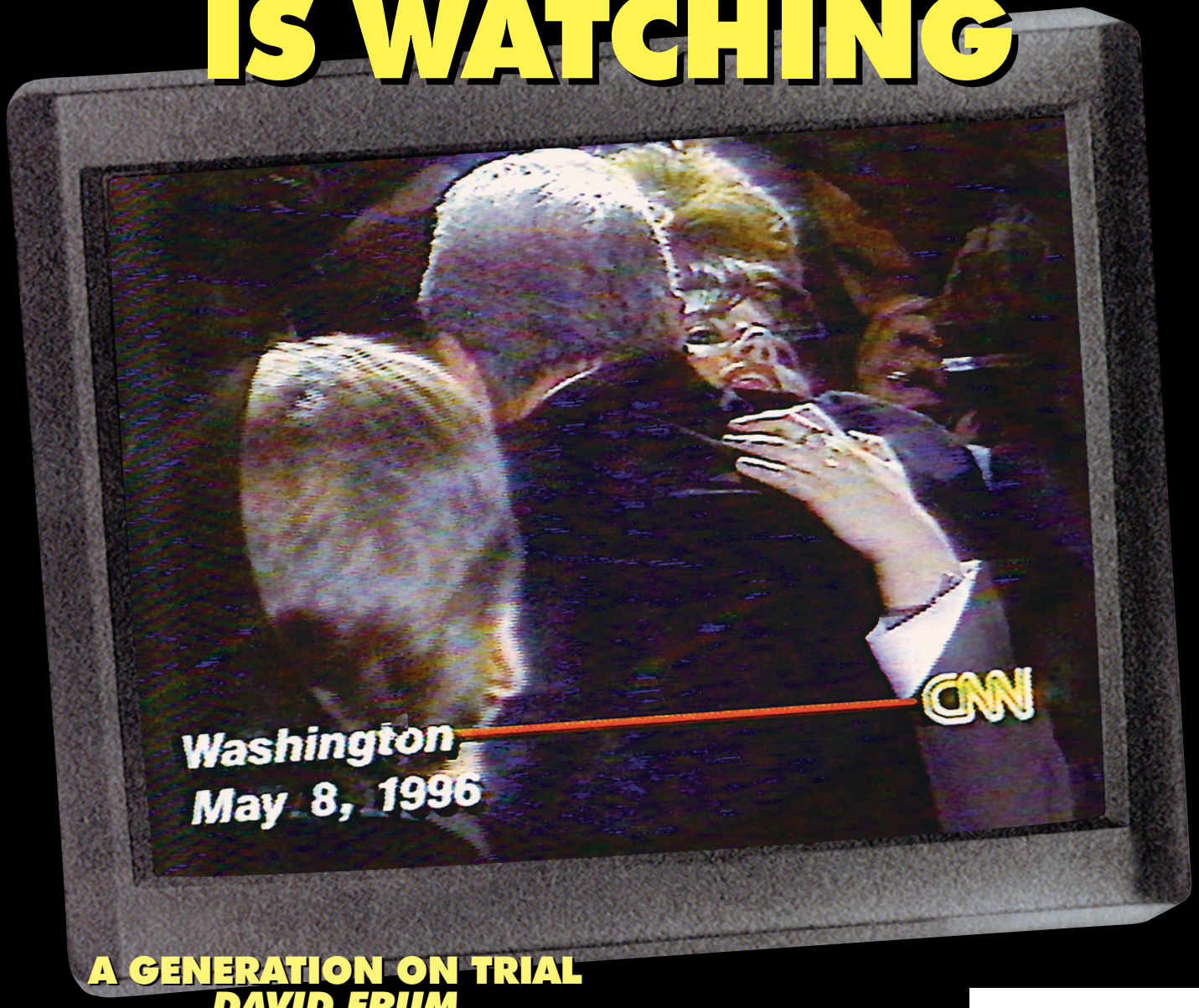
POWER PLAY
IRWIN M. STELZER

THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING



A GENERATION ON TRIAL
DAVID FRUM

FROM THE '60S TO THE '90S
PETER COLLIER

the weekly Standard

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Books & Arts

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A Plague of Independent Counsels

The Scrapbook is no fan of the independent-counsel law. Among other dire effects, it has contributed almost as much as the O. J. trial to the alarming lawyer glut on television. Have you noticed that every network now has a seemingly endless supply of former independent counsels as commentators? Michael Zeldin—who investigated alleged Bush administration tampering with Bill Clinton's passport files—may be on air more than any of them. He's a producer's dream, a former independent counsel who's willing to criticize Ken Starr. A quick Nexis search shows that he's been on *Today* once, on *Nightline* at least twice, and on an array of CNN shows.

Zeldin has criticized Starr on multiple fronts. He doesn't like that Starr offered Linda Tripp immunity; he thinks Starr should have directed Tripp to the FBI; he is even bothered that Starr released a milquetoast statement responding to Hillary Clinton's claims of a "vast right-wing conspiracy."

Zeldin also seems to have more than the usual access to the inner Ken Starr. On CNN, he confidently asserted that Starr doesn't believe Clinton is "morally suitable to be president." Added Zeldin: "This is a challenge to him to essentially expose their moral deficiencies."

No doubt Zeldin's a better than average talking head. But that's not all he is. In 1995, he was a consultant to Bruce Lindsey, the White House's deputy counsel and one of Clinton's closest aides. Indeed, in July 1996 Zeldin published an op-ed piece in the *New York Times* defending Lindsey, who had recently been named by Starr as an unindicted co-conspirator in a Whitewater trial. Starr's decision to name Lindsey, wrote Zeldin, "smacks of politics."

We don't doubt that Zeldin's bookers are aware of this—it's his very willingness to go after Starr that makes him a valued commentator in the Manichaean world of television punditry. Still, you'd think the connection worth noting at a time when everyone's motives are the subject of scrutiny. So far, though, none of his interviewers seems to have deemed it worthy of mention. A vast left-wing conspiracy of silence?

Bon Mot from Malveaux

Julianne Malveaux, a syndicated columnist and television talking head, may be the most . . . venomous pundit in the business. Perhaps you remember the charming comment she made in 1994 about Clarence Thomas: "I hope his wife feeds him lots of eggs and butter and he dies early, like many black men do, of heart disease."

Now she has struck again. On television the other weekend, she made a characteristically repellent observation: "There is no allegation that Monica Lewinsky was raped or coerced. . . . She has not come forward to complain. Something has been coerced out of her. The other woman who came out allegedly yet again—and anything that Linda Tripp says I think you have to look through the filter of a ugly stick she's been beaten with—there's something wrong with that woman, I'm serious."

Let Them Eat . . . at the White House

French monarchs used to reward their favorites by admitting them into the bathroom for private moments. The Clinton White House hasn't yet ascended to that level, but it is still interesting to see which journalists are favored with invitations to state dinners. For example, on February 5, *Newsweek*'s Eleanor Clift and *Time*'s Margaret Carlson were invited to the White House dinner in honor of Tony Blair. This presumably allowed them to spend even more time working on the president's defense with Clinton aide Sidney Blumenthal and all-purpose flaks James Carville and Harry Thomason, who were also guests at the affair.

Still, there were lots of unhappy journalists as several courtiers every bit as loyal as Clift and Carlson were shockingly omitted from the invitee list; particularly upset, say sources close to Blumenthal, were Al Hunt, Frank Rich, Joe Conason, Jane Mayer, and most of the staff of CNN (fondly known in Washington these days as the Clinton News Network). Just as one member of the president's cabinet is always required to stay away from the State of the Union address for reasons of succession, NPR's Nina Totenberg was reportedly excluded from the dinner so that she would be able to defend the president on *Nightline* that evening.

Kenneth Starr: the Early Years

Hillary Rodham Clinton's invitation to journalists to investigate the vast right-wing conspiracy was taken to heart by CNN, which aired a one-hour prime-

Right-Wing Conspiracy Scrapbook

time documentary on independent counsel Kenneth Starr's "strong political background." The portentously titled show, "Investigating the Investigator," was actually very confusing. The creepy music suggested a hit job, but the CNN "investigators" didn't really dig up anything damaging to Starr. After all, everyone knows by now that Starr is a Republican and, like many longtime Washington lawyers, knows lots of interesting people (some right-wing) and has had lots of interesting clients (including tobacco companies).

Oh, but they did dig one thing up. Anchor and legal analyst Greta Van Susteren noted that Starr "does not shy away from his conservative past." Hmmm. What might that be? "The father of three and son of a minister, he regularly teaches Sunday school and he sold Bibles to help put himself through college." Yikes!

Anthony Lewis, Relic

You have to wake up pretty early in the morning to pull off one of those vast, right-wing conspiracy tricks on *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis. In fact, it helps to wake up in 1958.

In Lewis's February 2 column he plumbed the hidden motivations of Whitewater independent counsel Kenneth Starr. Lewis noted that Francis D. Carter, the Washington lawyer Vernon Jordan initially arranged for Monica Lewinsky, had been subpoenaed by Starr. And . . . well, we'll let Lewis explain how the plot unfolds:

"In addition to the Washington grand jury, Mr. Starr has one in Virginia—and the subpoena to Mr. Carter directs him to bring his records there. Why Virginia? Could it have anything to do with the fact that Mr. Carter is black?"

Yeah, that must be it. Starr probably figures that Carter will be more likely to cooperate if he first gets hosed down by the good old boys in the Virginia state po-leece on his way to the courtroom's back door.

On second thought, President Eisenhower would never let that happen, would he?

Ken Starr: the Middle Years

It's worth remembering that Kenneth Starr wasn't always the left wing's idea of a right-wing conspirator. Before his appointment as independent counsel, Starr enjoyed widespread respect and was considered a likely Supreme Court nominee.

In the summer of 1991, Christopher Edley—a Harvard law professor, sometime Democratic official, and now President Clinton's chief adviser on affirmative action—published a piece in the *Washington Post* in which he denounced Clarence Thomas. "If Thomas were white," wrote Edley, "he would not have been nominated." Because "only color could jump him ahead of such conventionally impressive figures as"—as who?—as "Solicitor General Kenneth Starr." Edley went on to say that "if Thomas were still running the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, that agency would file a reverse discrimination suit on behalf of Starr, the disappointed white male."

Then, it was only natural that Starr should come first to a Democratic mind as a Republican figure beyond reproach. Now, however, by investigating a corrupt Democratic administration, Starr has pretty much negated his chances of serving on the high court. But at least, in his old age, he can re-read his pre-Whitewater clippings.

Casual

Showdown on WEIR-AM

If you don't know Dr. Ray Greco, you don't live in the northern tip of West Virginia, and a shame, too. Norman Rockwell couldn't have drawn a more appealing physician—kindly, wise, all-capable. Dr. Greco is also a bit of a radio star, hosting a Saturday-morning call-in show called "Let's Talk Health." The show is a casual, meandering affair, broadcast from a tiny studio near Weirton. It doesn't have a great many listeners, but those it does have are eager and devoted.

About a month ago, I found myself a guest on this program: Dr. Greco is my wife's grandfather. He is also a Democrat, and when I say Democrat, I mean a Democrat like none you've ever met—Tip O'Neill, by comparison, never gave a thought to party. Dr. Greco is not exactly thrilled to have a Republican granddaughter, and, worse, he's got me.

Early on, I took Dr. Greco for a typical Democrat of his generation—something like a present-day Republican. But no. He didn't cross over to vote for Ronald Reagan, and his party identification is more than a habit. He actually believes the stuff, and so do his friends. For them, it's always 1930, with a Hooverville in every park. So I have a little fun with Dr. Greco, as he does with me. The week before I was to join him on the radio, he announced to his audience, "Hang on to your hats, folks, but we're going to have a Republican in here next time. Hate to do it to you."

As we arrived at the studio, I figured we were in for an hour of pleasant banter. I would say provocative things about the local hero, Sen. Bob Byrd, and Dr. Greco would chide me for Republican selfishness and greed. After a time, his friends would call up and say, "We're with you, Ray, but go easy on the boy, would you? He doesn't know any better."

Instead, "Let's Talk Health," on that Saturday, was a cauldron of political bile. It started out mildly enough. Dr. Greco welcomed me to the show, and I said that I was happy to integrate the place—the community had been without philosophical diversity for long enough. "Will you tell your listeners that I don't have horns and a tail?" I asked. Dr. Greco didn't seem so sure. (You may wonder what all this has to do with health, but, as Dr. Greco says, his show is about health "broadly defined," as in, "To vote Republican, you must be mentally ill.")

I might have sparked things just a tad when I said, "How can a decent, patriotic American like you be a Democrat in the Age of Clinton? If Harry Truman were alive today, he'd be a Republican, and so should you." The lone technician in the studio rolled his eyes and shot me a look (not for the last time). The switchboard, normally calm, lit up like a Christmas tree. On a sleepy, wintry morning, I had struck a nerve.

The first call turned out to be the friendliest: "Oh, we like Republicans here in West Virginia," the man said. "We like 'em few and far between." The next caller delivered a wide-ranging diatribe: Dan Quayle was a dunce (still?); Paula Jones was a lying skunk; and Ken Starr was a Republican operative, bankrolled by the hard Right, out to destroy the president (and this was pre-Monica).

As the calls streamed in, I had a mini-revelation: These were political nuts—C-SPAN junkies, probably—who seldom had anybody to talk back to. I was an unexpected opportunity for them, and they were letting me have it with both barrels. Dr. Greco was amused, and a little surprised. Most of his listeners, he had told me, were elderly, interested mainly in pills and twinges. But these screechers were young and combative. Not that Dr. Greco didn't hit hard, too. I tried to keep the conversation light—"Hey, every building I see around here is named for Sen. Byrd and his wife. How about one for the dog?"—but he insisted on inveighing about the haves and have-nots.

On the ride home, as Dr. Greco dialed up his buddies on the car phone, cackling about our performance, I realized that I was exhausted, and a little taken aback. This was an exotic breed of Democrat—unsmitten by race and gender, but convinced of the saving power of big government, and absolutely besotted with Bill and Hillary Clinton. I was glad to get back to Washington that night. The political atmosphere around Weirton had been awfully hot.

And how do Dr. Greco and his gang feel now, in the throes of Monica fever? Rallied and defiant. Dr. Greco told me the other day, "I love the guy, and I love his wife even more." He also mentioned the subject of his next show—"On a Healthy Character Structure." Wish I could tune in.

Jay Nordlinger

SADDAM MUST GO

Like almost all American discussion of what to do about Iraq, Robert Kagan's "Saddam's Impending Victory" (Feb. 2) takes no account of the Iraqi population. He assumes that the outcome depends only on U.S. action. Thus he ignores what may be the key to Saddam's defeat: the internal opposition, almost all elements of which were brought together in the Iraqi National Congress led by Achmad Chalabi, a Baghdadi who is one of the most impressive political leaders of our time.

Kagan concludes that "only ground forces can remove Saddam" and goes on to say that "a successful invasion of Iraq is certainly not beyond the capacities of the American military." Both statements are true, but their implication—that the U.S. Army has the only ground forces that can defeat Saddam—is false. The fact that in 1991 the allies mobilized over 500,000 men to attack Iraq does not indicate even within a factor of four how large a force was needed to defeat Saddam then, much less how big a force is needed today, when Saddam's army is much weaker.

In 1995, infantry forces created by the Iraqi National Congress defeated two armored divisions of the Iraqi army, despite the fact that the United States had prevented the INC from acquiring high-quality anti-tank weapons. Because of the widespread hatred of Saddam in Iraq and his failure to provide well for the Iraqi army since the Gulf War, the Iraqi army will not fight for Saddam. Only the Republican Guard forces can conduct serious military combat. When units of the Iraqi army meet minimal armed resistance, they will defect or fall apart. A few battalions of infantry equipped with modern anti-tank weapons can destroy the whole Iraqi army, one division at a time.

If Iraqis see that the United States has firmly turned away from the idea of supporting the Ba'ath regime in the hope that someone from inside that regime will take power from Saddam, and that the United States has decided that it cannot live with Saddam indefinitely, the INC can again produce

Correspondence

enough ground forces to defeat Saddam—without a single U.S. soldier's landing in Iraq.

Kagan's message about the need for the United States to decide that Saddam must go is correct; but once we make that decision, there are a number of potential instruments that we can use to achieve our objective. One of the advantages of being the sole superpower is that our decision by itself, if serious and recognized, changes in an important way the political and military realities. While the goal of removing Saddam is important enough to justify the use of U.S. ground forces if necessary, there are easier ways to do it that should be tried first.

MAX SINGER
CHEVY CHASE, MD

LIBERTARIAN PEDIGREES

David Frum's review of *Hamilton's Republic* ("Dueling with Hamilton," Feb. 9) was very good. It's important for today's liberals and conservatives to realize their shared roots in the Federalist and Whig parties. Democrats and Republicans today represent the liberal and conservative wings of the intrusive Government Party.

The libertarians, on the other hand, are the true heirs of Jefferson and the Anti-Federalists.

ROBERT K. STOCK
WEATHERFORD, TX

ON AMERICAN POWER

Lawrence Kaplan's "Leftism on the Right" (Feb. 9) is a curious conflation of personalities and ideas. Kaplan seems to think that the perfections of American society are so overwhelming that only the most benighted foreigners would refuse them, and that for these few, American power can be the instrument of enlightenment. But what about those who fear the human-rights arrogance that helped to bring us the Ayatollah in place of the Shah? Or those who suspect Clinton's competence in foreign affairs? Or those who know the follies of "nation-building" in places like Somalia and Bosnia? Or those who are happier to set as a goal a world safe for democracy rather than a world remade in the American image? These are not pale versions of the "blame America first" crowd, but rather careful people not given to mystical enthusiasms about American power.

I found it especially odd to see Walter McDougall's name among Kaplan's miscreants. McDougall may have been casual about accepting the editorship of *Orbis*, for which he has repented at length, but no one who knows him or has read his book could ever mistake McDougall's approach for an animus against American power. As a Vietnam veteran, he surely has an animus against the *misuse* of American power. But that is *very* different from Kaplan's charge.

HARVEY SICHERMAN
PHILADELPHIA, PA

YOW!

My compliments on the fine cover art for your Feb. 9 issue, depicting the president in his role as First Satyr. One question: How did you manage to persuade him to take time from saving children and building bridges to sit for the portrait?

STEVEN LAURIA
SHORT HILLS, NJ

The people of the United States are having difficulty because the established and plausibly alleged repugnant behavior of their president undercuts their pride in their country and its government. We need well-supported criticism of a man and an administration chosen, in two moments of folly, by the people. It is harmful to descend to extreme vulgarity in addressing us. The cover of the Feb. 9 issue was very offensive. It is unworthy of you.

LAWRENCE H. O'NEILL
NEW YORK, NY

CORRECTION

This firm represents MacAndrews & Forbes. We write to advise you of significant errors that appear in your article, "The Revlon Connection" (Feb. 2). These errors include:

1. The article states that Vernon Jordan called Ronald O. Perelman, identified as chairman of Revlon, and that Perelman personally "agreed" to a deal with Webster Hubbell. In fact, Perelman was in no way involved with the retention of Hubbell.

2. The article claims that Jordan spoke with Barry Schwartz, identified as Revlon's general counsel, about helping Hubbell make money "until his trial" and questions Revlon's motives in hiring "a man under indictment." In fact, the retention of Hubbell took place shortly after Hubbell resigned from the Justice Department and before he was under indictment or facing trial. Those matters were in no way addressed by Jordan, Schwartz, or anyone else before Hubbell was retained. The company promptly terminated the Hubbell relationship when informed of Hubbell's indictment and guilty plea.

3. The article states that Hubbell was hired for "public relations work." Hubbell was retained as a lawyer.

The article also contains the innuendo, perhaps unintended, that Schwartz has not cooperated with Judge Starr, the independent counsel. In fact, MacAndrews & Forbes and Schwartz have fully cooperated and will continue to do so. Nothing in the factual record, or in our dealings with Judge Starr's office, supports an inference that the independent counsel is not entirely satisfied with that cooperation.

On behalf of MacAndrews & Forbes, and Mr. Schwartz, we urge you as a matter of fundamental fairness, to correct those misstatements promptly and completely.

THEODORE B. OLSON
GIBSON, DUNN & CRUTCHER LLP
WASHINGTON, DC

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the weekly Standard

No Substitute for Victory

The good news is that some clear thinking about U.S. policy toward Iraq has emerged from the muddle of the past few months. Responsible political leaders, outside the Clinton administration, have come to grips with the iron logic of the current impasse: If you want to save the United States and its allies in the Middle East from the scourge of chemical and biological weapons, you've got to remove Saddam Hussein and his regime from power.

Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott cut through the nonsense last week: "If we're going to do this, let's go all the way. Until we get [Saddam Hussein] out of Iraq, we're never going to get this situation under control." Lott was not alone. In Davos, Switzerland, Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich told the assembled bankers and foreign policy establishment types, "We cannot tolerate a regime in Iraq which will develop weapons of mass destruction . . . [and] we cannot afford just a bombing campaign at the end of which [Saddam] makes weapons of mass destruction." Eighteen prominent officials from past administrations, including former secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld and former undersecretary of defense Paul Wolfowitz, signed a letter on January 26 calling on the Clinton administration to adopt a strategy aimed at taking Saddam down.

Is this Republican posturing, as Sen. Joseph Biden claims? Hardly. The list of Democrats who support decisive military action to remove Saddam from power is growing. Last week, one of the most respected Democrats in the House, John P. Murtha of Pennsylvania, declared, "Air strikes are not going to solve the problem. You have to put people on the ground if you really want to solve the problem." Also publicly on board for a policy of removing Saddam are Sen. Bob Kerrey, Clinton's former CIA director, James Woolsey, and former New York congressman Stephen Solarz. We hope more Democrats will go public in the days to come.

This is what is known as a growing bipartisan consensus, shaped not by politics but by the logic of the situation.

The bad news is that the Clinton administration, faced with the same logic, has gone wobbly. Until last week, President Clinton had repeatedly insisted that his goal was to "deny Iraq the capacity to develop weapons of mass destruction and the missiles to deliver them." This, we were told, was "the bottom line." But meanwhile, Secretary of Defense William Cohen was acknowledging that the president's planned air campaign could not "accomplish the complete elimination of his weapons of mass destruction." And so, at his press conference last Friday, Clinton backed down from his earlier commitment. Now, he says, his goal is merely to "reduce and/or delay" Saddam's capacity to deploy chemical and biological weapons. For how long? A month or two? This is a preemptive surrender by the president.

The facts are clear: Saddam is determined to obtain and someday use weapons of mass destruction, just as he has in the past. An air attack, even a big air attack, will not prevent him from doing this. Some Clinton officials suggest that an air attack could force Saddam to let the U.N. inspectors back into Iraq with full access to all sites. They're dreaming. When the air attack ends, Saddam will demand the lifting of all sanctions and will announce the end of the U.N. inspections regime. Russia, France, and China will back him up, and the U.S. diplomatic position will be weaker than ever. Saddam will be the big winner, well on his way to strategic dominance of the Middle East.

The answer is not to define Saddam's deviancy down, as the president did last Friday. The answer to the present conundrum—as we have been saying for two months—is to remove Saddam from power. That means being ready to use ground troops. We have the forces to do the job—if we deploy them. And the job might be easier than many think. Saddam's army is weak and demoralized. Arab states are more likely to support a military operation that finishes Saddam off than one that leaves him in power, as dangerous as ever.

We know the Clinton administration doesn't want to take this course, but here's a modest suggestion: Shouldn't the administration begin now to build up

our ground forces in the region, if only as a matter of prudence? After all, what if the bombing starts and Saddam responds by trying to inflict serious damage on U.S. troops or our allies in the region? We would surely want to respond quickly and overwhelmingly—and part of that response might well include an assault on the ground.

Or what if the bombing actually starts to undermine Saddam's control in Iraq? What if the Shia population in the south, the Kurds in the north, and the Iraqi National Congress rise up in response to the bombing and make a bid to topple Saddam's regime? Won't we want to be in a position to provide some assistance to them? Or will we watch them be crushed, again, by Saddam's forces? It will take weeks to get sufficient ground forces to the Gulf to meet any of these contingencies—let alone enough for a full-fledged assault.

Michael Ramirez

The time to begin moving those troops to the Gulf is now. After all, soldiers need to be recalled from leave. The reserves and National Guard need to be mobilized. Weapons stocks must be acquired. Transport ships need to be readied. Even if the president hopes never to use ground forces, they should be ready. Failing to move sufficient grounds forces to the Gulf now is plainly irresponsible.

Newt Gingrich put it well last week: "This is a real problem that requires a real solution, and incremental timidity which only punishes Saddam and leaves him in place to build weapons, is a defeat, not a success." President Clinton's policy of incremental timidity is now leading us toward an American defeat. ♦

The Real Linda Tripp

by Andrew Ferguson

FINALLY! WE'RE TWO WEEKS INTO the most sordid presidential scandal in memory, and people have at last roused themselves to a state of moral indignation. A villain has been found—a suitable target for ethical outrage. Is it the president who allegedly used the Oval Office to cheat on his wife with a starstruck 21-year-old intern? Or perhaps a White House staff dedicated to stonewalling and obstructing the search for truth? Maybe the ex-intern's ex-boyfriends who shyly stepped before the cameras to testify to her sexual depravity and habitual lying?

None of the above. The villain of the scandal is . . . Linda Tripp.

Hers is by now a household name, fast becoming a byword for treachery. Early on in the scandal, a Time/CNN poll found that 66 percent of respondents considered Tripp's secret taping of her conversations with Monica Lewinsky "inappropriate." But as the days pass—to judge by the anecdotal evidence of man-on-the-street interviews, overheard conversations, the comments of friends and acquaintances—the judgment seems to have crystallized into something far harsher.

Some members of the press, too, are speaking out against the horror of Tripp. Who knew our nation's newsrooms housed so many moralists? "Could we all

quit calling Linda Tripp anything but the spy-provocateur she is?" thundered *Time*'s Margaret Carlson in a brief hit piece last week. What Tripp did was "transcendentally bitchy," said a writer in the *New Yorker*. Jacob Weisberg in *Slate*, an Internet magazine, called Tripp a "villain of potentially Shakespearean proportions"; plus, said Weisberg, in ethical overdrive, she has "bleached hair," wears "gold jewelry," and possesses a "bitter soul."

"In moral, if not legal terms," Weisberg wrote, taping Lewinsky was "much worse . . . than anything Clinton is accused of doing."

Call this the Eleventh Commandment. And amazingly it now seems to supersede the original Ten: Taping a friend's phone conversations without her knowledge is worse than adultery, which Moses had—mistakenly, I gather—placed at number seven, in between the ones about killing and stealing. To say the least, this is a curious inversion of traditional morality. But they don't make moralists like they used to.

Here I should interject a personal note and a declaration of interest. As it happens, I know—or rather, knew—Linda Tripp. In 1992 I worked at the Bush White House, where for several months she was a secretary to my immediate boss. We worked together on several projects for long and late hours. I liked her very much, and in talking with former colleagues about her over the last couple weeks I've found that my recollections of her are universally shared. Linda was indefatigable, enormously competent, friendly, funny, irreverent, and reliable—easy to like, in other words, and, more important in the cut-throat Bush White House, easy to trust. She was particularly liked by the interns in the White House office of media affairs, whom she oversaw for a time. The ex-interns I talked to still speak of her with great affection. "A mother hen," one of them called her the other day. "Our den mom," said another.

Now, the story of Tripp's motivation in the Lewinsky scandal has come out only in bits and pieces, bundled up in news stories among much more compelling detail about the president's current troubles. And even then the story has often been hopelessly muddled, as in Weisberg's account, or maliciously distorted by the president's media surrogates, as in Carlson's little oped.

Tripp herself isn't talking, and her lawyer, an agricultural-regulations specialist named James A. Moody, is no longer answering his phone. So consider what follows, compiled from news reports and talks with Linda's remaining allies, a kind of secondhand apologia. It's my opinion, and the opinion of others who worked with her, that if Linda Tripp did something transcendentally bitchy, she must have had a good reason for it. And it turns out she did—a couple of them, in fact. One is self-defense. The other will be harder for our current crop of moralists to understand.

Tripp first came to the limelight in 1995, during the D'Amato Whitewater hearings. As a career civil servant, a member of the permanent secretarial pool, she had continued to work in the White House after the Bushies left. She was assigned to the counsel's office, working for Bernard Nussbaum and Vince Foster. She was the last known person to see Foster alive. In front of the D'Amato committee she testified that in early 1993 she had complained to Nussbaum, the president's chief counsel, that Foster was spending "an inordinate amount of time" on personal business for the Clintons.

Having worked for President Bush's counsel, Tripp said this personal work didn't fall under the normal duties of the taxpayer-financed counsel's office. (She was right.) She further alienated the Clintonites when her office e-mail messages were released, in which she described Nussbaum and his lieutenants as "the three stooges." After that, there wasn't much work for Tripp to do at the Clinton White House. When she had a chance for a higher paying job at the Pentagon, in August 1994, she took it.

But her life had already taken a fateful turn, though she didn't know it at the time. On November 29, 1993, Tripp saw an acquaintance, Kathleen Willey, emerge from the Oval Office. Willey apparently told Tripp of a sexual encounter with Clinton.

Fast forward to April 1996. Monica Lewinsky left her job at the White House and moved to the Pentagon, where she and Tripp became friends. In their conversations over the next year and a half, the details of Lewinsky's alleged sexual relationship with Clinton emerged.

Meanwhile, Willey's story reached lawyers for Paula Jones, who were casting about for evidence of the president's dalliances. In the summer of 1997, they subpoenaed Willey. Willey's story had already reached Michael Isikoff of *Newsweek*. According to an uncontradicted statement Tripp released through her lawyer on January 30 of this year, Willey identified Tripp to Isikoff as a witness who could corroborate Willey's account of the encounter with Clinton. Tripp rebuffed Isikoff, who finally showed up at her Pentagon office. According to *Newsweek*'s account, Tripp eventually gave Isikoff an on-the-record version that she apparently thought was exculpatory for Clinton. Willey had not been sexually harassed, Tripp said. To the contrary: After her Oval Office encounter, Willey had appeared "flushed and joyful."

Isikoff's story appeared last August. It quoted Tripp by name. In the same story, Clinton's attorney,

Robert Bennett, said, "Linda Tripp is not to be believed."

Tripp was back in the limelight, whether she liked it or not. But it seems clear she didn't much like it, and she definitely had not sought it. As a veteran of the Clinton White House, she had seen what happens to people who displease the administration. Thanks to Clinton-allied private detectives, we have learned more about the personal lives of Gennifer Flowers and Paula Jones than anyone would ever want to know. Arkansas state troopers who talked out of turn found themselves the subjects of unflattering news stories about their pasts; another was demoted. Billy Dale, fired in the White House travel-office affair, was actually prosecuted and later acquitted for nonexistent malfeasance.


Kent Lemon

And so, by the summer of last year, Tripp found herself in a dangerous position. Contrary to Carlson, Weisberg, and others, the threat of retribution was real. Her job at the Pentagon was a political appointment, without the civil-service protection she had enjoyed at the White House and earlier in her career; she served at the pleasure of the president. She had been publicly identified as someone knowledgeable about Clinton's sex life. Paula Jones's lawyers had let it be known they would subpoena anyone with such knowledge, and Tripp, thanks to Lewinsky, had more knowledge than they realized. By late summer, it was almost inevitable that she would be deposed in the Jones case. And she would very likely be asked an open-ended question as to whether she knew of any other presidential dalliances.

If she lied, she would be committing a felony. If she told the truth about Lewinsky, she would be contradicted by the president and probably by Lewinsky herself, exposing herself to ridicule, the ruin of her reputation, and the loss of her job.

Unless . . . unless she had some corroborating evidence. And that's when Linda Tripp decided to tape her conversations with her friend. The expected subpoena from Jones's lawyers came in December, by which time Lewinsky was explicitly encouraging Tripp to lie, with the implication that the subornation was inspired by Clinton's camp. The taping continued from last fall through the middle of last month, when the FBI wired Tripp for her climactic date with Lewinsky. On January 21, Tripp responded to the Jones subpoena by filing an affidavit that recounted what she knew from her taped conversations with Lewinsky.

If you doubt the wisdom of Tripp's decision, imagine how that affidavit would appear without anything to back it up. But let's leave wisdom aside, for the moment. Was all of this—taping her friend, bringing the tapes to the independent counsel—an act of betrayal? Yes. But it was also an act of self-defense—or, as our new moralists might say, she was covering her ass. This they should understand, since self-interest now seems to be the one universally comprehensible principle of human behavior.

But there was another element to Tripp's series of decisions, which will be harder for the new moralists to grasp. Given the choice of betraying his country and betraying his friend, E.M. Forster said, he hoped he "would have the courage" to betray his country. The main problem with this formulation, of course, is that one's country usually contains one's friends. But Forster's absurd maxim seems to have become a settled pseudo-principle on one side of America's great cultural divide.

Linda Tripp found herself on the other side. "She had a strong sense of rectitude," Isikoff and Evan Thomas wrote in *Newsweek*. She had been an army wife for twenty years, and it showed. Her former interns tell of gentle scoldings over matters of decorum. She believed in the integrity of public service, and, unlike a lot of people she worked with in the Bush administration (including me), she actually liked the government. She loved the White House and felt honored to work there. And what Monica Lewinsky told her filled her with revulsion. The real betrayal, by Tripp's lights, wasn't her own. It was the president's. And she wanted the story out.

You either understand this or you don't. But even if you don't, it seems odd to brand Tripp a moral cretin because she adhered to a time-honored and quite orthodox, if currently unfashionable, hierarchy of values. And it now appears she has adhered to them throughout her life. In the reams of coverage Tripp has received in the last weeks, there has been remarkably little dirt. But that doesn't mean the White House has-

n't been trying. Within days of the scandal's breaking, the anti-Tripp campaign began. Clintonites faxed to friendly reporters a three-page document headlined "Who is Linda Tripp?" Among its earth-shaking revelations, offered in bold type: "TRIPP THOUGHT BY NEIGHBORS TO BE A REPUBLICAN." "TRIPP DESCRIBED AS CONSERVATIVE." That this is the best they can do tells us a great deal about the Clintonites. But it tells us even more about Linda Tripp.

Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

THE GOP STIRS

by Fred Barnes

REP. STEVE BUYER OF INDIANA is not a household name, even among Indiana Republicans. But House speaker Newt Gingrich stood aside on February 4 for Buyer to address a closed-door gathering of all 228 House Republicans. Buyer took on Topic A: the pathetic response by congressional Republicans to the White House sex scandal. President Clinton's denial of a sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky and of having urged her to lie under oath, Buyer said, is "a combination of George Bush's 'Read my lips' and Richard Nixon's 'I am not a crook.'" And it sets the standard, Buyer said, for judging the president's truthfulness. This—trust—is what people care about, not legalities or obstruction of justice or impeachment. "We should reinforce his standard," Buyer insisted, by citing it over and over again and adding that we hope the president is proved to be telling the truth once all the facts are known. "That should be our message," Buyer declared.

Buyer's clever suggestion is important for three reasons. One, it gives Republicans something to say that neither abets a White House coverup nor casts Republicans themselves in a bad light. Two, it reduces the scandal to a single test the public understands and Clinton probably can't meet. Three, it fits with the Watergate-like fashion in which the scandal may be unfolding.

Buyer's advice is not the only sign Republicans are ready to lift their code of silence in dealing with the scandal. When Senate staffers met on February 5, they were given permission to criticize the White House for stonewalling the release of any facts, stonewalling that continued at Clinton's press conference the next day. A week earlier, they'd been instructed to zip their lips, if only because Clinton's popularity in polls had soared after the State of the Union address on January 27.

Republicans desperately need something to say that isn't crassly partisan. In the first days of the scandal, silence was appropriate. The press was rapidly laying out the evidence against Clinton. Besides, Republicans were terrified of being accused by the White House and the media of exploiting the scandal for political gain.

Soon, however, Republican silence was actually aiding the president. All the public heard was Clinton's firm denial and Hillary Rodham Clinton's charge that right-wing conspirators had concocted the case against the president. Monica Lewinsky said nothing publicly, nor did Ken Starr or most Republicans. And when Sen. John Ashcroft of Missouri broke ranks on January 31 and zinged Clinton, he failed to prompt other Republicans to join in. So the Clinton line was unopposed, and Republicans were enablers in the coverup.

Troubled by this, Buyer asked constituents in Indiana for their take on the scandal. All they wanted to know, he told me, was whether Clinton is telling the truth about himself and Monica Lewinsky. If it turns out he lied in claiming there was no sexual relationship, "the American people will not look kindly on that," Buyer said. What makes Buyer's strategy of underscoring truthfulness as the standard so shrewd is that there's already strong evidence Clinton will fall short of it. After all, Monica Lewinsky—both on tape and in what her lawyer has told investigators—has described her relationship with Clinton as sexual.

Lewinsky is bound to tell her story in public. A deal with Ken Starr, the independent counsel, for testimony before a grand jury would not preclude a later appearance before a congressional committee or in TV interviews. When that happens and assuming her story hasn't changed, the standard for truthfulness set by Clinton would be breached. Lewinsky's emergence would be a big enough bombshell to change the dynamics of the scandal, says pollster John Zogby. Then, it might be time for Republicans to step up their criticism, just as Democrats did as Watergate wrongdoing was laid out in Senate hearings. Still, Republicans should be careful who does the criticizing. Few Republicans besides Sen. John McCain of Arizona and Rep. Henry Hyde of Illinois have the credibility to carry it off, according to Zogby.

The truth is, if the scandal goes this far, it probably won't make much difference what Republicans say. The scandal will have a momentum of its own, just

like Watergate. In a comparable period in early 1973, around the time of the State of the Union, Nixon's popularity peaked at 67 percent. In subsequent months, it drifted down to the high 40s, until the next bombshell, the televised Senate Watergate hearings. Within two months, Nixon had dropped 15 to 20 more points in polls, and things never got better for him. Of course, the Clinton sex scandal may be sufficiently different from Watergate that this won't occur. Maybe Clinton's current popularity won't erode over the next few months. Maybe when Lewinsky and others put a public face on allegations against the president, it won't amount to a bombshell. But I'm betting it will.

Fred Barnes is executive editor of **THE WEEKLY STANDARD.**

SAY IT WITH FLOWERS

by Christopher Caldwell

THE DOGGONE, LOWDOWN, country-western-style string o' bad luck that is Gennifer Flowers's love life finally broke two weeks ago. Bill Clinton's January 17 deposition in the Paula Jones case, the *Washington Post* reported, acknowledged at last the love affair that Flowers had claimed on the eve of primary season in 1992. Clinton has denied the liaison ever since—even though Flowers released tape recordings she had made of their then-very-recent phone conversations. On the tapes, Clinton alludes to the affair. "If anyone asks you about it, just *deny, deny, deny*," he says in one memorable exchange. In his recent deposition, Clinton confined the affair to the 1970s; still, it was a vindication of sorts for the "nightclub singer." Flowers was invited on *Larry King Live*, *Sunday Today*, and other national talk shows as a material witness to the president's tendency to issue lying denials. Quite unexpectedly, Flowers was being granted a rematch in the probity battle from which the media had disqualified her in 1992.

On January 30, *Time* posted on its Internet site an account of the Clinton deposition that was more specific. Jones's lawyers had defined sex as "any touching of the genitals, anus, groin, breasts, inner thigh or buttocks" (what is this, a cassoulet recipe?) "with the purpose to arouse or gratify." Clinton replied that, by this definition, he had had sex with Flowers once, in 1977. Since then, he had never made a pass at her; she once made a pass at him. According to a lawyer who has worked on the Paula Jones case, deposing lawyers from the Dallas firm of Rader, Campbell, Fisher & Pyke "would have been very specific about the sex acts involved."

Time's piece only sharpened matters of detail. But members of the press sympathetic to the president began to present the *Time* version as somehow a victory for Clinton. Both Rita Braver and Margaret Carlson viewed it as evidence that, since the *torridity* of the Flowers affair has (by the president's account) been exaggerated, *all* the charges against him were overblown. The focus shifted from Clinton the Adulterer to Flowers the Embroiderer. The Clintons have won on that terrain before. So now, with the president's poll numbers buoyant, his defenders are happily revisiting the 1992 Flowers controversy in hopes of an easy public-relations victory.

How strong is the Clintonites' case? There are two questions that friends of the White House, like the Clinton campaign six years ago, are trying to put in Americans' minds. First, Were Flowers's tapes doctored? And second, Was the voice on the tapes Clinton's?

James Carville took the first tack on *Larry King Live*. He said, "One of the things is—remember, we'll go back to the Gennifer Flowers statement. I think they found that tape was doctored and CNN even found out, like 10 or 12 different places. So you have to be careful."

You sure do. The piece Carville was alluding to was a "Special Assignment Unit" report hosted by Brooks Jackson and aired on January 31, 1992. CNN consulted audio expert Steve Cain, who said he saw four breaks that could indicate doctoring but could have been caused by routine microphone malfunctions. Cain withheld final judgment on the matter, since Flowers would not offer up the original tapes.

Whatever Carville thinks now, he had to know back then that CNN's report had *not* proved the tapes were tampered with. Because days later, the Clinton campaign aired an ad on New Hampshire's WMUR-TV stating that (1) Cain's examination had shown the tapes to be doctored, and (2) President Bush's "Republican operatives were involved in promoting the untrue Gennifer Flowers story to destroy Bill Clinton." That quotation, read by a narrator, was attributed to CNN. CNN's "Ad Watch" (Jackson again) immediately assailed the ad, saying that (1) CNN's segment on the tapes had said no such thing, and (2) the allegation of Republican involvement had been

made not *by* the network but through a journalist's question in the course of a Flowers news conference that the network had simply *aired*.

Clinton campaign consultant Frank Greer then made an astounding claim. The ad, he said, which the campaign had sent to several stations, had run only by accident. "We consciously decided not to run that ad," Greer explained. "We didn't authorize it. A low-level employee put it on 11 o'clock at night." Oh.

Last week, former Clinton aide George Stephanopoulos, now in the role of journalist, addressed the same point on *Larry King Live*, citing a different authority. "The tape was damaging, but it was also doctored," said Stephanopoulos. "KCBS in 1992 showed that the tapes were doctored, and that's what we said in 1992." KCBS, like CNN, did not have access to the original tapes. But its expert stated unequivocally that the tape was "selectively edited" and was "suspect at best." Unfortunately for Stephanopoulos's case, the audio expert involved was southern California private eye Anthony Pellicano, whose recent clients have included Michael Jackson, O.J. Simpson, and—surprise!—the president himself. According to the *New York Post*'s Andrea Peyser, Pellicano has a big role in the Monicagate scandals, tailing rogue book agent Lucianne Goldberg and other Clinton foes to help slap down new sex rumors as they arise.


Kent Lemon

On the second question—of whether that was Clinton's voice on the tape—Hillary Clinton professed herself uncertain. "Who can tell?" she said. "I don't have any idea. But he's talked to her!" Then-New York governor Mario Cuomo—whom the voice on the tape described as a "mean son of a bitch" who "acts like" a mafioso—had no doubt that that voice was Clinton's. And since ethnic slurs were more likely than adultery, apparently, to cost him the presidency, Clinton called Cuomo immediately to *apologize*. "If the remarks on the tape left anyone with the impression that I was disrespectful to either Governor Cuomo or Italian-Americans, then I deeply regret it," Clinton said. That vintage Clintonism wasn't good enough for Cuomo, who responded, "What do you mean, *If*? If you're not capable of understanding what was said, then don't try apologizing." (Cuomo later accepted the apology.)

That apology dispels any doubt that the tapes are genuine. And they leave us with only two possible conclusions. Either the affair with Gennifer Flowers was a longstanding one that lasted until very close to the 1992 presidential race. If so, and if the accounts of his deposition are accurate, the president lied under oath.

Or the nation's leader, facing the biggest challenge of his life, spent hours on the phone confiding in a floozy he hardly knew and rambling on delusionally about a love affair that didn't exist, even though the woman had been hounding him for sex since the 1970s.

If he did that, then we're in worse trouble than we thought.

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Is Asia Still Melting?

by David M. Smick

"Stocks Soar on Optimism over Asia," announced a page-one headline in last week's *Washington Post*. Anyone would think the Asian crisis was all but over, and the U.S. economy safely set to grow at 2-3 percent this year, and the stock market primed to whip past 10,000. . . . Well, don't bet the ranch on it yet.

Actually, an eerie silence hangs over Washington regarding Asia. Officials, including those at Robert Rubin's Treasury, know that no econometric model can fully predict the "negative dynamic" that may be triggered by the Asian meltdown. The great unknown is the effect on global confidence as the billiard ball of trou-

ble ricochets through the international system. One particular unspoken fear is financial instability in Russia and perhaps Brazil. Meanwhile, the signs in the United States are not as reassuring as they appear. The so-called U.S. Purchasing Managers Survey—the compendium of early-warning data that Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan loves so much—shows a peak in confidence last August and a fairly continuous slide since. Washington may be enjoying an artificial calm, with the full effects of the Asian turmoil just over the horizon.

As a matter of common sense, we should assume the worst. Valued in terms of the U.S. dollar, Asia's total GDP is roughly half today what it was six months ago when the crisis hit the front pages. Most of the companies in the affected countries are carrying debts far larger than they can ever repay.

Take Indonesia. Its currency is worth roughly one-sixth of its value against the dollar since last June, and half since the first IMF rescue plan was introduced. Paying debts under these conditions is next to impossible.

True, IMF officials are still holding discussions with the Indonesians, who respond with all the suitable assurances. The reality, however, is that Indonesia, fourth most populous country in the world, is being written off by the international financial community. Many experts half expect a military takeover, most likely under the cover of ending the inevitable violence against monied Chinese residents. Is anyone surprised that the Indonesians promise the IMF virtually everything but deliver very little? Clearly, in any debt-restructuring process, the advantage goes to debtors who come to the table with cash. So the Indonesians are hanging on to their dough.

It would be comforting to think that Indonesia is a special case, with the rest of Asia quickly coming back. Again, don't bet on it. Perhaps the primary reason the Asian economies grew so robustly was the high level of capital investment, more than half of it from overseas. That funding has all but vanished.

Even in Korea, whose strategic importance wins it the attention of the IMF, the U.S. Treasury, and the Japanese, the outlook is murky. Whether the labor unions will accept the restructuring plan put forward by the IMF and the banks remains a major question. Indeed, simply to cajole the American banks into rolling over their Korean debt, U.S. bank regulators have been forced to relax their standards. But the big story involves the German banks, major holders of Korean debt and, more significantly, of huge equity stakes in the giant failed Korean merchant banks. The German banks for technical reasons probably cannot participate in an IMF bailout scheme that includes Korean taxpayer guarantees. They'll be big losers, which is bad news for the already soggy European economy. With Tokyo still not committing to any significant further fiscal stimulus even as its economy plummets, Uncle Sam is more than ever forced into the role of global locomotive.

Notice, too, that U.S. officials are silent about China. That's because China is in the midst of a policy war: the sophisticated financial elite (officials who understand the futility of currency devaluation and who talk regularly to the international community) versus the domestic politicians (who have to deal with the negative fallout from the many failed state enterprises in the north and thus favor an immediate devaluation). How this will be resolved is uncertain, but the signs coming out of China are not good. According to senior Taiwan representatives, the Chinese are desperate for capital, which makes a devaluation of the currency (and thus adjustment of the Hong Kong peg) a real possibility. And make no mistake: That development would be catastrophic for Asia.

AS A MATTER OF COMMON SENSE, WE SHOULD ASSUME THE WORST. IN DOLLARS, ASIA'S GDP IS WORTH ROUGHLY HALF WHAT IT WAS SIX MONTHS AGO.

To be sure, some Asian stock markets have rallied recently. But these are extraordinarily thin markets, rising from a basement many stories below the street. Note too that if a market drops 50 percent, as Asia's have done, and then rallies 50 percent, it has still lost 25 percent of its value—which is why a quick Asian comeback is unlikely.

Washington remains calm and confident, oblivious to the fact that the American economy often looks strongest just before a slide. At the beginning of 1989, for example, virtually the entire Washington policy community saw a big economic surge ahead. The January and February employment data that year were explosively strong. The Fed sensed it had no choice but to raise short-term interest rates. In retrospect, it is clear that policymakers managed to act at the precise moment the economy was peaking. The Fed, looking a bit awkward, was easing by June.

Today, a lot of the same policy wizards are predicting 3 percent growth for 1998 and see the United States as largely insulated from Asia. Let's hope they're right.

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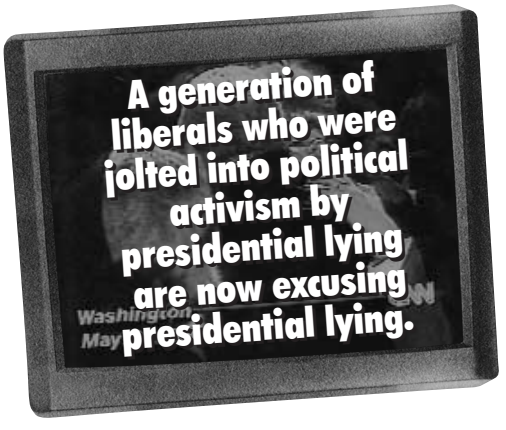
A Generation on Trial

By David Frum

Ninety years ago, Max Beerbohm drew a series of cartoons titled "The Young Self Meets the Old Self" about the strange twists in the lives of the famous and near-famous of his day. Max, we miss you now! A generation of young liberals who were jolted into political activism by presidential lying are now excusing presidential lying. Passionate young reformers who once despised Richard Nixon for his stonewalling and obstruction of justice now chuckle at the success of Bill Clinton's stonewalling and obstruction of justice. Militant feminists who once raged at lecherous middle-aged men who treated the young women in their employ as walking sex toys now rally to defend a middle-aged man who treats young women in his employ as walking sex toys. Thirty years ago, earnest psychologists would appear on television to explain that the baby boomers wore denim because it was dyed blue, and blue symbolized honesty. Today, the first baby boomer president bids fair to be the most shameless liar ever to hold the office.



This is a moment of testing for the once-earnest, once-young liberals who came of age politically between 1968 and 1974. Until now, the members of that political cohort have championed the Clintons and condoned their ethical lapses. Faced suddenly with the most indisputable evidence to date of presidential lawbreaking, these supporters of the president must decide what to do. Thus far, an amazing number of them have decided to shut their eyes and hush their qualms.

If the Clinton apologists were motivated by cynical political calculation, one at least could make some kind of sense of it. And some of them undoubtedly have entered into a conscious Faustian bargain, accepting the Clintons' dubious behavior as the necessary price of liberalism's political success. Since 1960, the Democratic party has nominated five upright men for president—Humphrey, McGovern, Carter, Mondale, and Dukakis—and three scoundrels—Kennedy, Johnson, and Clinton. From an electoral point of view, the conclusion seems obvious: As the weaker of the two political parties, the Democrats cannot afford to be over-scrupulous about their political morality.

Still, this depth of cynicism is rarer than one supposes, even in Washington. Existential characters in old-fashioned novels can knowingly do evil in order that good may come of it, but few of us are existential characters in old-fashioned novels. Instead, the Clintons' defenders in the political world are splitting up into three broad groups, each formed around a different excuse or justification. The first group are the gullible. If Bill Clinton says something, it's good enough for them: They fervently believe there must be some perfectly innocent explanation for all those midnight telephone calls and secret office visits. It goes without saying that this group is not very large. The second are the shell-shocked. They don't know what to think, other than to hope that the case will remain murky enough to permit them to go on more or less believing in the president without looking or sounding either stupid or amoral. This is, for the moment, probably the largest group. And then there is the third group—still small, but growing fast. It's the group that is actually willing to excuse presidential lying.

Writer Wendy Kaminer offered a fascinating version of this line of defense on National Public Radio's "Morning Edition" last week. "Why should we hold the president to standards few of us meet consistent-

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ly?" she asked. " I'm not saying that the president's lies and infidelity don't matter. They must matter a lot to Hillary and Chelsea Clinton. But why should they matter to voters?" In *Slate* magazine, former Dukakis campaign manager Susan Estrich makes a similar point: "Should allegedly finding comfort, release, satisfaction, peace in the arms of a beautiful 21-year-old count for more than balancing the budget?" Hendrik Hertzberg, senior editor of the *New Yorker*, urges us to distinguish like grown-ups between "pernicious falsehoods aimed at covering up crimes against humanity and, say, feeble fibs aimed at wiggling out of some horribly embarrassing but essentially victimless and legal piece of human stupidity."

This calmness in the face of probable presidential perjury leaves critics of the president speechless and slack-jawed. The Clinton scandals long ago exhausted our capacity for astonishment. The old Iran-contra shock troops, led by Cadet Leader Anthony Lewis, are executing with Prussian precision a sudden and uniform about-face on the merits of the independent-counsel law. The president's feminist allies are carrying on a bizarre imitation of the most mercenary complaisant wife of 50 years ago ("Yes he plays around a little, but he gives me everything I ask for—look at this lovely daycare program he gave me on our anniversary . . ."). And the pious, good-government Democratic party of Ralph Nader and William Proxmire is reverting before our eyes to the old Girls and Graft ethics of James Farley's Tammany Hall.

Hypocrisy has always been liberalism's besetting vice. But the utter collapse of the good-government impulses that first summoned into politics the baby-boom liberals who now defend the Clintons—that's a colossal phenomenon that seems to require some larger explanation. Time was, when Charles Reich, the author of *The Greening of America* and a law professor at Yale when Bill and Hillary studied there, could denounce over-whipped peanut butter as an imposture and a deceit; today, the Clintons are toying with the idea that lying under oath is a perfectly reasonable response to pesky and impertinent inquiries. How in the world did we get from all the way over there to over here? How did so many of the most self-consciously pure members of the generation that regards itself as the most idealistic in history wind up in the service of two such dubious characters as Bill and Hillary Clinton?

Perhaps the answer is contained in the question. The story of Bill and Hillary Clinton is a generational story. Bill Clinton is neither an ideological figure like Ronald Reagan and Hubert Humphrey, nor a strong partisan like Lyndon Johnson and Bob Dole. He never calls himself a liberal, he seldom has a good word to say for any other Democrat. He is instead the first president to grant an interview to MTV to discuss his taste in pop music. He is, above all, a representative of his generation.

One of the first books about the Alger Hiss case suggested in its title that the case really put "a generation on trial." Hiss attracted defenders not so much because his story was believed—like Clinton's, his version of events flew in the face of the evidence—as because his experience resonated with that of a cohort of people who had been young and politically active in the 1930s. When Hiss loyalists insisted that their man was "innocent," they meant in many cases not that they rejected Whittaker Chambers's charges as false, but that they did not see Hiss's actions as culpable: For them, a flirtation with communism in the 1930s was a perfectly reasonable—indeed noble—response to the failure of capitalism in the Great Depression. Hiss may have gone a little farther than they had. He may well have gone too far. But it was hard to say so out loud. For if Hiss were acknowledged as a traitor, did it not imply that those who never quite went as far as he did, but shared his general outlook, were tainted to some degree with treason, too?

Is it possible that something similar is at work in the case of the Clintons? It's easier to keep calm at Bill Clinton's lies in the Monica Lewinsky case if you think that the behavior covered up by the lie—a series of casual sexual encounters with a series of women not his wife—was not especially wrong. And that, it appears, is what a good many members of the president's generation do think.

The one way that the generation born between 1946 and 1963 differs from all the generations born before—and perhaps from the generation born afterward—is in its faith in radical and untrammeled sexual liberty. You can track it in public-opinion polls. In 1972, when a child born in 1950 was 22, the 18 to 23-year-old group is radically more sexually permissive than its elders. In 1982, when that boomer turned 32, it is Americans under 35 who are sharply more sexually liberal than everyone else. And so on down the years. Today, the boomers are in their 40s and 50s, and the morals of their intellectual and cultural leaders set the tone for the larger society. Few of them have used that freedom as fully as Bill Clinton, of course, just as few of the young radicals of the New Deal era drifted as close to Moscow as Alger Hiss. But is it not possible that Clinton's most ardent defenders see in Clinton something of themselves? And understand, uncomfortably, that they cannot condemn him without condemning great chunks of their own lives? Might they

not see, as Hiss's defenders saw, that if their man's actions are seriously wrong, then their own approximations of their man's actions might be adjudged wrong too?

As these libertine boomers see it, criticism of Clinton is the first step on a slippery slope. You start with an apparently sensible restriction—married presidents shouldn't have sex with government employees in the Oval Office—and the next thing you know, it's back to Nathaniel Hawthorne. Just as the ACLU sees a Frosty the Snowman in front of City Hall on December 24 as the first step toward theocracy, so the president's defenders fear that condemning the Lewinsky affair will ineluctably lead straight back to Puritan New England.

Make no mistake: The defense of Clinton's right to lie about his affair with Lewinsky is not, as some of his defenders optimistically suggest, a defense of "privacy." If it turned out that Clinton were in the habit of making racist jokes in the company of two or three old friends, the privacy defense would not avail him. If he had lied under oath to cover up an improper deduction on his theoretically private tax return, Kaminer, Estrich, and Hertzberg would lift not a finger for him. The right to privacy? This is a White House in which you're not allowed to smoke.

No, what's at stake in the Lewinsky scandal is not the right to privacy, but the central dogma of the baby boomers: the belief that sex, so long as it's consensual, ought never to be subject to moral scrutiny at all. That belief is for large numbers of the baby boomers as fundamental and precious a part of their personality as the nostalgic memory of youthful Marxism was to the generation born between 1900 and 1915. Over the years, they have lost a lot: They have discarded their old disdain for material possessions and their former hopes for radical political change; they have made peace with big business and big law firms; they have been obliged to apologize for their drug use to their children and for their anti-military rhetoric to their parents. But the one thing they have never lost and are not prepared to lose now is their antipathy to the rigors and restrictions of the pre-1965 sexual code. Whatever else they are prepared to jettison as they age, that is the one thing they are determined to keep.

Their president feels the same way. He may have disappointed his supporters on welfare, on the 1995 budget agreement, and on free trade. But he has never given an inch on abortion, and the one issue on which he has defied the polls and staked out a principled position regardless of political risk is gay rights. Where it matters most to his followers, he has kept faith. Now they are keeping faith with him—no matter how badly they must stain their reputations or strain their consciences to do it. It's a sad end to the vaunted idealism of the Class of 1968. But then again, perhaps it is an end that could have been predicted from the start. ♦

From the Sixties to the Nineties

By Peter Collier

What does the president think about when he thinks about Bill Clinton? Part of the answer can be inferred from those well-practiced gestures—the sympathetically sucked-in lip and earnestly wrinkled forehead; the shades and sax while rocking out on the Arsenio show: *I'm so damned cool!*

More specifically—*I'm the coolest president since John F. Kennedy*. Bill Clinton still gets a particular gleam in his eye when he recounts what has become his most magic (and mythomaniacal) moment: that time at the national conference of Boys' Nation in 1963 when he, one of the best and brightest of student government, got a chance to shake the hand of JFK.

Unlike Hillary's weird attempts to arrange a séance with Eleanor Roosevelt, this was real contact. It was the moment the flesh was made word; when one New Democrat met another in a harmonic convergence and the torch was passed. It was the prophetic encounter that placed the sword in the stone so that it could be

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withdrawn 30 years later.

When the president thinks about Bill Clinton, in other words, he thinks about the second coming, so to speak, of John Kennedy.

Two presidents with youth and vigor and good looks; one who brought modern imagery to presidential politics and one who made image everything in the first postmodern presidency. One can well imagine the ghost of JFK watching with admiration as Clinton stands on Omaha Beach during the D-Day celebrations of 1994 and, after a blank moment when he can't think of anything to say, kneels down and arranges some rocks in the shape of a cross and appears to offer up a little prayer. *Not something I would have done, but god, he's really good!*

Beneath the surface plausibility of the comparison, of course, it is a case, as Hamlet might have said, of Hyperion to a satyr. There is at least as much distance between Kennedy and Clinton as the distance Lloyd Bentsen spied between Kennedy and Dan Quayle. After all, JFK rushed to serve his country, while Clinton was AWOL during the war his idol began. JFK's personality was literary and deeply contoured with irony; he was bored to death by the high-tech policy talk that turns Clinton earnest. True, both men like the idea of breasty women appearing periodically during the work day and saying, "Reporting for sex, sir." But for JFK, the act had a melancholy edge; it was a way of pinching himself on the arm and reminding himself that he was still alive after all those doctors had told him from the age of 10 onward that he was going to die. For Clinton, the act appears to be a no-fault sixties activity, a spasm of self-congratulation enjoyed by someone who has never gotten over the fact that he is a member of the first generation to enjoy sex without guilt and the last one to enjoy it without fear.

It is also the case that Washington in the nineties resembles Camelot much less than it does Dogpatch, and the steep descent from there to here can be seen, among other ways, in the replacement of Robert Frost by Maya Angelou, Segovia by Streisand, Schlesinger by Sidney Blumenthal, and Malraux by Michael Lerner

But all these differences notwithstanding, there is a significant point of contact between the first president of the sixties and the first sixties president. More than any other occupants of the White House before or between them, these two men believe that the rules—not just the political rules, but the daily rules we live by—are for suckers.

This is what the current crisis is all about, after all: the rules. It is about whether lying and cheating is permissible in a president; whether there is an allowable chasm between public virtue and private vice; whether character counts in leaders as well as in the nations they lead.

The most serious charge against Clinton, more serious than the particulars of his fumbled amours, is that in his ethical vacuity he has dumbed down our moral standards so completely that anyone even raising these issues runs the risk of being dismissed as a Mrs. Grundy. If Clinton survives the Lewinsky-Starr tag team, he will have placed us in a world where it doesn't matter if a Paula Jones has a grievance, as long as Dow Jones is happy; a world where a making-the-trains-run-on-time form of leadership is the best we can hope for; a world where the moral authority capable of summoning us to great sacrifice or great achievement is no longer part of the job description for the Oval Office.

The source of John Kennedy's disdain for conventional morality was close to home. His father had decided, in making his explosive move out of a grim immigrant past, that the rules were a Brahmin plot to keep the Irish Catholics down. To free himself from this oppression, as he saw it, Joseph Kennedy freed himself from the rules themselves, rules which held, for instance, that you didn't bring your doxies to the dinner table and force your wife and children to make small talk with them. This renegade morality was transmitted to his sons. While JFK may have questioned other aspects of his patrimony, as all who have studied him know and as Seymour Hersh has proved, he never questioned the fact that in his private existence he was beyond good and evil. When he captured the presidency, it was as an outsider who had no qualms about using his own amoral improvisations in the gray areas where the private becomes public.

Unlike JFK, Clinton had no primal father to give him a secret outlaw code; but Clinton did grow up in Hot Springs, with a precarious handhold on a middle-class existence. He forced his way up, becoming one of those kids who run for class president in the first grade and never stop running after that; one of those people who need to have their status ratified by a periodic show of hands all the rest of their lives. *I am elected, therefore I am.*

In any other era, Bill Clinton might have been another of those student-government nerds we all scorned—one of those natural born careerists who annoy us with their banal defenses of the system and make us want to rebel just to get even with them. But the sixties affected his life more profoundly than being a poor boy from Hope did. With its seductive vision of no-fault liberation and the possibility of having one's

cake and eating it too, the sixties gave Clinton a way of becoming cool. Even more significantly, the sixties gave him the authority to defy the rules whose strict upholder he otherwise might have been.

For him and for all the other Clintonites-in-training who passed through this crucial decade, a future opened in which they could both do their own thing and make it—in which they could use weasel words to prove that they never crossed the line between inhaling and not inhaling, inserting and not inserting, soliciting contributions and not soliciting contributions. They could participate emotionally in the radicals' trashing of the system—a web of imperialist plots, white skin privileges, and bourgeois hang-ups—while still maintaining their *viability* by an insistence that they were not revolutionists but *youthful idealists* using their *moral passion* to rescue America from its inherent evil and *build a better world*.

Archive Photos

Someday, son, all this will be yours: Bill Clinton shakes JFK's hand in 1963.

The notion that the sixties was a time when a generation arose to rescue the system from itself is crucial to Clinton and his cadres. It is their equivalent of a foundation myth. For it is their youthful idealism—now ripened and mature—that distinguishes them from the rest of us, and especially from what Hillary calls the "vast right-wing conspiracy" that would do anything to bring them down. (In this adjective *vast* we hear again the authentic voice of a generation, its narcissism and grandiosity, and also its fanaticism, echoing as it does Joseph McCarthy's "conspiracy so immense.") The fact that they are fighting still—as they did 30 years ago—that cabal of selfishness and greed which *is* America, is what gives them the right to ignore the rules. After all, the suckers who follow the rules were also the ones who never bought into the radical chic, who never paid lip service to a slogan like "Bring the War Home," and who just stood around while *they* proved themselves fighting against Vietnam and Watergate, racism and environmental holocaust, the oppressions of family and of gender and what in time, as language too yielded to their mindset, would be called "heteronormativity."

Bill Clinton arrived in Washington with those big sixties ideas—gays in the military and a mammoth federal health plan—and found that The Other voted in larger numbers than his *bien pensant* elites. So he had to make the best of a bad thing and adopt anti-sixties ideas such as a balanced budget and welfare cuts to survive. But he could take heart from the fact that, if it was everywhere in retreat in the political culture, the sixties was everywhere triumphant in the popular culture, its oppositionalist mentality having entered educational curricula, altered sexual mores and family life, changed the media and the entertainment industry, and encouraged minority groups to feel like victims.

His support was always more cultural than political, and Clinton knows it. The language of those year-end Renaissance weekends was primarily an inside-the-Beltway language, but it was also a language of the multicultural university, principal site of the sixties-in-the-nineties, whose new orthodoxies about diversity, about race, class, gender, and, above all, multiculturalism itself, seeped into Washington for the first time in this administration.

Hillary provided a halfway house where the clichés of women's studies shelter for a moment as they make the transition from the university to the broader culture. And the first lady, more of a child of the sixties even than her husband, plays this role apparently without the slightest awareness that the *deal* she has made in her personal life says far more about women

than all the glass ceilings and earnest efforts to revive Ophelia.

Bill might not know all the academic shoptalk about "indeterminacy of meaning," but he is on the same semantic wavelength as those who do. Consider his advice to Gennifer Flowers, which he appears to have repeated in so many words to Monica Lewinsky: "If they ever hit you with it, just say 'no' and go on. There's nothing they can do. . . . If everybody's on record denying it, you've got no problem." Here is a blueprint for the deconstruction of the idea of objective truth that would please Jacques Derrida, a formula for the social construction of an alternative reality that would do Michel Foucault proud.

This administration is a place where denatured New Left politics meets denatured New Age therapeutics. The Clintonites talk about *reinventing* and *empowering* themselves. They can get misty-eyed at the drop of a microphone and use a sister's death or a mother's difficulty to advance their plans. And now, having done their part to trivialize the national political language and Oprahize the national dialogue, they complain of the media feeding frenzy in the waters they have bloodied. And yet the media, tabloidized and rumor-mongering, is the one place left where the important question is asked. It is not a question about competence or even about morality. It is more routine: *What really happened?*

Bill Clinton has always wanted to be a reincarnation of John Kennedy. He must dream of the loving camera presenting him to future generations in evocative slow motion, as film of an earlier era continues to present Jack to us. And yet it is wise to be careful what you wish for. For all these years an icon of grace and class, JFK has now been sighted definitively on the dark side of Camelot, a place where he is in the arms not only of a Mafia moll but also of various prostitutes giving and receiving from him venereal diseases; a place where reckless fornication was accompanied by reckless statecraft, including the operation, as the much-vilified LBJ once asserted, of a Murder Inc. in the Caribbean.

The dark side of Dogpatch, when it is uncovered, may be equally sinister. But maybe not. Perhaps it will only be a place where the Muzak is Elvis but the characters are from a Mozart comic opera; where the figure in the Oval Office accepts gifts from Chinese visitors and occasionally goes into the seraglio to select one of the giggling girls guarded by a stately factotum named Jordan. ♦

Power Play

The High Stakes of Electric Utility Deregulation

By Irwin M. Stelzer

With sex dominating the news, electric-utility reform is not exactly the stuff of conversation on the Washington cocktail circuit. And with reason: It is more complicated than airline and telecom deregulation were, and it relates to a service that most people take for granted. But consider this: If the politicians get this one right, you might find another $300 or so in your pocket every year.

For electric-utility deregulation is the biggest-bucks issue to hit the Congress in years. The dollars at stake dwarf the sums involved in most of the disputed items in the president's new budget. America's residential consumers pay their electric companies $90 billion per year to keep the lights on, heat their homes and water, and power their electric appliances. The nation's factories run up annual electric bills of $47 billion. And those nice, well-lit, and delightfully year-round temperate malls and shops pay utilities $68 billion to keep their commercial establishments attractive to shoppers.

Providing all this service are some 3,200 electric utilities, 700 of which operate generating stations, with the balance distributing electricity purchased from others. Some of these are huge companies, operating in many states; others are tiny companies serving a single town or city. More than three-quarters of the industry's output comes from the 244 of these compa-

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nies that are investor-owned. The remainder are owned by the federal government (the Tennessee Valley Authority is perhaps the best known) or by smaller government entities (the New York Power Authority is among the largest of these). The investor-owned segment of the industry spends at least $20 billion a year on construction and currently has almost $400 billion invested in generating plants, transmission lines (those huge wires you see strung from towers as you drive through the countryside), and distribution lines (smaller wires running from poles or underground directly into your house).

All in all, well over $200 billion passes from customers to electric utilities each year, about the same flow of dollars that consumers hand over to the various providers of long-distance and local telephone service. If the restructuring of the industry proceeds along the lines of any one of the dozen bills already in the congressional hopper, savings to consumers from increased competition might amount to anywhere from $20 billion to $60 billion annually, the latter figure three times the cost of all the new social programs the president is proposing in his budget. Little wonder that the legislative battle is shaping up to be a bonanza for the denizens of Gucci Gulch, and a mouth-watering source of campaign contributions for the relevant committee chairmen.

Until very recently, electric utilities were regarded as natural monopolies. After all, no one wanted two or more companies stringing parallel wires around the neighborhood, or competing to dig up the streets. And generating plants were thought to operate on the bigger-is-better principle, or, as economists put it, to possess economies of scale that made it cheaper to produce electricity in plants so large that each market had room for only one seller.

In order to obtain the benefits of these economies of scale, governments granted electric companies franchises to operate as monopolies in designated geographic areas, often a city. Thus, Consolidated Edison became the exclusive supplier of electricity in New York City, and Pepco the sole supplier in the District of Columbia. Since monopolists with legal protection from challenges by other companies that might want to offer better service or lower prices have a license to exploit consumers, the franchise grant was accompanied by regulation of the rates the companies would be allowed to charge and the profits they would be permitted to earn.

There is wide disagreement about just how well this system of regulated monopoly worked. Critics contend that the utilities soon captured the regulators and, using their superior access to cost and other information, persuaded them to tolerate inefficiency and high rates. Defenders of the regulatory regime concede that it was far from perfect—as a competitive regime also often is—but that it did provide a reliable supply of electrical energy to a growing nation at prices that generally rose less rapidly than the consumer price index.

There is no longer any need to adjudicate that debate: All parties agree that the old regulatory system is no longer viable, the victim of intellectual and technological revolutions. The first of these revolutions was the realization that many industries long thought to be natural monopolies, requiring government control of entry and regulation of prices, would perform better if Adam Smith's invisible hand were substituted for the heavy hand of the regulator. The battle over airline deregulation in the late '70s brought leading academics into congressional hearing rooms in an educational campaign so effective that even Ted Kennedy came to understand—at least temporarily—that competitive markets serve consumers better than the best-intentioned regulators.

Airlines were only the first to be freed from regulation, with a resultant decrease in fares to non-business travelers that led to an explosion in air travel. People who never even contemplated boarding a plane found that they could afford to visit Grandma in Florida or take a vacation trip to the beaches of Hawaii in planes operated with safety records that steadily improved.

Then came the deregulation of natural-gas production and long-distance telecommunications. Both industries reacted to the bracing winds of competition by lowering prices and increasing the range of services available to customers. The intellectual case for deregulation was thus reinforced by experience: Markets worked, just as the academic economists had said they would.

The second revolution that paved the way for current efforts to deregulate the electric industry—or, more precisely, the generating segment, the wires still being regarded as natural monopolies—was a dramatic change in technology and in the price of one of the fuels used to generate electricity, natural gas. Technological advances resulted in small generating stations that in many places are every bit as efficient as, if not more efficient than, the big coal and nuclear stations that long provided most of the nation's electrical energy. These smaller plants are run on natural gas, which has become progressively cheaper, in part because of the additional supplies that came to market when natural-gas prices were freed from regulation—a case of deregulation of one product (natural gas) facilitating the deregulation of another (electricity).

No longer is the generation of electricity a natural monopoly, with each plant so large that only a single seller can operate successfully in the market. Now, small entrepreneurs can and do build plants and offer the electricity they produce to customers once captive of their local utility. Indeed, in recent years non-utilities have been adding about as much to the nation's capacity to produce power as have traditional electric utilities. Worst of all, from the point of view of the old-line companies, these newcomers can sell electricity, profitably, at prices as low as one-half to one-third of the prices existing companies must charge in order to recover the capital they have sunk in their nuclear plants.

Needless to say, companies that own these nuclear plants are not happy at the prospect of having to meet this competition, a move that would involve writing off billions of dollars of investment. Nor are those of the industry's six million shareholders who hold stock in companies with large sunk investment in non-competitive plants—a group of owners that includes enough widows and orphans to warrant the attention of legislators, and the sympathy of policymakers.

And they have a reasonable argument for protection against such financial devastation. In return for their monopoly franchises, electric utilities accepted an obligation to serve all customers: Throw the light switch, and you get light, even in areas where new houses are going up by the score. Unlike the telephone companies, which always accepted that during peak demand—Mother's Day, for example—a certain percentage of consumers would get busy-circuit signals, electric companies planned to have enough capacity for that 100-degree, humid day when everyone runs his air conditioner at full tilt.

Having prudently invested billions to serve customers under a set of rules that utilities contend assured them a return on that investment, utilities now argue that it is unreasonable to ask them to bear the losses associated with a radical change in those rules. Indeed, some reputable scholars contend that wiping out the utilities' sunk investment by changing the game from regulated monopoly to market competition is an unconstitutional taking of the utilities' property.

The industry's critics disagree, contending that no such social compact ever existed and that consumers should not have to bear the cost of the errors utility managements made when they built plants that are now proving too costly to operate in a competitive market. If power from nuclear plants costs three times as much as power from new, gas-fired plants, say these critics, it is both unfair and inefficient to require consumers to pay some surcharge to the utilities that built the now-inefficient plants.

That surcharge could be levied by the utilities in a variety of ways. They might charge industrial customers who switch to another supplier an "exit fee," on the theory that the customer is abandoning long-lived facilities that were constructed to meet his needs. Or they might charge competitors an extra fee for access to the transmission and distribution wires that they must use to get power from their plants to their customers' premises.

The treatment of the costs of these white-elephant plants—so-called "stranded investment"—is no small matter. Estimates of the sums at stake vary widely, with some cited by the Department of Energy running as high as $500 billion. That's why the industry cares intensely about what the bills now before Congress say about their stranded investment. An analysis of nine of these bills by Linda Stuntz, formerly deputy secretary of energy and now an attorney representing several utilities, shows that seven are silent on the subject, while one, sponsored by Sen. Dale Bumpers, would require regulators to permit utilities to recover their stranded investment, and another bars such recovery. That latter bill, innocuously titled "The Consumers Electric Power Act," comes courtesy of Texas congressman Tom DeLay. It not only requires utilities to absorb any losses resulting from their inability to meet new competition, but mandates that such competition be introduced promptly at the retail and wholesale levels.

Some of the forces arrayed on both sides of the issue are obvious: Utilities oppose any measure that fails to guarantee them cost recovery; large industrial users of electricity favor measures that put the burden on the power companies rather than on their customers. But there are other important players. The environmentalists are reluctant to sign on to the deregulation team, for two reasons. First, they have in the past cut deals with utilities and regulators to conceal the cost of their favorite but cost-ineffective conservation and other programs in utility rates. If those utilities now have to compete with the lower rates of new entrants not burdened with these social costs, they are likely to stop funding the greens' programs.

Second, open competition would result in lower-cost, coal-based power from the Midwest replacing more expensive, less polluting nuclear power in the Northeast. Environmentalists, not hitherto known for their fondness for nuclear power, appear to be even less enamored of coal-fired generation, which they now associate with global climate change. But the greens can be had: They will support bills that in

essence reserve a given share of the electricity market to sun, wind, and other renewable sources of energy that are too costly to survive in a competitive market.

Besides the widowed and orphaned stockholders, the environmentalists, and the utilities, there is another powerful group that is unenthusiastic about federal legislation to restructure the power industry—defenders of states' rights. Organized as Citizens for States Power and chaired by former New Hampshire governor Steve Merrill, this group wants the feds to keep hands off what has until now been a matter left largely in the hands of state legislatures and state regulators. "Most of the major proposals introduced in the Congress trample on the rights of states to pursue their own visions of reform," says Merrill. And the states are doing just that. Karen Palmer, a fellow at Resources for the Future, a non-partisan think tank, is completing a study that shows that 13 states have already enacted some form of pro-competition regulatory reform, while 36 more proposals to move in that direction are now before either the legislature or the regulatory agency (only South Dakota appears content with the status quo).

Indeed, because of state action, many utilities are already restructuring themselves to meet competition. Some have struck bargains by which they sell off their generating stations to competitors and open their transmission and distribution lines to anyone who wants to use them. In return, they get the right to set charges for the use of the lines high enough to recover any stranded investments. In essence, customers in these states are inducing utilities to drop their opposition to future competition by picking up the cost of their past mistakes.

Unfortunately for states' rights advocates, only federal regulators have jurisdiction over the terms of access to and use of long-distance transmission lines. And access to those lines is crucial for companies that want to compete for business across state lines, as many of the new entrants do. Enron, for example, is probably the most vigorous and feared of the newcomers. It wants to sell electricity to everyone, everywhere, at competitive prices—if not now, soon. Its television ads herald a day when even the smallest homeowner will have as many choices of electric supplier as he now does of long-distance telephone carrier. And a day when diners will be interrupted by still another call from some telemarketer, this one offering electricity at bargain prices. A small price to pay for billions in savings on the nation's electric bills. ♦

America's Best Forgotten Poet

J. V. Cunningham and the Epigram in English

By J. Bottum

In 1985, a minor American poet named J. V. Cunningham died at the age of seventy-four. A writer of elegant and precise little miniatures—brief epigrams for the most part, and epigrammatical even when longer—he had his share of publication in some of the premier venues for poetry in his time: *Hound and Horn*, *Poetry*, the *New Republic*, the *Partisan Review*, the *Southern Review*, and elsewhere. He had as well his share of strong admirers, including his longtime friend Yvor Winters, the younger poets X.J. Kennedy and Mark Strand, and the critic Denis Donoghue.

But he produced fewer than two hundred poems—several only two lines long—in a career of over fifty years, and although he lived through a number of poetic fads in America from the 1930s to the 1980s, he managed to remain unfashionable during them all. With a handful of what many professional critics and fellow poets acknowledge as nice minor verses, but without a single major poem identifiable by the greater poetry-reading public, he was little noticed, little anthologized, and little read. The system of foundation grants, artists' colonies, and college poet-in-residence programs that emerged in America during his lifetime allowed him to remain, mostly at Brandeis University outside of Boston, a professional poet and man of letters, lecturing and teaching and occasionally writing essays of interesting Shakespeare criticism and commentary on his own and others' poems. Within ten years after his death, however, his work had suffered the invariable fate of minor poetry—as his last thin and incomplete volume of collected verse from a subsidized press slipped unnoticed out of print.

J.V. Cunningham

Swallow Press

Late last year, one final effort was made to salvage Cunningham when Timothy Steele—who had conducted a biographical interview with the poet for the *Iowa Review* shortly before his death—edited and brought out from the combined poetry imprint of Swallow/Ohio State University Press a new and more complete collection of his poems.

The book succeeded in obtaining from the major book-review journals in America some desultory nods toward the fading poet, but it has so far produced no real boom for Cunningham's work: no outraged calls to revive a forgotten master, no trumpeted invitations to discover an unknown genius.

And thus there is slipping away, perhaps forever, even among the most devoted readers of poetry in America, an awareness of someone who—it seems worthwhile to mention—may have been the most talented poet of his generation, one of only three or four masters of a particular poetic form in the history of English poetry, and a genuine American original.

Among poets in America, there is a tradition of deprecating poetry, a sort of counter-current to the equally American tradition of Walt Whitman's enormous proclamations for poetic importance. Robert Frost always called his work "lines" rather than poems, while J. V. Cunningham—living under the shadow cast over his generation by the world-dominating T. S. Eliot's dense, rich, spiritual poetry in the very grand manner—insisted in self-defense that he wrote no poetry. In the 1939 "For My Contemporaries" (one of his better-known works but in many ways merely a typical example of his technique of tight, little ironic lines followed by a sudden and serious twist), he declared:

How time reverses
The proud at heart!
I now make verses
Who aimed at art.

But I sleep well.
Ambitious boys
Whose big lines swell
With spiritual noise,

Despise me not,
And be not queasy

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To praise somewhat:
Verse is not easy.

But rage who will.
Time that procured me
Good sense and skill
Of madness cured me.

His path to such constricted, ironic, humorous, latinate verse was a strange one—perhaps most of all in its association with the American West that would produce such odd juxtapositions of narrow form and spacious matter as his "Montana Pastoral" or his sequence of poems about driving across the country, "To What Strangers, What Welcome."

James Vincent Cunningham was born in 1911 in Cumberland, Maryland, to Irish-Catholic parents (whose religious faith he would later confess in a melancholy way his inability to hold in "A Moral Poem" and "Timor Dei"), but his father—a steam-shovel operator for the railroad—moved the family a few years later to Billings, Montana, which Cunningham would always identify as his home. In 1923, his mother's insistence upon finding a better education for the children took them to Denver, where Cunningham showed enormous academic promise, finishing at age fifteen the Greek and Latin program at the Jesuit-taught Regis High School.

The events of Cunningham's late teens may hold some explanation for his verses' often embittered compression of American themes into the poetic forms of Martial, Horace, and Catullus. The collapse of the family's finances at the death of his father and the ruin of Denver's economy in the Depression transformed within three years the promising, college-bound, classically educated young man into a train-hopping vagrant. There was, he would later remark, "a good deal of starving involved" as he tramped the West with his brother, looking for a job and writing ill-paying piecework for whatever publications he could find.

Even in high school, encouraged by a bookstore owner in Denver named Morris Rosenfeld, Cunningham had developed an interest in contemporary poetry, entering into correspondence with a Stanford graduate student—and rising young poet and anti-modernist critic—named Yvor Winters. In 1931, from the road outside of Tucson, he wrote Winters to ask "if it was possible to go to college and stay alive." Winters wrote back, offering the hobo the shed in his backyard. Taking both his undergraduate degree in Classics and his doctorate in English there, Cunningham would stay at Stanford for the next fifteen years—feuding with Winters, making up with Winters, not speaking to Winters, arguing for hours with

J. V. Cunningham
The Poems of J. V. Cunningham
Swallow/Ohio State University Press,
215 pp., $28.95

Winters, and falling equally under the spell of Winters's mentor, the Renaissance and Ben Jonson scholar William Dinsmore Briggs.

It was at Stanford as well that Cunningham would begin to write his serious verse, publishing his first volume, *The Helmsman*, in 1942. By the early '40s, he was doing the best work of his career, and a second volume, *The Judge Is Fury*, followed in 1947 and a third, *Doctor Drink*, in 1950. In 1953, he took a teaching job at Brandeis, where he would remain, off and on, for the rest of his life, publishing four volumes of criticism and five more slight collections of verse. (He knew how thin his books could seem, mocking after the publication of *Doctor Drink* that a reader *Dislikes my book; calls it, to my discredit, / A book you can't put down before you've read it.*)

In *The Judge Is Fury*, in particular, but elsewhere as well, Cunningham presents a metaphysical view whose vocabulary and, he seemed to think, whose ideas derived ultimately from the medieval philosopher Duns Scotus (who had also, and somewhat more accurately, influenced the philosophically trained Victorian poet Gerard Manley Hopkins). In "The Metaphysical Amorist," for example, Cunningham wrongly imagines—though with considerable sexual humor—that Scotus solves the conflict between Plato's insistence on the sole reality of ideas and David Hume's insistence on the sole reality of physical perceptions:

Plato! you shall not plague my life.
I married a terrestrial wife.
And Hume! she is not mere sensation
In sequence of observed relation.
She has two forms—ah, thank you, Duns!—,
I know her in both ways at once.

And under such Scotian titles as "Haecceity"—a medieval Latin philosophical term for "thisness," or the brute particular existence of a thing—Cunningham puts in extremely compressed terms what is in fact not derived from Scotus but merely a confused and de-Christianized neoplatonism, not unrelated to the existentialism sweeping Europe at the time. "The more realized a thing is," he would write in a prose essay, "the greater its defect of being"—and Cunningham did not shy from the quietism that is the ethical consequence of all such metaphysics: "hence any particular choice is as such evil, though morally it may be the best choice." Or, as he put it poetically, *Evil is any this or this / Pursued beyond hypothesis.*

But poets are rightly not judged for the coherence of their stabs at abstract philosophy, and in fact—though the sort of quietism that refuses to act or take responsibility is reprehensible in its theoretical expression—an admirable ethical persona does emerge from Cunningham's poems. *Time heals not: it extends a sorrow's scope*, he wrote in an early epigram, *As goldsmiths gold, which we may wear like hope*. He began another early poem, *Men give their hearts away, / Whether for good or ill / They cannot say.* By his second volume of verse, he had forced his narrow form to hold poems as difficult and good as his "Meditation on

Statistical Method," which ends:

Error is boundless,
Nor hope nor doubt,
Though both be groundless,
Will average out.

Or "In Innocence," which reads in its entirety:

In innocence I said
"Affection is secure.
It is not forced or led."
No longer sure

Of the least certainty
I have erased the mind,
As mendicants who see
Mimic the blind.

By the early '40s, he had as well found his greatest gift, becoming one of the few genuine masters of the poetic epigram in English—moving from seven of these brief poems in his first volume to over forty in his second, and producing over a hundred in the course of his career. Like many tight, precise poets, Cunningham in his longer poems often tended toward the epigrammatic—little quotable bits that express a thought with exceptional neatness, as when he concluded a twenty-four line poem for a friend who had just received her Ph.D.: *For you have learned, not what to say, / But how the saying must be said.*

The poetic epigram, however, is something slightly different from the pithy saying that is called an epigram in prose, or even from an epigrammatical line or two in a longer poem. Quite what that difference is remains hard to say. Derived from the Greek word for "an inscription," an epigram is literally merely any poem short enough to be inscribed on stone, and the *Greek Anthology* contains thousands of them. But as the form was passed to the Romans, it developed along certain lines, defined mostly by the success of the first-century poet Martial, who composed over fifteen hundred Latin epigrams—some obscene, some melancholy, many satirical, but all short, pointed, expressing a complete thought, highly reliant on unlikely metaphors, obviously poetic in form, and producing in their final words some unexpected but satisfying grammatical or intellectual twist.

With the Renaissance translation of the *Greek Anthology* and the rediscovery of the Roman poets, there came a revival of the Latin epigram in Europe, and the form quickly became popular among scholars and courtiers. It is during the Renaissance—with Scaliger, for instance, who wrote a taxonomy of the epigram in 1561—that the epigram's various sub-genres become more clearly discernible: the riddles, the mnemonics, the didactic and moral apophthegms, the sundial mottoes, the miniature elegies, the religious satires known as *pasquilli*, the sexual puns, the epitaphs and humorous gravestone inscriptions, and perhaps a dozen other types.

Just as nearly all determined poetic forms in English are borrowed from classical and Romance languages, so the epigram came into English with the Renaissance. Something in the epigram, however, unlike the sonnet or even the ode, seemed to resist English—or perhaps it's better expressed the other way around: There's something in English that doesn't want to produce the poetic epigram. Perhaps it lies in the looseness of English grammar that requires a sentence to tell us its structure clearly, or perhaps it has to do with the fact that rhyme—rather than the metrical structure of vowels—is required in English to show that a short burst of words is poetry, and rhyme requires at least two lines.

Of course, the resistance of the language has never stopped English poets from producing epigrams, particularly during the centuries when poets were reared on classical languages. Nearly all major poets have turned their hands to the form, from the eighteenth-century Alexander Pope—who wrote the inscription for the collar of the king's pet: *I am His Majesty's dog at Kew. / Pray tell me, Sir, whose dog are you?*—to the twentieth-century William Butler Yeats, who wrote, for a fellow Irish literary figure, "To a Poet, Who Would Have Me Praise Certain Bad Poets, Imitators of His and Mine":

You say, as I have often given tongue
In praise of what another's said or sung,
'Twere politic to do the like by these;
But was there ever dog that praised his fleas?

It is a form congenial to poets whose natural bent is for concision and the transparency that makes a poem look easy though it is in fact extremely difficult; to A.E. Housman, for example, who wrote of the British dead in the Boer War:

Here dead lie we because we did not choose
To live and shame the land from which we sprung.
Life, to be sure, is nothing much to lose;
But young men think it is, and we were young.

or to Philip Larkin, who wrote for Queen Elizabeth's silver jubilee in 1977:

In times when nothing stood
but worsened, or grew strange,
there was one constant good:
she did not change.

A handful of minor poets have proved surprisingly good at the epigram—the utterly forgotten Georgian poet Frances Cornford, for example, who used a typical joining of classical reference and modern situation for "Parting in Wartime":

How long ago Hector took off his plume,
Not wanting that his little son should cry,
Then kissed his sad Andromache good-bye—
And now we three in Euston waiting-room.

or the Edwardian Hilaire Belloc with his humorous series of sundial mottoes: *I am a sundial, and I make a botch / Of what is done far better by a watch*, and *I am a sundial. Ordinary words / Cannot express my thoughts on birds*. The Victorian Walter Savage Landor is often included in anthologies solely because of such epigrams as his description of a beautiful dead woman being ferried over the River Styx:

Stand close around, ye Stygian set,
With Dirce in one boat conveyed!
Or Charon, seeing, may forget
That he is old and she a shade.

And yet, despite the occasional forays of major poets into the form, and despite the occasional achievements of minor poets, the poetic epigram has never succeeded in English as well as the sonnet. Only three major poets in the language have devoted themselves to a systematic exploration of the epigram: Ben Jonson, Robert Herrick, and J. V. Cunningham.

Like Jonson and Herrick—who demand to be read in their entirety—Cunningham shows his knowledge of the sub-genres of the form. He translates some of Martial's sharp social observations:

Bert is beguiling with his mother,
She is beguiling with her Bert.
They call each other Sister, Brother,
And others call them something other. . . .
A mother who would be a sister
Would be no mother and no sister.

and composes his own:

Some twenty years of marital agreement
Ended without crisis in disagreement.
What was the problem? Nothing of importance,
Nothing but money, sex, and self-importance.

He reproduces the little teaching lessons of the Renaissance didactic distiches in "Cantor's Theorem," the sundial mottoes in "I who by day," and the explicit sexual puns in "Bride loved old words" and "Lip was a man who used his head." He indulges the dyspeptic misogyny traditional in the epigram with *The ladies in my life, serially sexed, / Unscrew one lover and screw in the next*, and

Career was feminine, resourceful, clever,
You'd never guess to see her she felt ever
By a male world oppressed. How much they weigh!
Even her hand disturbed her as she lay.

He gives such humorous epitaphs and gravestone inscriptions as *An old dissembler who lived out his lie / Lies here as if he did not fear to die*, or *Here lies my wife. Eternal peace / Be to both of us with her decease*, or, for a seducer, *Naked I came, naked I leave the scene, / And naked was my pastime in between*. He invents types to mock: *This Humanist whom no beliefs constrained / Grew so broad-minded he was scatter-brained*, and *Pal was her friend, her lover, and, dismissed, / Became at last her lay psychiatrist*. And he gives way to the epigram's deep melancholia in, for example, *Life flows to death as rivers to the sea / And life is fresh and death is salt to me*.

And yet, even after this parade of marvelous and insufficiently appreciated verse, it is worth asking why Cunningham is not an even better poet—why the reader feels at last a narrowness in his verse, an unfulfillment, a poetic gift greater than its poetic output. Like Jonson and Herrick, Cunningham performed the nearly impossible feat of mastering in

English a form that English doesn't want to master. But unlike Jonson and Herrick, Cunningham had nowhere to go once he had mastered the epigram and the epigrammatical turn. His poems contain everything the epigram can do, but the epigram does not contain everything his poems could have done—and consequently, much of his best poetry was never written and much of his greatest poetic impulse fell away unused.

The poet X.J. Kennedy was strongly influenced by Cunningham, and—thanks to his promotion of unpopular poetry during the 1960s and '70s—Kennedy became, in turn, a major influence on the school of New Formalists who began to achieve recognition in the '80s and '90s for demanding poetry in difficult and traditional forms. After Cunningham's death, Kennedy wrote his "Terse Elegy for J. V. Cunningham," in which he claims that the poet

penned with patient skill and lore immense,
Prodigious mind, keen ear, rare sense,
Only those words he could crush down no more
Like matter pressured to a dwarf star's core.

It is a lovely tribute to the man, but it is not quite right. The Renaissance epigram was a little diamond—polished, brilliant, and cold. But Cunningham's best verse means more than its form can convey. You can almost see it in his photographs: The man is not forcing his poetry down to compression by an act of will; he is himself being forced. Whether it is by something inside him from his days of extreme poverty, or outside him from what he perceived as his ambivalent relation to American culture, who can say?—but something was ramming with terrible force a great poetic will and imagination through a chokingly constricted funnel.

But that is, of course, exactly why J.V. Cunningham remains—in all that he did and all that he failed to do—the most fascinating poet of his generation. ♦

BCA

Bad Girls, Bad Girls

Whatcha Gonna Do?

By Jonathan V. Last

Last Tuesday, February 3, Texas prison officials filled the veins of Karla Faye Tucker with poison and watched her die, while camera crews and prayer squads and ranting protesters and cheering death-penalty advocates swirled in an ugly little mill outside her prison gates.

Even after more than a dozen transforming years on death row, Tucker hardly made a good pin-up girl for those who oppose capital punishment. In the last twenty-five years, since California gassed Elizabeth Ann Duncan in 1962, only one woman has been judicially killed in the United States: Velma Barfield, executed in 1984, a North Carolina grandmother who poisoned a friend and—promising she'd never do it again—seemed to many a fairly good example of the pointlessness of the death penalty. Tucker wasn't anywhere near as presentable. A drug addict and prostitute, she had helped kill a man and a woman during a 1983 burglary—puncturing the man eleven times in the throat with a pickaxe while (as she later confided to a friend) orgasming with every swing.

Nonetheless, Tucker's sentence was stayed several times between her conviction in 1984 and her execution in 1998. It had something to do with the fact that behind bars she'd managed to kick the drugs and find Christ (even joining in an unconsummated wedding with the prison chaplain). And it had something to do with the legal machinations of volunteer groups that fight every execution in America. But it had perhaps most to do with the increased discomfort voters feel when capital punishment involves a woman. And a considerable number of right-wing Evangelical groups, left-wing "blame-the-culture-first" prison-reform activists, and uneasy middle-wing Texans banded together in the unsuccessful effort to save Tucker from the fate Governor George W. Bush and the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles had in mind for her.

Patricia Pearson
When She Was Bad
Violent Women and the Myth of Innocence
Viking, 288 pp, $24.95

Alice Myers and Sarah Wight, eds.
No Angels
Women Who Commit Violence
HarperCollins, 208 pp., $16

Notably absent from the hoopla over Tucker, however, were America's feminists, those activists who have so much to say on every other topic that touches upon women. And they were absent—or utterly incoherent, on those occasions when they did try to make a statement to the press—primarily because feminism hasn't been able to decide what to think about the gentler treatment accorded women by the justice system. It's hard to say you're out to help women if you want women treated as harshly as men; but it's hard to say you're for equal treatment if you don't.

Recent months have seen the publication of a pair of books that take up the question of violent women: Patricia Pearson's *When She Was Bad: Vio-*

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lent Women and the Myth of Innocence and a collection of essays, *No Angels: Women Who Commit Violence*, edited by Alice Myers and Sarah Wight.

It quickly comes clear in reading these books that there is an insoluble rift in feminist theory on the topic: Either violent women act from their own natural violence (which lets men off the hook) or violent women are merely victims of male violence (which reduces women to traditional gender roles). Pearson takes the first line, arguing that we need to shuck our misogynist oppression by punishing women just as harshly as men. And Myers and Wight take the second line, whining that we need to fight misogynist oppression by saving women from men's cruel, masculine law.

It even more quickly comes clear, however, that none of these feminist authors cares much about evidence, truth, justice, right and wrong—or anything beyond semanticizing about the correct feminist perspective. The contortions to which feminism is put in these volumes makes them fascinating reading.

Pearson's *When She Was Bad* is based on one correct fact, wrapped round by incredible silliness. Aiming at a sort of cross between Betty Friedan's 1960s feminist classic *The Feminine Mystique* and such 1990s television schlock as *Real Stories of the Highway Patrol*, Pearson spends the better part of three-hundred pages cataloguing female acts of violence. She doesn't seem particularly engaged until she reaches the topic of serial murderesses, but by way of building up to it, she provides a handy taxonomy to female mayhem. First come the tales of women who kill their babies for no good reason. Then come the modern-day Medeas who kill their babies for what we are assured are very good reasons. Then there are the women who kill their lovers, and finally the women who decide instead merely to kill along with their lovers.

The one true point Pearson labors so hard to make with all this is that violent women are rarely punished as harshly as their male counterparts—in part, as she rightly surmises, because it's unsettling to imagine that the culture's chief nurturers might be threatening: There's a reason that the forty-eight women on death row in America account for only 1.5 percent of the 3,365 inmates awaiting execution.

Take, for instance, Karla Homolka, a fetching Canadian girl who had the misfortune to meet a man named Paul Bernardo. Bernardo had previously been a serial rapist, and just before their wedding day, the couple decided to cement their relationship by kidnapping, raping, and torturing to death several young girls, including Homolka's younger sister. But when the police came calling to ask about Bernardo, they cut a deal with Homolka—who promptly confessed the couple's later killing spree (about which the police knew nothing) before they could even ask her about the earlier rapes (about which she knew nothing). Bernardo was sentenced to life imprisonment for first-degree murder; Homolka was convicted merely of manslaughter.

Pearson is irate that this woman got away with murder. Her concern with gender bias in crime and punishment, however, has nothing to do with protecting society from evil. It's all about the feminist crusade: Denying women responsibility for violence "affects our capacity to promote ourselves as autonomous and responsible beings, . . . affects our ability to develop a literature about ourselves, . . . demeans the right our victims have to be valued, . . . [and] radically impedes our ability to recognize dimensions of power that have nothing to do with formal structures of patriarchy." Without the ability to own their violence, how can women "be aggressive on every front—the Persian Gulf, the urban police beat, the empires of business, sports, hunting, politics, debate?" The patriarchical power structures are the real evil for Pearson, so oppressive that they turn women to violence instead of allowing them constructive, creative outlets: Had she only been a man, Marybeth Tinning, for instance, who killed eight of her nine children, "might have been a particularly ruthless entrepreneur."

It all makes sense once you realize that Pearson doesn't see murdered people as victims, but women, all women, as the real victims—victims of society's oppression. Law-abiding women? Victims of a society that won't let them express their violence. Murderesses? Victims of a society that won't let them take credit for their violence by submitting to harsh punishment.

The icky apotheosis of much feminism has always been lesbianism, and female homosexuality is hinted at throughout Pearson's breathless descriptions of her subjects. Karla Homolka is "headstrong and sexy, intelligent, hungry to take on the world." The now-dead Karla Faye Tucker is described as "a spry Texan teenager, eyes bright, spirits quick, . . . a fawnlike beauty," while Myra Hindley, the neo-Nazi of Britain's infamous 1960s Moors Murders, is "a shapely blond 'looker' in a uniform."

The kicker, however, comes in a chapter ominously entitled "Island of Women." It seems that while only 20 percent of women enter the big house gay, almost 60 percent of female inmates become so during their stay. Butches in California, Pearson carefully informs us, are called "stud-broads," while their sisters in Michigan prefer the term "aggressors." But whatever the words, it looks to the author a lot like utopia, where women "fight, make love, run a thriving illicit economy, launch lawsuits, gather in groups to compare notes on abuse, and arrange themselves into an all-female hierarchy of power that combines masculine and feminine strategies of aggression in a virtually unprecedented way." Litigation, love-making, and support groups: Right after murdering an evil

man in the popular 1991 middlebrow feminist film *Thelma & Louise*, Susan Sarandon says with steel, "I'm not ready to go to jail just yet"; if only she had read *When She Was Bad*.

Or perhaps she should have read Alice Myers and Sarah Wight's *No Angels*. The eleven essays collected in the volume contain their share of sociological fem-speak, as for example: "Feminist writers must acknowledge and confront the issue of violent women in order to facilitate the process of establishing a new language which will allow us to analyze women's violence outside the 'mad versus bad' framework, and thus challenge the imposition of silence which has dominated women's experiences." But the point, cutting across most of the essays and underlying all the argot, seems to be that women just don't do anything violent unless compelled to by evil men—and thus, however softly they're treated by the criminal justice system, it's not softly enough.

The male-oriented legal system has only two explanations for why women sometimes murder: Either they're mad, or they're bad. And "when women attempt to resist the mad/bad categories by presenting their own logical and rational explanations of their violent crimes, they are disqualified as speakers—their accounts become 'muted' by dominant 'expert' (and commonsensical) knowledge constructions around violent women."

The consequence is that the legal definition of exculpatory self-defense favors men because women aren't strong enough to strike back during the attack. They have to wait until a safe time afterwards, such as while the attacker is sleeping. Thus the law should be amended to allow women to kill whenever they want, so long as they were at some earlier point provoked.

Of course, one is compelled to ask, if women are so weak, how can they seek to be in ground combat or on the police beat? But the essayists in *No Angels* are unconcerned about such things, preferring to see women as helpless, Victorian creatures first driven to violence and then punished for it by oppressive male structures. After a parade of false statistics exploded long ago—four women are killed in the United States every day in domestic violence, one out of four women has been raped—the authors can only conclude, "In light of such systematic abuse and terrorization of women, is it not more surprising that so few women have lopped off penises than that Lorena Bobbitt did so?"

When all is said and done, Western society has little use for harming its women. Myers and Wight are wrong and Pearson is right (though she hates it): Women and men do occupy separate places in the collective psyche of society. We have a visceral reaction to seeing women harmed in any context. That's why we don't want them in ground combat in the armed forces, why we view "wife-beater" as the harshest of epithets, and why we don't generally execute women or even let them rot in jails for prolonged periods of time. Because society has a low tolerance for seeing them harmed, women—even criminals—have traditionally been treated differently by the justice system. Differently, but still, at least possibly, with justice. The loss of that difference is part of what makes last week's destruction of Karla Faye Tucker so disturbing. ♦

Diminished Expectations

The Moviegoer's Diary Finds the Movies All Wet

By John Podhoretz

Wednesday, January 28. Watching Kenneth Branagh spend most of *The Gingerbread Man* in the pouring rain reminded me of a great remark a Hollywood producer once made about the swimmer-actress Esther Williams: "Wet, she was a star." Well, wet, Kenneth Branagh isn't a star. Come to think of it, dry, he isn't a star either. Only in Shakespeare is Branagh a star—his *Henry V* and *Hamlet* are both magnificent. But did you get a load of him in *Swing Kids*? Or *Frankenstein*? Or *Dead Again*? If you didn't, take my advice: Don't, unless you want to see some seriously bad acting.

Actually, Branagh isn't particularly bad in *The Gingerbread Man*, but the movie is. The credits say it derives "from a story by John Grisham." "From hunger" would be more like it. This is yet another film, like *Basic Instinct* or *Jagged Edge*, in which one of the characters proves to be so fiendishly brilliant that she is capable of manipulating others into doing almost anything—they'll fake a divorce for her, defend her in court for free, put their own children at mortal risk, and kill people for her. And yet this Clausewitz of the boudoir lives in a shotgun shack, does nothing but pout, and makes no more than the minimum wage.

The Gingerbread Man is getting good reviews, though, and for one reason only: Robert Altman is the director, and like many icons of the late 1960s and early 1970s, he has defenders who will do almost anything to keep intact the reputation they so ludicrously inflated way back when. Altman has made so many terrible movies—including, during his supposed glory days, *Brewster McCloud*, about a boy who wants to be a bird—that one might think the onset of his seventies would allow Hollywood to ease him into retirement. No such luck. Like most Altman movies, *The Gingerbread Man* features a cataclysm intended to symbolize the internal struggles of the characters. In *Nashville* it was an assassination; in *Short Cuts* the spraying of malathion over Los Angeles; here, it's a hurricane. Only the movie itself is so dispassionate and uninteresting that a mildly cloudy day would have been more appropriate.

But then Altman wouldn't have participated in the latest madness to grip Hollywood: the wet movie. Studio chiefs seem to have gotten it into their heads that wet, their movies will sparkle. There's been a spate of wet movies in the past couple of years: *Waterworld*, *Speed 2*, *Hard Rain*, *Deep Rising*, and the upcoming *Sphere* (which is about a spaceship on the ocean floor and will undoubtedly prove the best spaceship-on-the-ocean-floor film since *The Abyss*).

With the exception of *Titanic*, the wet movies have been about as compelling as a waterlogged newspaper. All the dampness is distracting. You can't watch one of these movies without thinking about how uncomfortable and cold it must have been for the actors. That makes it hard for the suspension of disbelief necessary to enjoy these wildly implausible thrillers. But *Titanic*'s astounding success—it will soon be the most commercially successful movie ever made—means that moviegoers will be awash in wet movies for years to come. Bring back Esther Williams.

Saturday, January 31. If Kenneth Branagh is a great actor who can't successfully play anything but Shakespeare, Ethan Hawke is a terrible actor who can't successfully play anything. The fact that he was cast as Pip in a contemporary version of *Great Expectations* would have been enough to keep me from the theater, but his costar is Gwyneth Paltrow, a delightful actress to whom I feel a particular connection because once, twenty years ago, I babysat her.

Paltrow is the only reason to see *Great Expectations*, and it's not, alas, for her acting. Rather, it's for her wardrobe: As they say in the garment center, a dress hangs on her like nobody's business, and draped in green outfit after green outfit, Paltrow defines the term "eye candy."

Otherwise, *Great Expectations* is very pretty and very awful. It's not that a good movie couldn't be pro-

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duced from Charles Dickens's book—the 1946 *Great Expectations*, directed by David Lean and starring John Mills and Alec Guinness, is one of the greatest movies ever made. But you can't take a story about the rigidity of class distinctions in nineteenth-century Britain and shift it to the present without making a hash of the whole business (not unless you take Jane Austen's *Emma*, retitle it *Clueless*, and turn it into a sprightly comedy).

In this movie, it takes the Pip character (called Finn for some reason) just ten weeks to become a high-society star in New York—all he has to do is board a plane in Florida and get himself a gallery opening in Soho. In the novel, of course, Pip's journey from hardscrabble poverty to gentlemanly pursuits takes years and has immense psychic costs. The most heartbreaking section of both the novel and the original movie comes when Pip's wondrously kind uncle and guardian, Joe, visits him in London, and Pip finds himself torn between his love for the man and his shame at Joe's inferior social standing. Ethan Hawke only gets sullen and angry, and the scene lasts all of a minute and a half, because of course in 1998 New York, a colorful Gulf Coast fisherman uncle would be just the ticket in diversity-mad Soho.

Wednesday, February 4. It's not often that a movie by a one-time homosexual pornographer is the best thing around, but such is the case with *Live Flesh*, a stunning new Spanish film written and directed by Pedro Almodóvar. Much as I hate to admit it—praising one-time homosexual pornographers not really being my style—Almodóvar has become a master filmmaker. Though many of his movies are blasphemous (*Dark Habits*) or deviant (*Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*) or both (*Kika*), he is capable of much more. That's what his delightful breakthrough comedy, the 1988 *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, showed—and *Live Flesh* is even better.

That might have something to do with the fact that the film is based on a novel by Ruth Rendell, whose psychological thrillers have made remarkably compelling British television dramas. *Live Flesh* is about a boy who is literally born in trouble—the son of a hooker who gives birth to him on a Madrid bus on the night in 1970 when Franco imposed martial law. His birth is only the first sign that Victor is destined always to be in the wrong place at the wrong time: As a nineteen-year-old, he has a fling with a heroin addict in a club only to find himself in the midst of a shootout—as a result of which a cop gets paralyzed and Victor gets six years in prison. When he gets out, he finds himself drawn back to the heroin addict who got him into trouble—except that she's reformed and married the paralyzed cop.

I've probably said too much already, because one of the many pleasures of *Live Flesh* is that it takes so many interesting and unexpected turns it's best to know as little about it as possible. After fifteen years of mainstream filmmaking, Almodóvar has stripped himself of most of his affectations and tells the story with an edgy, unsettling eye reminiscent of another brilliant deviant, Roman Polanski. *Live Flesh* is moving, exciting, and original—and in Francesca Neri, who plays the heroin addict, Almodóvar has found a successor to 1960s European sex bombs like Claudia Cardinale. Dry, wet, whatever, Francesca Neri is a star. ♦

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Parody

he Washington Post

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 1998

Clinton Scandals Achieve Harmonic Convergence

By Susan Schmidt
and Bob Woodward
Washington Post Staff Writers

The vast right-wing conspiracy and the vast left-wing conspiracy were both thrown into an uproar yesterday when it was learned that Monica Lewinsky paid 52 visits to the office of campaign-finance-scandal figure Charlie Trie during the summer of 1997.

Bruce Lindsey, running the left-wing conspiracy for Hillary Rodham ("H.R.") Clinton, immediately organized a conference call to Eleanor Clift, Margaret Carlson, Rick Kaplan of CNN, and everybody who has ever worked at the Washington Monthly to inform them that, while Ms. Lewinsky did service Mr. Trie, her earlier affair with Craig Livingstone did not necessarily mean that she had seen the FBI files of former Bush administration official Marlin Fitzwater.

Meanwhile, on the right, Kenneth Starr met with Reed Irvine (they have been staging a mock feud in public to confuse the enemy), Richard Mellon Scaife, and the children of Walker Percy at the now-deserted Mena Air Strip to update them on his findings that Lewinsky lawyer William Ginsburg had rigged the cattle-futures market in the 1970s in order to produce huge profits for Mrs. Clinton.

Those profits were promptly plowed back into the Castle Grande real estate venture, thus bringing Mrs. Clinton into direct contact with Susan McDougal, who at that time was threatening to divorce her husband James McDougal because he was having an affair with Marcia Lewis, mother of Monica Lewinsky and alleged paramour of Placido Domingo.

On one occasion, according to sources in both conspiracies, Ms. McDougal threw Revlon eye makeup at Ms. Lewis, prompting Revlon Chairman Ron Perelman to complain to Washington super-fixer Vernon Jordan that the Clinton crowd was wasting perfectly good eyeliner. As penance, Susan McDougal was forced to pay 37 consoling visits to H.R. Clinton, who, angered by Ms. McDougal's perpetual tardiness, fired the entire staff of the White House Travel Office.

Six Buddhist nuns, who were sleeping in the White House book room at the time, were left without travel plans and were accidentally shredded by Mrs. Clinton's chief of staff Maggie Williams. Their remains were dumped in the office formerly occupied by Vince Foster, where they were discovered by Mr. Foster's secretary Linda Tripp, who passed them along to her agent Lucianne Goldberg, who then passed them through her client Mark Fuhrman to Rodney King, who deposited them for safekeeping in the office of noted attorney Johnnie Cochran.

Ms. Williams was recently confronted with this information in Paris by Jean-Marie le Pen, also of the vast right-wing conspiracy, who notified the cousins of Francisco Franco, a neighbor of Rush Limbaugh, and the columnist Arianna Huffington. Ms. Huffington had recently revealed that disinterred former ambassador Larry Lawrence owned a majority share in the Little Rock hotel where state trooper L.D. Brown scouted women for then-governor Clinton. Mr. Brown is second cousin twice removed of former Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, whose plane mysteriously went down in the Balkans, with Monica Lewinsky's black dress and a knife once owned by Cochran client O.J. Simpson allegedly on board.

Peter Baker, John Harris, Dan Balz, Michael Isikoff, Stephen Labaton, Glenn Simpson, Matt Drudge, Jane Mayer, Jonah Goldberg, Jeff Gerth, John Fund, David Brock, and Sidney Blumenthal contributed to this report.