the weekly Standard

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WHO BOMBED THE EMBASSIES?
EDWARD G. SHIRLEY

The Truth Is Out There

the weekly Standard

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The Defender Clinton Deserves

When Hillary Rodham Clinton blamed a "vast right-wing conspiracy" for the brouhaha over her husband's occasional use of Monica Lewinsky, she seemed to have reached the apex of silliness. But when she added last Monday, to an interviewer from the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, that "a lot of this is prejudice against our state; they wouldn't do this if we were from some other state," she managed to overreach even herself—blaming bias against hillbillies for the pursuit of her Rhodes Scholar husband.

Alas, records exist to be broken, and just two days later, in a column in the *Los Angeles Times*, the novelist Gore Vidal proved once again why he is the silliest person in America still allowed access to pencil and paper. "What is behind this vendetta against Clinton?" Vidal demands —and plumps for the two most obvious answers: "the rage of lumpen white Americans against blacks" and "the wealth of corporate America." It is the racist world of American business—typified, Vidal believes, by Richard Mellon Scaife—that "declared war on the Clintons in 1993 when the innocent couple tried to give the American people a national health service." And it is bigoted corporate America that has unleashed Kenneth Starr, "a one-time judge of meager intellectual capacity but deep faith in all the superstitions [i.e., God] that ruling classes encourage the lower orders to believe so that they will not question authority."

Vidal has always been more than a little bit nutty and more than a little bit slutty. Until you've read the scene in *Myra Breckinridge* in which a half-transgendered woman takes a boy up to her room for an afternoon romp, you have no idea of just how polymorphous a perversity can be. In his defense of the president, though, Vidal proves more narrow-minded: "Does a frictive act performed on a passive president, idly daydreaming of the budget, count as intercourse?" Absolutely not, he decides, unless the "sturdy Secret Service lads join in."

However much she tries, Hillary doesn't have what it takes to play in this league. When he concludes, "I should not in the least be surprised" if Starr "were to be put promptly on trial for treason against the United States and its people," Vidal shows the gulf that exists between the professional crank and even the most talented amateur.

Boss Arafat

Yasser Arafat showed once again this month that he is absolutely opposed to expanding Palestinian democracy. Since the Clinton administration has been silent on what happened, here is a brief account.

The elected 88-seat Palestinian Legislative Council did an audit of Arafat's administration and found that nearly half his $800 million budget was being lost to graft or waste. The council demanded a cabinet shake-up and recommended that three ministers be prosecuted for corruption. A cabinet shake-up there has indeed been. All three ministers accused of corruption have been kept in office. Two critics of corruption were demoted and resigned in protest. To buy off other critics, Arafat appointed 10 new ministers, most without portfolio but with the usual perks—car and driver, for starters.

As reported in the *Jerusalem Post*, the departing minister of agriculture Abed Sallah summed it all up: "This is a new government in which the effective ministers have been kicked out and the corrupt ones have remained." It is, moreover, an Arafat kick in the teeth to the council and to the very notion of accountability. Palestinian tax revenues go directly to Arafat, but where they go after that appears to be anyone's guess.

Why hasn't the administration done anything about this? The policy mindset that wants a strong Milosevic to do business with, and fears deposing Saddam Hussein because there might be instability in Iraq, is at work here, too. The "peace process" is thought to require a strong Arafat as a "partner" in "building peace and democracy." Some democracy. Some partner.

Clinton and the Feminists

Last week, National Organization for Women president Patricia Ireland told the Fox News Channel, "I think what we've seen, if these charges are true, is a man who follows a traditional model of dividing the world between women you have to respect, like Hillary Clinton, Madeleine Albright, and Donna Shalala, and women who can be used like tissue paper."

Hmm: The Scrapbook was reminded of our contributor Noemie Emery's "All the President's Women" (Feb. 9), which delineated Clinton's two types of

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women—"the Donna-Hillary axis" and "the Gennifers, Paulas, and Monicas." Feminists, Emery noted, have to wonder how "this man, who gets to spend his days with Janets and Donnas and is wed to the world's most wonderful woman, can be mauling twinkies after work."

Ireland finally seems to be "getting it."

Clarence Thomas's Triumph

In his much-noted recent address to the National Bar Association, Supreme Court justice Clarence Thomas finally got proper revenge on the critics who call him a race traitor, rebuking them to their face with courage and judiciousness: "I have come here today," he said, "to assert my right to think for myself, to refuse to have my ideas assigned to me as though I am an intellectual slave because I'm black. I come to state that I'm a man, free to think for myself and do as I please. I've come to assert that I am a judge and I will not be consigned to the unquestioned opinions of others."

While there are other members of the court who regularly rule against racial preferences, Thomas noted, he is the one who's regularly excoriated for it. He is the only justice who is regularly, and insultingly, described by black and white liberals as not really thinking for himself, but rather "serving a particular political master," as the particularly poisonous *Time* columnist Jack E. White, put it.

Thomas's was a masterly performance; indeed, it is hard to recall any Supreme Court justice delivering such a memorable speech in recent years. That must be what provoked a hissy fit at the *New York Times* editorial page, which has remained notoriously and unthinkingly hostile to Thomas. "The issue is not his race, but the content of his ideas," the *Times* intoned. Oh? The Scrapbook would like to see all the editorials the *Times* has published seriously addressing Thomas's constitutional and jurisprudential arguments.

The *Washington Post*, on the other hand, was editorially gracious: "Justice Thomas has no duty to parrot the orthodoxies of affirmative action simply because he is black," allowed the *Post* editorialist, adding that "it is time for Justice Thomas's critics to engage him in a debate on the merits and flaws of his work, instead of on the specious question of whether he is an adequately authentic black justice." Indeed.

Thomas's reticence after his nomination ordeal, however understandable, has been unfortunate. It's just one more example of the enduring damage done to public discourse by Anita Hill, her media handmaidens, and the U.S. senators who did their bidding.

Sorry

A production glitch in our last issue lopped off the final words of David Gelernter's "The Future of Art." Here is the final paragraph as it should have appeared:

"Today's serious artists face Establishment indifference. They wish it were otherwise, but, when they step back, they know it usually isn't. They can take it, understanding as they do—in words today's Establishment knows how to laugh at but could never begin to understand—that it has always been and will always be an honor to live for art."

Casual

The Misfits

It's a bit of an oxymoron: Christian journalist. On the one hand, you're supposed to be meek, forgiving, and agreeable. Roughly speaking, those are the attributes of Christians as laid down by Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. All the normal characteristics of human behavior—Christ stood them on their head. And journalists have the normal characteristics in the extreme. They're aggressive, judgmental, and given to hyperventilating in public.

I fretted over this conflict when I became a Christian in 1980. My conversion came relatively late in life—I was in my thirties, married with two kids—and I was well into a career in journalism. In fact, the only job I'd held in my adult life for more than a few months was as a newspaper reporter. I loved the work. But I feared my advancement, indeed my ability to function effectively as a reporter, would be coming to an end, now that I'd chosen to follow Christ.

Well, unless I'm self-deluded, it hasn't. Nor, as I've discovered over the years, has it for many others. This was made amply clear to me at a three-day gathering of Christian journalists in London last week. The conference had a hifalutin title, "Journalism: Truth and the 21st Century." But it really dealt with the practical matter of how Christians in journalism can simultaneously adhere to their faith and enhance their profession. The 50 or so journalists came from England, India, Finland, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Canada, Norway, Egypt, Nigeria, Indonesia, Russia, Japan, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and the United States.

The guiding force behind the conference was David Aikman, a former foreign correspondent for *Time* who now has a perch at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington and contributes regularly to several publications, including The Weekly Standard. David, more than anyone I know, has a passion for bringing Christian journalists together—and not to conspire on schemes for distributing tracts or evangelizing newsrooms. Rather, one of his ideas is to promote Christian fellowship among believing journalists and so reinforce their faith.

His bigger idea is to bring the Christian worldview to bear on journalism. No, not to impose it, but to present it in a way that might prompt more honesty, a better understanding of the human heart, and a fresh take, from time to time, on what's new and newsworthy. If David were a liberal, he might market this as diversity. His belief, however, is that Christians can play a far more important role, saving secular journalism from its self-destructive, amoral tendencies.

That's the concept—a worthy one, I'd say. The problem comes in the execution, and this is what the London conference dwelt on. The truth is, Christian journalists in America have it relatively easy. Sure, journalism is a breathtakingly materialist profession. And, yes, newsrooms often are hostile environments to people who take their Christian faith seriously. I've talked to many young Christians who steer clear of mainstream journalism for exactly this reason. But Christ didn't promise us a congenial environment—quite the contrary. My advice to young journalists is to gut it out. There will always be enough writers for Christian publications, but never enough Christian writers and reporters to go around in the secular media.

Besides, compared with those in the Third World, newsrooms here are hotbeds of tolerance and tranquillity. Imagine working in a Muslim country where, as one reporter recounted, armed commandos are familiar visitors to the newsroom. They come whenever they're dissatisfied with a story in that day's paper. (I'd be more specific, except the ground rules of the conference were that speeches and panel discussions were off the record.) The comparable situation here would be the dispatch of Green Berets to the *Washington Post* because President Clinton didn't care for a story about him and Monica.

Still, it's no picnic for Christian journalists in the U.S. media. They are mocked and marginalized by co-workers who have no inkling that they're dissing anyone. I can't say I've experienced much of this, at least face-to-face, but I don't doubt the tales I heard from other Christians, especially younger ones. Their ambitions are great, their faith intense, and it's painful when the two clash. One woman at the conference said she goes home indignant every evening over the slights she's endured. Another said she must self-censor her comments to get along amicably with other journalists. Serious talk of religion would not be welcome.

My guess is Christians in their twenties and thirties have a bigger impact than they think. Their candor and boldness in discussing their faith is impressive. Their commitment to Christ is so much more palpable than mine was at their age. Should their numbers swell, they have a real chance of changing journalism. For the better.

Fred Barnes

Correspondence

Defending Private Ryan

I hope that your readers will not allow themselves to be guided by John Podhoretz's patronizing review of *Saving Private Ryan*, for it is one of the most powerful movies about war ever made ("All Guts, No Glory," Aug. 3).

Podhoretz laments the movie's lack of glory. Infantry combat, unfortunately, exhibits the same deficiency. But those who have not seen the film should know that the nobility of the central figure, Captain John Miller (superbly rendered by Tom Hanks), and his men, is that they persevere in their duty despite the horrors of war, fears for their own survival, and understandable misgivings about an ambiguous mission. They are the more heroic for the unsparing portrayal of what they did, and what they endured.

The complaint that there is nothing new in the fact that "war is hell" is similarly misplaced. It is one thing to type William Tecumseh Sherman's phrase into a computer, turning a grim warrior's distillation of reality into a glib dismissal of it. It is another to ponder that hell, to the extent that we comfortable civilians can. Perhaps those of us who have a hawkishly patriotic disposition in politics should, most of all, submit to this movie's terrors, which, though fictional, are vivid enough to elicit tears and sleepless nights.

Eliot Cohen
Washington, DC

John Podhoretz suggests that *Saving Private Ryan* "offers no coherent answers," but he is wrong because it enshrines the virtues of bravery and fortitude like no other recent movie. Of the opening D-Day scene, he says, "There's no single shot in this sequence to compare with the image of thousands of dead and dying Southern soldiers lying on the Atlanta railroad tracks in *Gone with the Wind*." In terms of numbers, true enough, but Dog Green Beach was a small area, perhaps 20 percent of Omaha Beach alone. So the movie remains historically exact in showing the landing of C Company's 2nd Ranger troop transport there. Thirty-five men in that 65-man Ranger company were lost on that beach. If anything, in the movie it seems as though too many men survived.

Podhoretz also faults Steven Spielberg's development of characters because the moviegoer cannot remember their names. With my limited experience in both the 82nd Airborne (505 P.I.R.) and the 29th Infantry Division (116th Infantry Regiment), I would call this reality. Most men who serve in the infantry remember even their closest friends only by their last names.

I agree with Podhoretz that Spielberg can certainly be seen as holding many ridiculous beliefs, being a programmatic liberal, and possibly not even being an adult, but to suggest that the director has "an inability to grasp these ideas" and that "it was triumph that gave meaning to tragedy" is ridiculous. In no way does Spielberg exalt World War II, but he does exalt the soldiers who readily laid down their lives for the greater good in a truly just war.

Christopher C. Caron
Arlington, VA

God and the Declaration

Matthew Spalding's survey of religion's place in the American founding, itself a recommendation of the exhibit at the Library of Congress, would be completed by the mention of the Declaration of Independence ("Present at the Creation," Aug. 3). The Declaration has four references to God: as the Creator, legislator, judge, and providential executive (as George Anastaplo first observed). One wonders if someday, observing our dwindling protection of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, He might withdraw His covenanted protection.

Michael Platt
East Wallingford, VT

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"I Know No Oath"

The full-figured lady has sung—and retired to her mother's Watergate apartment—but Washington's epic opera of presidential pathology is not quite over yet. The title character must now belt out his showstopper aria, which calls for him at last to tell the truth about his own behavior. It will be an improvised scene; this is jazzy, modern music. Until just moments before his cue, Bill Clinton has been huddled offstage with his coaches, struggling to refine a tiny little nuance in the libretto. *I didn't have sex with the intern*. Then again, of course, depending on your definition, *I sort of did*. Which "truth" will his audience prefer?

It shouldn't matter.

Last Friday's *New York Times* reported what looked to be an authoritative White House leak: Clinton and his lawyers have prepared for his grand-jury appearance this week by "designing answers that allow him to acknowledge a relationship with Ms. Lewinsky without going into graphic detail." Needless to say, there would be no reason for Clinton seriously to plan for such an acknowledgment if it were false. It still remains possible, the *Times* cautioned, that the president will persist in his Monica denials when questioned by Ken Starr's prosecutors. If he does, though, by the inescapable logic of his own Oval Office "practice sessions," he will be perjuring himself. Period. The sex is finally beyond dispute.

And should Clinton concede the sex as the *Times* suggests is likely—what then? Will he not be thereby admitting to an earlier perjury in his Paula Jones deposition? No, the president will apparently contend: When he swore in January, among other things, that "I have never had sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky," he was testifying honestly—because Jones's attorneys didn't pose their queries the right way. This new claim by Clinton will itself be deceitful. He knew perfectly well what he was being asked in January, and he knew perfectly well what his answers were intended to convey. The evidence in our courts and the honor of our president are not supposed to turn on microscopic wordplay.

Come what may this week, in short, Bill Clinton will lie about the intern—again. The only meaningful question remains, as always: What's to be done about it?

And here the national conversation remains, as always, terribly confused. When the Lewinsky story broke, American reaction was instinctive and near-universal. Some people even gave it voice. On January 25, Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan said the Oval Office sex *qua* Oval Office sex—forget the law—could well prove fatal to Clinton's presidency because "If it's so, it represents a disorder." Two days later, even Hillary Clinton seemed inclined to agree, at least in theory. If a president commits adultery in the White House and dissembles to cover it up, she was asked, should Americans demand his resignation? "Well, they should certainly be concerned about it," Mrs. Clinton responded. "I think that would be a very serious offense."

Almost nobody talks this way any longer. The passage of time—as the president obviously hoped it would—has dulled public opinion to the scandal's lurid details. We have spent most of this year, instead, obsessed with the narrower, safely antiseptic question whether Bill Clinton is guilty of a crime. And now that it seems clear he *is* guilty—Starr will shortly forward an impeachment report to Congress based exclusively on the Monica Lewinsky controversy—gray-bearded wise men everywhere, Republicans and Democrats alike, are mumbling that even these suspected felonies do not warrant formal public action. If the president offers Starr a pro forma, white-lie "confession" this week, the controlling view in Washington lately has it, we should all be prepared to let bygones be bygones. And pretend the scandal never happened.

No can do, we say. This magazine consistently rejected the long-advanced White House line that critics of the president must entirely ignore his "allegedly" repellent private life and either convict him of a crime or shut up. We now reject, in turn, the newly emerging White House line that Clinton must

be held practically harmless for the crime—because that crime is, at worst, a lie about his *undeniably* repellent private life. Yes, the crime is about the lie is about the sex. But there should be no crime for which the president, of all people, is exempt from discipline. And there is a broader principle that must be sustained as well. After all, the particular crime that now rivets the nation's attention—Clinton's perjury in the January 17 Paula Jones deposition and whatever obstruction of justice might be associated with it—is just the first and *least* of the president's public sins in the Lewinsky scandal.

An on-the-job philanderer lives both his private and public lives in a suffocating vacuum of dishonesty. When the job in question is the presidency, and the lies are maintained even after the philandering is exposed, national politics as a whole is victimized—not just the president's wife and mistress. In our constitutional order, the president must keep faith with the people who have elected him. In this respect, he is *always* under oath.

Bill Clinton was under oath this way when, in the Monica eruption's early hours, he was questioned by reporters about his denial of an "improper relationship" with the intern. Was this lawyer language, they wondered? Was the relationship "in any way sexual," one of them asked him? "The relationship was not sexual," the president responded. "And I know what you mean, and the answer is no."

Bill Clinton was similarly under oath a few days later, when he directed the same denial at a national television audience—in that famous, clenched-jaw, finger-wagging act. He was under oath for months thereafter, as he sent his deputies to attack Ken Starr as a maniac and to clog the courts with spurious assertions of testimonial privilege. It was all a lie. And so all the while, the American presidency was a lie.

Early in Mozart's opera about another seducer, Don Giovanni makes a solemn promise—"I swear it on my honor"—and almost immediately breaks it. What about your vow, he's asked by his servant, Leporello? *Non so di giuramenti*, the Don replies; *I know no oath*. In the realm of Art, such chronic betrayal is fascinating. But in real life, in the Oval Office, it is intolerable.

Or at least it should be. For his Lewinsky dalliance, and for the brutality with which he has manipulated American politics to conceal that dalliance, Clinton must somehow, in some form, receive official sanction. Don Giovanni was dragged to Hell in the end; we might settle for something less as Clinton's punishment. But punishment there should be. New and improved lies from the president will not be enough.

—David Tell, for the Editors

The Defining Lie

by Michael Medved

All discussions about the president's predicament, whether at dinner parties or on talk radio, in neighborhood bars or on cable TV, seem to unfold with an almost ritualized predictability.

At one point or another, Bill Clinton's exasperated defenders invariably declare that the chief executive's social life is his own business. With all the problems confronting our country, they snarl, who cares whether some middle-aged guy got involved in an affair with an adoring intern? Sex ought to remain a private issue, they say, and this whole scandal is only about sex.

No it's not, retort the Clinton critics. The deeper issues involve perjury, obstruction of justice, stonewalling, a consistent pattern of deception, contempt for our legal system. It's not about sex, they bark. It's about lying. But it's still only lying about sex, insist the Clintonistas. And everybody lies about sex, whether it's sighing, "You're the best I've ever had," or swearing, "I could never feel attracted to anyone who looked as trashy as she does!" No one is so upright or honorable that he hasn't at some time fibbed a bit, or at least shaded the truth, when it comes to life's most intimate arena.

At this point, the anti-Clinton contingent usually sputters off into "higher-ground" defensiveness, suggesting that the president isn't supposed to behave like everybody else, that he ought to set a moral example for the country, that his lies do more damage to the fabric of society than those of ordinary citizens, and so forth and so on into the evening. Regardless of how indignant or eloquent a presidential pursuer might prove to be, he's already lost the debate . . . if he accepts the notion that Clinton has merely lied about sex.

Yet this notion involves perhaps the most crucial misunderstanding of the entire controversy. If the president indeed failed to tell the truth last January

when he stared into TV cameras, wagged his finger at the nation, and declaimed that he had *not* had sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky, he wasn't lying about sex. He was lying about the survival of his presidency. A *sex* lie in this context might have involved a plaintive plea to the effect that "Hillary, honey, I swear that big-haired intern isn't my type and there's never, ever been anything between us." As the president's defenders rightly insist, such a statement, however misleading or dishonorable, ought to remain a private matter—of concern only to the chief executive and his wife. But when the president issued his categorical public denial in the Lewinsky matter, he wasn't speaking to his wife—he was speaking to the American people. And if he lied then, he wasn't lying to Hillary—he was lying to us.

Indeed, that lie might properly be viewed as the defining moment of his presidency. Through either slick leadership or sheer dumb luck (or some combination of the two), Clinton has managed to avoid earth-shaking crises in his terms in office—no Great Depression, no Hiroshima or Korea, no Cuban missile crisis, no Gulf War. The only moment at which he faced a potentially history-making disaster was when his very claim to the office he had craved his whole life appeared suddenly shaky—with the first explosion of Lewinsky-related news last January. Veteran pundits predicted he would be forced to resign within a matter of weeks, and even his friend and former aide George Stephanopoulos publicly used the "I-word" (impeachment) in discussing Clinton's future. "Sexgate" has tested his mettle just as surely as Watergate defined the real Richard Nixon. For the first time, this popular, skillful chief executive encountered a make-or-break juncture in his presidency.

And most Americans remain convinced that he answered this singular challenge with an outright lie. There was nothing private about this response; the context could hardly have been more public. When he confronted the charges against him, his reply was hardly personal—it was profoundly political, and unprecedented.

That is why another line regularly employed by Clinton's apologists remains at best irrelevant and, at worst, thoroughly misleading. "He's not the first chief executive to fool around in the White House!" they declare, avoiding the fact that he is the only president forced to respond to credible charges of sexual immorality during his term of office. Harding, FDR, Kennedy, and Johnson may have engaged in extramarital adventures as president, but they never looked the American public in the eye and lied about their shortcomings.

The notion that charges of perjury, obstruction of justice, and, worst of all, breaking faith with the American people amount to nothing more than "lies about sex" is absurd. The reaction of the leader of the free world to the one decisive crisis of his political career speaks volumes about his fitness to hold the office.

Film critic Michael Medved hosts a nationally syndicated radio talk show and is co-author of the newly published **Saving Childhood: Protecting Our Children from the National Assault on Innocence.**

You Can Be a Pundit, Too!

by Andrew Ferguson

American journalism reached a landmark of sorts last month, and the moment shouldn't be allowed to pass without suitable fanfare, however tardy. On *Late Edition*, CNN's Sunday-morning political talk show, three of the show's regular panelists gathered as usual to chew over the week's news. The problem was, there wasn't any, or at least no news deemed pundit-worthy. This was July 19, before Monica flipped and the president agreed to testify. So the show's producers had a brainstorm: The panelists would comment on . . . their comments! The videotape rolled, the panelists watched a clip of themselves from a show months before, and then they were asked what they had to say about what they'd had to say. They were unanimous in their admiration.

This was history. Here, for a brief shining moment on CNN, the political talk show at last achieved a kind of perfection, the ultimate condition of postmodern purity: The pundits' world folded in on itself and became absolutely self-referential. The news had vanished altogether. Only the commentary remained.

We should have seen it coming, and now that it's happened once, it will surely happen again. Television's distorting effect on the delivery of news has been a favorite subject of deep-thinkers for years. One social critic, for example, invented the term "pseudo-event" to describe those manufactured happenings—political demonstrations, press conferences—that are

staged solely for the purpose of being broadcast by TV cameras. But pseudo-events are, so to speak, old news. We are now in the age of pseudo-punditry.

The term "pundit" used to have a slightly derisive scent to it, a connotation of gasbaggery and dilettantism that the earliest pundits did their best to avoid. These were the old gents who would appear on shows like *Agronsky and Company*. The mastodons would gather around a table and summarize the stories they'd reported the week before, while their colleagues nodded approvingly and tried, often without success, to stay awake until it was their turn to disgorge.

In the mid-1980s, *The McLaughlin Group* injected heat and opinion into the format, but the premise—national political reporters gabbing about national politics—was essentially unchanged. Even so, *McLaughlin* was scorned by Agronskyists as mere punditry, an "intellectual food-fight." What fools we were! It is clear now that those were the good old days. In the era of pseudo-punditry, the bitching and hissing of the old *McLaughlin Group* look like Matins at a Benedictine monastery.

Surf the all-news cable channels if you don't believe me. I recommend the daylight hours, though early prime time serves the purpose, too. FNC, MSNBC, and the other alphabetized talk channels offer a furious parade of usually young guys and gals who seem never to have wanted anything more from life than to be called a TV pundit. Each of them bears a mysterious job title that raises more questions than it answers: "GOP consultant," "Democratic pollster," "former White House aide," "former [fired?] prosecutor," "syndicated columnist." Each, also, has a grave expression and a furrowed brow—sometimes two. And excellent hair.

More important, each speaks with the certitude of a racetrack tout. The certitude is all the odder given the subjects the pseudo-pundits are asked to address. "Cynthia," the MSNBC moderator might say, "how is Hillary Clinton reacting to the latest revelations?" "Jeff, even without the dress, does Ken Starr have enough corroborative evidence to indict?" "What's Bill Clinton's endgame strategy?" "What does the Secret Service know?" "How are the grand jurors holding up?"

Various as they are, the questions have one thing in common. The only possible answer to any of them is: "How the hell should I know?" But this is not the answer that's given. Being a pseudo-pundit means never, ever, under any circumstances, having to say, "I don't know."

It is no coincidence that the rise of pseudo-punditry occurs simultaneously with Bill Clinton's logorrheic presidency, in which the piling up of words supersedes any consideration of what the words might mean. Pseudo-punditry operates in a world where knowing and not knowing are irrelevant to the matter at hand, for the matter at hand requires only speculation, wishful thinking, pretense—the simulation of knowledge rather than the real thing. All you have to do is keep talking.

***Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor of* THE WEEKLY STANDARD.**

THE DEMOCRATS' DAVID DUKE

by Matthew Rees

WHAT IF REPUBLICANS NOMINATED for governor a fringe figure with a history of making derogatory comments about Catholics and Jews? Klansman David Duke created roughly this scenario seven years ago in Louisiana. The national media charged that hateful extremists were taking over the GOP. And Republicans, both in the state and across the country, disavowed and condemned Duke.

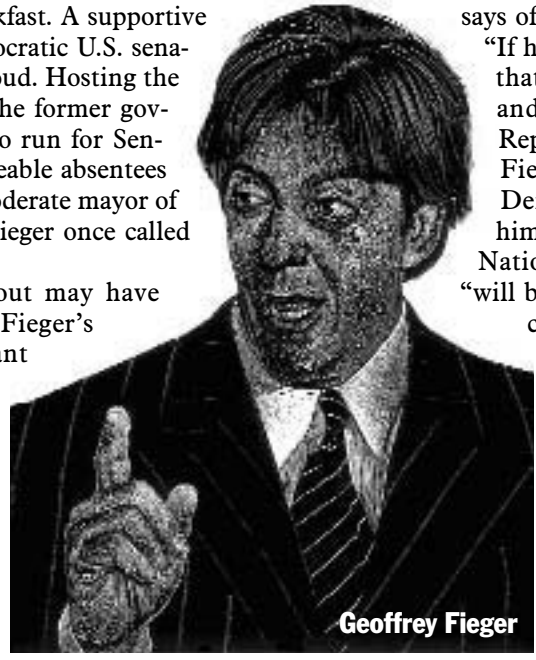
The reaction has been a little different to Geoffrey Fieger, Jack Kevorkian's lawyer. Fieger won the Democratic nomination for governor in Michigan on August 4. He has compared Orthodox rabbis to Nazis, described the archbishop of Detroit as a "nut," and characterized his opponent, John Engler, as "the product of miscegenation between barnyard animals and humans." But prominent Michigan Democrats such as David Bonior and John Dingell have done nothing to distance themselves from Fieger. Indeed, Bonior says the Democratic party "is united top to bottom" for Fieger.

The Democrats' embrace of Fieger is all the more remarkable considering the belligerence of his primary campaign. Trading on the attention he received for being Dr. Death's lawyer, Fieger ran against the Democratic establishment. One of his opponents, Larry Owen, was the favorite of the state's powerful labor unions—the United Auto Workers endorsed him a year before the election—and Owen also had the support of Bonior, Dingell, and other House Democrats. Doug Ross, meanwhile, was the hope of

New Democrats.Throughout the campaign, Fieger mostly ignored Owen and Ross, as well as the Jewish voters who figure prominently in Michigan's Democratic primaries. Instead, he directed vicious personal comments at Engler and went after the black vote. He played up his outsider status by vowing, if elected, to sack the state Democratic chairman, Mark Brewer.

Given Fieger's campaign, coupled with his embarrassing rhetorical and professional record, Michigan Democrats had a good excuse not to line up behind the candidate immediately after his victory. But on the morning of August 5, the day after the primary, Bonior, Dingell, and fellow House Democrats John Conyers and Debbie Stabenow all flew in from Washington to appear at a Detroit hotel for a "Democratic Unity" breakfast. A supportive letter from the state's Democratic U.S. senator, Carl Levin, was read aloud. Hosting the event was Jim Blanchard, the former governor who's maneuvering to run for Senate in 2000. The only noticeable absentees were Dennis Archer, the moderate mayor of Detroit, and Ross, whom Fieger once called a "sniveling weasel."

The heavyweight turnout may have been responsible for Fieger's uncharacteristically pleasant mood at the breakfast. He joked that Brewer, the party chairman, could keep his job, while observing that he was "glad to see religion back in the Democratic party. When I walked in, I never saw so many people praying." But the détente didn't last long. Once the breakfast was over, Fieger described the Democratic party as full of "wimps and oatmeal."



Geoffrey Fieger

Kevin Chadwick

The prevailing Democratic attitude toward Fieger was captured by Debbie Stabenow, who remarked at the breakfast that "the most important thing for each of us is to understand that the real fight is with John Engler. The good news is that we've got a guy tough enough to take him on." This is the crux of it for most Michigan Democrats. So intense is their animosity toward Engler—he's had an extremely successful eight years as governor—they refuse to distance themselves from someone as embarrassing as Fieger. Thus Jim Berryman, a Democratic state senator who's running against Rep. Nick Smith, says without a hint of irony, "I'm more offended John Engler can have policies that kill kids than I am by people calling him names." Other Democrats, asked about various Fieger smears, breezily dismiss his comments as having been "taken out of context." They also praise him for "energizing" voters. But some Democrats in the state legislature are already expressing concerns privately that they could lose their slim House majority with Fieger at the top of the ticket.

Michigan Republicans, then, couldn't be happier about having Fieger as the face of the Democrats this year. David Bonior's opponent, Brian Palmer, has already distributed three press releases pressuring Bonior to disavow Fieger and charging that it is "an abuse of the people's trust and an insult to their faith" for Bonior to "align himself with a religious bigot." Similarly, Republican Leslie Touma says of her opponent, Rep. Sander Levin, "If he stands with Geoffrey Fieger, does that mean he agrees with his caustic and divisive statements?" Michigan Republicans say they're likely to use Fieger and his record against every Democratic candidate who endorses him. A spokesman for the Republican National Committee predicts Fieger "will be made the poster child for Democratic candidates in the '98 elections."

One leading Democratic strategist, while not agreeing that the GOP can make much hay out of Fieger, doesn't mince words when saying of him, "He's a nut, he's got very high negatives, and he's going to get beat badly." Indeed, one poll shows that just 58 percent of Democrats support Fieger (while 90 percent of Republicans support Engler) and that two-thirds of the Democrats who voted for Ross say they'll be supporting Engler. Fieger didn't help himself much with Democrats when he recently approached two prominent Republican women about being his lieutenant governor.

The strong possibility of a landslide victory by Engler, coupled with Fieger's recklessness and propensity to pop religious figures, raises the question whether he'll get any support from Democrats nationally. An official at the Democratic Governors' Association says financial and technical resources will be made available to Fieger. More important, though, is whether President Clinton will campaign for him. Fieger met with top Clinton officials on August 7 and told reporters afterward that he expects the full support of the White House. The Democratic

strategist isn't so sure. "The president has a busy schedule these days. I don't see him making it out to Michigan for a fund-raiser."

Which is probably a smart move. The last thing Clinton needs now is to explain why he's supporting a man who once described Jesus as "just some goofball that got nailed to the cross."

Matthew Rees is a staff writer for THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

SADDAM WINS

by John R. Bolton

IN AN ASTONISHING PAIR OF REPORTS at the end of last week, the *Washington Post* and NBC revealed that the Clinton administration has repeatedly sought to limit the work of United Nations weapons inspectors in Iraq. Administration officials—led by secretary of state Madeleine Albright—have, in the past few months, attempted to prevent the special commission responsible for Iraq's disarmament from conducting surprise inspections of sites the inspectors believed contained likely evidence of Iraqi development of weapons of mass destruction.

If true, these reports lay the foundation for a national-security scandal of immense proportions, reflecting an unprecedented level of duplicity that Congress must fully expose. If true, these reports show behavior by the Clinton administration that goes well beyond its normal incompetence and amounts to what can only be called malfeasance in office. Indeed, if true, these reports could create a domestic political crisis for the president that will make him long for the return of the Lewinsky scandal. At a minimum, the House and Senate foreign-affairs committees should return from recess to conduct immediate hearings.

Before this news broke, Iraq had nearly succeeded in throwing off both the economic sanctions imposed by the U.N. in 1990 and the U.N.'s weapons-inspection system. Yet Saddam Hussein was seeking Security Council legitimization of what he had essentially secured on the ground. His weapons program, although diminished by the U.N.'s seven-year effort, never altogether ceased, and Iraq is now poised to do openly what it has been doing furtively since its military defeat in 1991: develop, build, and deploy weapons of mass destruction.

In response to Saddam's last major act of defiance, in October 1997, the United States should have pledged to overthrow his regime and end its threat to the region. But by then, the Clinton administration

had effectively ignored Iraq for almost five years. In January 1998, the Lewinsky scandal increased the risks to the White House of an assertive response, and the following month U.N. secretary general Kofi Annan made a deal with Saddam with Washington's full support. The Annan agreement allowed the Iraqis to pretend to cooperate with U.N. inspectors and the Clinton administration to pretend its policy had been vindicated.

As predicted in these pages, Annan's deal lasted only until Iraq decided the moment had come to challenge it. Even the administration's supporters never regarded it as a permanent solution. Instead, they argued for "containing" Iraq. They justified President Clinton's decision not to use military force in February as strengthening both our political position and our ability to use force "the next time."

Now, "the next time" is here, perhaps even precipitated by the administration's own blunders. The Security Council condemned Iraq's withdrawal of cooperation as "totally unacceptable" but did not threaten "the severest consequences" for Iraq—as it had in its resolution endorsing the Annan deal in March—or suggest the use of force if Iraq remained defiant. If the press reports noted above are true, of course, we now know why.

Kevin Chadwick

Saddam Hussein

Secretary General Annan, faced with the collapse of the agreement he had negotiated, has called for a "comprehensive reassessment" of Iraq by the Security Council. This is a code phrase for normalization of Iraq's international status, giving Saddam Hussein what he has sought since 1991: an end to economic sanctions and weapons inspections. No one in New York was surprised by press reports that Annan's proposal came "just hours" after a telephone call with Iraqi deputy prime minister Tariq Aziz. Annan dispatched his personal envoy, Ambassador Prakash Shah of India, to Baghdad last week for further negotiations with Aziz, while Richard Butler, chief U.N. arms inspector, remained in New York cooling his heels. With the September opening of the U.N. General Assembly due to inundate Manhattan with heads of government, foreign ministers, and their retinues, there is every prospect that the secretary general soon will seek the full rehabilitation of the Baghdad regime.

The United States is completely unprepared for this challenge. The Clinton administration is doing all it can to divert public attention from the necessity of thwarting Saddam's gambit and what may be its own complicity. The "Persian Gulf coalition," long neglected by Washington, has almost disappeared. But time is depressingly short, and the potential damage for the United States, in the Gulf and around the world, is enormous.

If we are seen bending the knee to Iraq, our credibility, restored by President Reagan's rearmament and President Bush's military and diplomatic conduct of Desert Storm, will again be tarnished. To allies and opponents alike, it will seem that the United States, in a flashback to the Carter administration 20 years ago, is undergoing another humiliation in the desert.

More important, an unfettered Iraq will certainly work full tilt to rebuild its arsenals. There will be nothing to prevent it from presenting the world with a *fait accompli* and simply announcing its possession of nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons at any time.

What can be done? With the president's truthfulness under severe assault, the outlook is about as dismal as can be. Another weak and inadequate response from the White House—belying its confident promises in February—would further demonstrate the administration's dishonesty in foreign policy. Ideally, Saddam's latest insult to the U.N. would finally compel a consensus that the strategy of containment is doomed and there is no alternative to replacing the Iraqi regime. But acting on that conclusion would mean applying force—which requires vigorous political leadership, unlikely to materialize during the remaining life of this administration. Without such leadership, secretary of defense William Cohen's recent boast that the United States has more than

ample firepower in the region is hollow at best.

Even a minimally acceptable policy must confront Saddam in the short term. The president should announce, for example, that Iraq's record is so appalling that the United States will *never* permit the U.N. sanctions to be lifted while Saddam remains in power and that Washington will use its veto in the Security Council to this effect. This would end any impression that Saddam can outlast or outcheat U.N. inspections. The oil-for-food program should also be dramatically scaled back or eliminated, forcing Iraq to make painful choices.

And steps must be taken to remove Saddam from power. Covert operations could include arming and training Iraqi resistance groups—and especially recruitment of high-ranking military officers perhaps willing to move more quickly. Such measures would not bring immediate results, but they would show Saddam and the world that the United States had moved beyond mere posturing. If some such actions are not at least tried, humiliation will be the kindest word for what President Clinton will have permitted to befall us.

John R. Bolton is senior vice president of the American Enterprise Institute. In the Bush administration, he served as assistant secretary of state for international organizations.

Milosevic Wins, Too

by Morton Abramowitz

You've got to hand it to Yugoslav president and ruler of Serbia Slobodan Milosevic. He has our number.

Hemmed in economically, his country a basket case, his people alienated, he has the United States and its allies begging him to make peace and throw a bone to the Albanians of Kosovo. For many weeks he has told visiting Western delegations of his commitment to end the fighting, as he continues to torch Albanian villages. After eight years of watching him destroy the former Yugoslavia, you might have thought we had learned something.

Indeed, Milosevic has manipulated the West so skillfully that many believe we have joined with him in trying to eliminate the Kosovo separatists, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

After wagging its finger at Milosevic for the destruction of villages in Kosovo, performing military exercises in next-door Albania and Macedonia, and incessantly asserting that "the use of force is still on the table," the West has watched for four weeks as he has cleaned the clock of the Albanian insurgents. Many in both Serbia and Kosovo maintain that the West gave Milosevic a green light. As one unidentified Western diplomat commented, it was necessary to "bring the KLA down a peg or two" to get "negotiations" going.

What have Western "peace" efforts and incessant NATO foreplay produced since January? We have watched the ethnic cleansing of Albanian villages along the Kosovo-Albanian border. We are witnessing a major humanitarian crisis, the dimensions of which daily unfold. Over 60,000 Kosovars are refugees, some 300,000 are displaced, with many wandering in forests, and another 700,000 or so are under some form of siege or food-supply restrictions. Milosevic is targeting the civilians of Kosovo as much as the KLA; he is quenching the violence by draining the sea in which the KLA operates. And as this goes on, we call it a "success" when we get his permission to send into Kosovo foreign observers to view the destruction, and we content ourselves with a stream of announcements about Milosevic's eagerness to get displaced people home and bind up the wounds of the war—a task for which he has no money and we would likely end up paying the bill.

Events in Kosovo are also creating more chaos in Albania—if that is possible—by weakening reformist elements in Tirana and accentuating the split between North and South. More ominously, Milosevic is polarizing Macedonia, as many Slavic Macedonians—not surprisingly, given their own unhappy Albanian population—are supporting Belgrade in the fight against the Albanians. In his own backyard, Milosevic is undermining the position of his enemy, president Milo Djukanovic of Montenegro, by sending him more and more Kosovo refugees.

Milosevic has every reason to be confident of his handling of the West. He has created dissension within NATO and put Russia in the middle of the issue, effectively giving Russia a veto over the use of NATO forces. Now he has led the West to agree that the enemy is really the Albanians. He can do this because he knows the West is opposed to Albanian demands for Kosovar independence for fear of destabilizing both Macedonia and the Dayton accords. In fact it is Milosevic's policies and the continuing war

that are undermining Macedonia and, quite possibly, Dayton.

More important, Milosevic believes that Western publics and legislatures want no more Balkan military adventures. Once-robust Western rhetoric has turned mushy in the past six months. So when Western tough talk heats up again, as it did last week, over the humanitarian nightmare Milosevic has created, who can blame him if he pays no attention?

Kosovo is not Bosnia, as Western governments repeatedly state. In at least one way, it is worse: The West has had such extensive dealings with Milosevic over Yugoslavia's disintegration that to be beguiled by him again almost defies imagination. His word is meaningless unless he is totally cornered, as he was by Croatia's destruction of the Croatian Serbs and imminent destruction of the Bosnian Serbs and the subsequent NATO bombing; those developments are what persuaded Milosevic to make peace in Bosnia.

Milosevic

Over the past six months, the Kosovo problem has been radically transformed. The "non-violent" Albanian leadership of Ibrahim Rugova has been badly tarnished. The advent of the KLA and the war and destabilization has made any solution politically difficult for either party. Right now the KLA is reeling and may be willing to settle—along with Rugova, and under Western pressure—for whatever "Slobo" offers. Many Albanians understandably want to negotiate at all costs, in the belief that the fighting must stop to save their people. We are encouraging them to think that they can lie down with the lion. So we rock along seeking "negotiations" at any cost and a settlement that may be elusive and is not likely to be sustainable without a massive Serb or Western military presence. Presumably if a deal jells, we will reward Milosevic for his generosity by lifting sanctions, providing aid, and welcoming him into the Western club.

We have made the Albanians the crux of the Kosovo problem and not the man who created it and survives from it. We have supported the strong and deserted the weak. We seem to have the hope that Milosevic can, by such Western "statecraft" and a change of heart, reestablish some form of Albanian self-rule in Kosovo, possibly portrayed as leading to independence. Failing that, we seem to be prepared to live with a continuing low-level guerrilla war until the Albanians run out of steam. Thus, apparently, will the West "solve" the Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia problems.

Morton Abramowitz, a former assistant secretary of state, serves on the executive committee of the International Crisis Group.

Love's Last Shift

by Peter Lubin

There is both profit and pleasure to be derived from what may be called the poetry of mistake. Colley Cibber, perhaps the least talented of England's poet laureates, saw his play *Love's Last Shift* translated into French as *La dernière chemise de l'amour*. Scotland's Firth of Forth was translated by another Frenchman as *la cinquième de la quatrième*. Attempting to correct a non-existent error by assuming "firth" was a printer's error, the hapless translator ended with a folly of 5 percent, instead of east of Edinburgh. But we are glad to have these mistakes: Something has been found in translation.

In one of the standard Russian-English dictionaries, I came across the word *polnolunie*, which means "full moon," rendered as "fool moon." I imagined the compiler consulting over telephone static, in bad old Soviet days, with a fellow lexicographer. "How do I translate *polnolunie* into English?" Mumble,

mumble. "What did you say, Felix Edmundovich?" Mumble, mumble. "Ah, I see. Fool moon." And into the dictionary it went.

Sometimes a printer's error will change the entire meaning of a sentence. The Adulterous or Wicked Bible, published in London by Barker and Lucas in 1631, takes its name from the fact that a "not" was left out of the Seventh Commandment. Thus God instructs the Hebrews: "Thou shalt commit adultery." Readers of the time were not amused (indeed, Barker and Lucas, having blotted their copybook, were fined and temporarily banned from the printing trade), but the wayzgoose lapse amuses us now. We might even imagine a reprint of Barker and Lucas being quietly substituted, in certain motel rooms, for the more demanding King James version distributed by the wandering tribe of Gideonites.

Academic errors can be funny when not fatal. I once knew a graduate student in Russian who, preparing for his Ph.D. oral examination, decided to cut corners by reading a few works in English instead of the originals, as required. Among the books he studied in this fashion was Gogol's most famous story, "The Greatcoat" (in Russian, *Shinel*). At the exam, the professor—an elderly native speaker who had seen Mayakovsky and Lili Brik plain—asked him to list, in Russian, Gogol's major works, including the *Petersburg Tales*. The student, furiously translating the English back into Russian, referred to the story as *Plashch*—which is to say "The Raincoat."

Which brings us to The News the Whole World Has Been Waiting For, and one more of those misunderstandings that life occasionally sends along to cheer us up. What forgettable or immortal work of world literature a certain palpable miss provided, along with lovelacing embraces, to her ithyphallic flimflam man, is undoubtedly of less moment, in the grand scheme of things, then the Balkanization of the Balkans, or frantic attempts to swat the millennium bug, or eternal verities about Vishnuland that took flight in the stipe of a mushroom cloud. Scandal is ephemeral, the insect of an hour; affairs of state alone perdure.

Still, few will resist the chance to scoop up the latest grist for the gossip mill about the girl from the "curvaceous slopes of California" who made her bends adorings. I tell the tale I heard told. She went, *sans moeurs et sans reproches*, to closedmouthed Kramerbooks, and there, amidst shelves devoted to eighteenth-century English drama, sought one of those inconvenient works "to be read," as Rousseau remarks, "with only one hand," as a drury for her intermittent darling. Neither *The Virgin Unmasked,* by Henry Fielding, nor *The School for Scandal*, by Richard Brinsley Sheridan, quite fit her bill, but just then, on the verge of coming away empty-handed, she spotted a copy—I have it on impeachable authority—of innocent Oliver Goldsmith's inoffensive farce, *She Stoops to Conquer*, and changed her mind.

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Lawyers and Circuses

By David Brooks

If there's anybody left in America who qualifies as genteel, surely it's *New York Times* columnist and PBS frontman Russell Baker. But these days Baker has been in what for him qualifies as a quaking rage. He recently wrote a column titled "A Shudder of Disgust," about the degradation of public discourse. His peg was the Lewinsky story. His contempt was for pretty much everybody involved in it. "Sensitive people," Baker wrote, "will be content to loathe them all quietly for what they have done to the country, for how they have debased our culture."

Roberto Parada

It's a sentiment we're hearing more and more from commentators on the far side of the generation gap. There was recently a segment on a Los Angeles radio station that had sages Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and Richard Reeves scolding the media for paying so much attention to this lewd affair. And it's not just liberal fogies who feel this way. The conservative Rutherford Institute is now fighting for survival. Its donors have stopped giving, to protest the group's decision to support Paula Jones's lawsuit. These people may not like Bill Clinton, but they despise tawdriness even more, and they're willing to blame anybody who airs it.

It's hard not to sympathize with the last defenders of the old order. Baker, Schlesinger, and those Rutherford donors are all standing up for a set of social standards now eroding—something conservatives ought to respect. During the Cold War, there was a hierarchy, rarely articulated but perfectly understood, that determined which subjects were fit for public discussion. At its head were issues involving guns and money. So arms control, foreign affairs, and monetary policy were the most prestigious topics. Then you got down to less prestigious but still important matters, like education and welfare. Below them all, however, was a range of subjects, private matters, that were unfit for parlor chatter—abortion, adultery, private perversion. People weren't innocent about such topics (read John O'Hara), but that was no reason to acknowledge them. Folks were willing to cover up scandal and vice for the sake of reticence, which was a value they thought essential to decent public life.

That code is now gone. We live in a world in which Dan Rather and *New York Times* columnists go on the Don Imus show. It's clear the old Protestant establishment can no longer exert sufficient social pressure to enforce its standards. Now there's a general scrambling of high and low, and this, since Monica, has provoked a raft of hypocrisy on both sides. It's a little rich to hear baby boomers who have spent their lives attacking the WASP old-boy network now lamenting the loss of the decorum established by that network. Not long ago, the boomers were attacking decorum as stuffy and repressive. They were the ones who prized frankness. So too, it's a little odd to see some conservatives, who talk a lot about the degradation of culture, suddenly unbothered by public discussion of semen-stained dresses.

But the shift from Walter Lippmann to Geraldo Rivera is not strictly a story of cultural decay. It's more accurate to say that public passions have migrated. During the Cold War, there was a broad consensus

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about private morality, but strong disagreements about public policy. It's hard now even to recall the furious intensity that surrounded aid to the contras, let alone episodes like the Hiss-Chambers trial. Today, there are few passionate debates about fundamental public issues. Almost nobody argues the pros and cons of capitalism. Political corruption like Whitewater or Asiagate arouses passions only within the niche market of political junkies.

But Americans are confused about private morality. Many Americans don't know how to be judgmental. They aren't sure how they are supposed to treat people who have committed sins. So to address such confusion, public discussion has shifted to topics of private behavior, and not just on Jerry Springer, but on the network news and in the news magazines. If anything, it's surprising that at this late date there is still such widespread resistance to frank discussion about private matters.

What's interesting is the arena we have chosen for our discussions about private morality. If you had to predict, you would say that it would be psychologists or novelists or clergymen who would lead public discussions of personal morality. But the novelists have retreated to their alternative academic universe. And most leading psychologists and church leaders have values so non-judgmental that they are of little help to mainstream Americans. So instead, America has turned to . . . lawyers.

The legal arena has taken center stage. Whether the subject is race, sex, the way we treat our parents, or the way we treat our children, it's one damn legal proceeding after another. It's O.J., the Menendez brothers, Lewinsky, babies in the dumpster, kids shooting in the schoolyard. It's these stories, not legislative battles or works of literature, that are the real markers of the age. When America needs to take its temperature, it doesn't look to novels or to the halls of Congress—it looks to the courts.

We're seeing the emergence of a new social phenomenon: the legal spectacle. Monicagate, which has unfolded in Washington and involves its top politician, is more a legal spectacle than a political scandal. Unlike Watergate, it didn't start as an effort to gain political advantage. Unlike Iran-contra or Hiss-Chambers, it is not related to any great policy matter. Monicagate is about politics like the O.J. trial was about football. Politics is the route Bill Clinton used to achieve celebrity, and a celebrity surrounded by lawyers is what you need to get one of these new-style spectacles going.

The legal arena is perfect for controversies about private behavior because it allows us to probe for ever more lurid details while at the same time giving us a dispassionate and technical way to talk about them. Unlike journalists or writers, lawyers with subpoena power can unearth personal details with a thoroughness that was previously available only to novelists. Moreover, the pace and rhythm of legal proceedings stretches each drama over months, even years. So the public can follow the stories with the same steady fascination that 19th-century readers followed serialized novels.

But these legal spectacles are not traditional stories, or non-fiction novels in courtroom form. Several pundits have likened the Monica story to a tragedy, with Clinton being brought low by his tragic flaw. But what separates these spectacles from normal storytelling is that, in spectacles, unlike literature, the central figure is beside the point. An O.J. or (in radically different circumstances) a Clinton may get the action going. But once the spectacle begins, this figure is passive. It is the lawyers and commentators who are the main players. They impose a silence and idleness on the genesis figure and they take over the action. Imagine a Shakespearean tragedy that has Othello's legal team battling Iago's legal team while the two principals sit in the dressing room, awaiting the outcome.

As the months go by, the lawyers and pundits construct a legal superstructure and a dense thicket of commentary around the original kernel of crime. Using the magic word "allegedly," pundits can fashion arcane discussions about events that may never have occurred in the first place. Pretty soon, the legal superstructure and the sociological commentary begin to overshadow the original event. In true postmodern fashion, the meanings ascribed to the events are more important than the events themselves. O.J. matters because of the lessons different groups have drawn about race relations. Johnnie Cochran has had more influence on American life than O.J. Simpson. Monicagate's importance will lie in the way it influences our tolerance of adultery and lying. The fact that the public has so far accepted Clinton despite his behavior is more significant than anything that has happened or is likely to happen to Clinton personally. America is always in the midst of redefining itself. These spectacles serve as the pretext for that kind of discussion.

Today, you can't turn on the TV without seeing Jonathan Turley, Greta Van Susteren, Richard Ben-Veniste, Alan Dershowitz, Johnnie Cochran, or some other lawyer expanding on the events of the moment. Legal spectacles are like war in that they make fast promotion possible. And the sort of people who rise to prominence in times of spectacle are those who are

good behavior coaches. In last week's *Newsweek*, lavish attention was paid to Clinton lawyers David Kendall and Nicole Seligman. In *Time*, there was a worshipful profile of Lewinsky lawyer Billy Martin. These lawyers are portrayed as the strategic masterminds behind the conflict. They are the only truly glamorous figures in the entire event. And what these people are praised for is their ability to give advice on etiquette and conduct.

In college, the deal was you could be either a lawyer or a writer. The lawyers would go off and get nicely tailored suits. They'd play tennis wearing whites and enjoy winter vacations at resorts. The writers, meanwhile, would wear rumpled jackets, play tennis wearing any old T-shirt, and enjoy cheap vacations in national parks. But as compensation, the writers (journalists, intellectuals) got to play a unique public role. They got to take part in the national conversation, tackle the really big issues, and hash out moral disputes. The lawyers, of course, had to squirrel away over boring briefs. But now lawyers get the money *and* the public role.

So the current fascination with lewd details and suspect dresses is not simply some lapse of taste. It is not some temporary blip that the country can put behind it once Monica leaves the scene. These legal spectacles are going to dominate the media and American life for quite a while. We're going to be spending our time with all those yucky private details we sort of don't want to know. And we're going to have to listen to a lot more lawyers. And maybe start thinking like them. ♦

The Potemkin White House

Let's Just Make Believe the Scandal Doesn't Exist

By Tucker Carlson

The day after terrorists blew up two U.S. embassies in East Africa, Sandy Berger, President Clinton's national security adviser, held a meeting at the White House to discuss the American response to the bombings. The secretaries of state and defense, along with the attorney general and the heads of the CIA and the FBI, were there. Absent from the table, however, was Bill Clinton. After a morning engagement with his personal lawyer, the president took the rest of the day off and played golf.

Clinton's failure to show up to an important national-security meeting was taken by many in Washington as confirmation that he has become utterly distracted by the Monica Lewinsky scandal, and no doubt he has. Facing the threat of impeachment and in a perpetual huddle with his lawyers, Clinton doesn't spend much time these days running the White House, much less the country. But that doesn't mean he has been idle. In fact, he has never been busier.

In addition to speaking at an astounding number of campaign-season fund-raisers and taking frequent trips out of the country, Clinton has talked up a new public-policy initiative nearly every day for the past several months. Virtually none of them means much, but the sheer volume is impressive. Consider: In a single seven-day period in early July, the president gave public lectures on HMO reform, handgun safety, teen drug use, the year 2000 computer problem, and the importance of restoring historic sites. He also participated in a race-relations "dialogue" on PBS and celebrated the 200th birthday of the Marine Corps band.

The following week, judging from White House press releases, was even more productive. Between July 20 and 26, Clinton promoted "discipline and safety in schools," improved "the quality of nursing homes," announced "new grants to fight crime," signed the IRS Reform Act, and took on "agriculture issues during a radio press conference." On Friday he gave a speech to the Boys Nation class of 1998, and by Monday he was hard at work again, chatting about the entitlement mess at a forum on Social Security reform.

The first half of August was, if possible, even more

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frenetic. Over a span of less than two weeks, the president hosted events on welfare reform, job retraining, global warming, health care, information technology, and gun control. On August 7, he appeared in the Rose Garden to sign the Work Force Investment Act, possibly the most important piece of legislation, Clinton explained, since the Credit Union Membership Access Act, which he had signed earlier that morning. Four days later, Clinton traveled to San Bruno, Calif., to assure citizens there that his administration is doing its best to keep their municipal reservoir clean—not an easy task, he reminded the crowd, given the "disturbing trend" among Republicans to oppose clean drinking water.

An ordinary president trapped in a humiliating, possibly felonious, sex scandal might hesitate before needlessly antagonizing his political opponents. Clinton, by contrast, has become belligerently partisan since January. In the past few weeks, he has threatened to veto seven of the 13 congressional appropriations bills, challenging the Republican leadership to another government shutdown. In speeches, his rhetoric frequently becomes comically overheated. At an event in Maryland earlier this month, Clinton warned a crowd of high-school students that the Republican Congress wants to eliminate their summer jobs. "And," said the president gravely, "that's not all the Republicans plan to do away with." According to Clinton, the heartless GOP also wants to rid America of safe, affordable daycare centers; hopes for a return to "exploitative" child labor; and, "at a time when our nation is experiencing extremely severe weather," can hardly wait to deny heat to elderly poor people during the winter months.

Kent Lemon

Paul Begala

Rough words from a practitioner of Third Way politics, though not rough enough to add heft to his policy proposals. Clinton's second-term agenda has turned out to be largely insignificant, and many congressional Democrats are mad about it. Every Friday morning, senior members of the White House staff—Rahm Emanuel, Paul Begala, and Ann Lewis among them—meet in Rep. Dick Gephardt's office to talk strategy, coordinate events, and develop the following week's political message. For Democratic members of Congress facing a midterm election in November, coming up with a message is not an idle concern. "To get over the cacophony of Monica," says one Hill staffer who participates in the meetings, "we're going to need to have a couple of very high-profile positions on issues like HMOs, education, and Social Security." Yet despite endless events at the White House, the staffer says, "little if anything we talk about gets translated into anything real." One thing nobody talks about is the scandal: "We operate the meetings as if the Lewinsky thing doesn't exist, like it never happened."

The White House's refusal to acknowledge the effect of the scandal comes as no surprise to former presidential adviser Dick Morris, who describes Clinton as "one great big denial mechanism." The president, says Morris, "exists in a cocoon of his own, where this stuff is never talked about, never referred to. And he flees to that cocoon—the frenetic fund-raising, the 18-hour-a-day campaigning, the speeches every day—to get away from the real world." According to Morris, Clinton demands that those around him participate in the charade, and thereby strikes an unspoken deal: "As long as we all make believe it's not there, we can go on. I'll act like I'm president, you act like you're staff, and we'll all have a wonderful time."

Some Clinton loyalists don't seem to mind playing along. "It's nothing," says ur-spinner James Carville of the Starr investigation. "It's $50 million for four strands of DNA. I'm not coming home from vacation for that." Few others close to the president can affect the same calm. Lanny Davis, who left his job as a White House spinner several months ago, says his former colleagues who stayed behind are by this point "absolutely frustrated, beyond frustrated, disgusted." Former Clinton aide Bill Curry, now safely residing in Connecticut, agrees. "Most of them are beyond language so they can't actually articulate their feelings. You have to have see them in the flesh and read their expressions."

One of the most bewildered expressions must belong to Clinton adviser Paul Begala. A seasoned and accomplished scandal manager, Begala spent much of

1992 swatting down reporters' questions about the candidate's draft record, his relationship with Gennifer Flowers, and countless other now-forgotten flaps. Begala emerged from the campaign devoted to Clinton and has remained a loyal supporter. Yet, when the Monica Lewinsky story broke, Begala was shaken.

The very allegation that Clinton would have an affair with an intern, Begala said at the time, was "bizarre and disgusting and awful." Before going on television to defend his boss, Begala met with lawyers in the White House counsel's office to find out what exactly Clinton meant when he denied a "sexual relationship" with Lewinsky. "I wanted to be sure, to a certainty," Begala explained, "that what we meant by this was not anything cute or sick or twisted, but that it was a simple, decent meaning of these words. I wasn't going to be part of it if we had some sort of twisted defense."

Satisfied that Clinton was telling the whole truth—not just the legal truth—Begala did interview after interview, making statements that are almost painful to read now. "The president has looked me in the eye," Begala said at one point with what appeared to be genuine conviction, "looked the American people in the eye, and said he did not have an improper physical relationship, that he didn't ask anyone to lie. That's enough. I believe in this man."

Seven months later, it's not clear what Begala believes. Asked how he'll feel if, as just about everyone at the White House expects, Clinton finally admits to some sort of a relationship with Lewinsky, Begala refuses to answer. "I don't want to talk about my feelings," he says. "I just don't want to talk about my feelings. I just don't. Maybe one day I'll be able to share my feelings." Until then, he says, "I've got to keep my head down and help get him through this difficult . . ." Begala's voice trails off. He sounds sad. "Then I'll get on with my life." ♦

Who Could Do Such a Thing?

A Suspect List in the Embassy Bombings

By Edward G. Shirley

Unless the United States has communication intercepts revealing who bombed the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, the search for the guilty will probably be an exhausting exercise involving meticulous police work, intelligence liaison, and luck. Connecting the terrorists' modus operandi to a motivating ideology will be key in pinpointing those responsible. Though it is too soon for investigators to zero in on a few possibilities, it isn't too early for observers to suggest why certain parties are more likely suspects than others.

The clerical regime in Tehran should be at the top of our list—even above Osaman bin Laden, the Saudi Islamic militant who calls for a holy war against the United States. Iran's ruling mullahs have the means, the mentality, and, most important, compelling domestic political reasons to kill American officials abroad.

Though terrorism waged by independent fanatics—so-called transnational terrorism—has come into vogue since the end of the Cold War, state-sponsored terrorism remains a more probable culprit for large-scale, coordinated terrorist acts. Very few terrorists really want to get caught or killed. Even those who seek to immolate themselves for God's greater glory and a passport to paradise often fear retribution against kith and kin enough to inhibit them from claiming their handiwork. Some terrorists, certain of their actions and free of any need to seduce new recruits, don't have to brag about their exploits. This is even truer for terrorist-supporting states, which have physically much to lose by failing to hide their fingerprints and emotionally little to gain.

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To kill on a large scale and remain anonymous, terrorists must operate in well-trained, dedicated teams. They must know how to conduct thorough but discreet surveillance—no easy task. They must possess the right identification and travel papers. In matters of training and documentation, governments have a big advantage over even the most dedicated wealthy individuals like bin Laden.

Of the five most likely culprits in the embassy attacks—Libya, Iraq, Sudan, Iran, and bin Laden—only the last two unquestionably can deploy terrorist teams willing, or even eager, to blow themselves up. Libya and Iraq certainly have their devotees and agents around the world—Libya's leader Muammar Qaddafi has spent money freely in Africa to win friends and undermine the West—but neither Saddam Hussein nor Qaddafi has been particularly successful at harnessing Islam, pan-Arabism, or any other belief to his holy war against America, Israel, and the West. Iraqis and Libyans—let alone Muslim East Africans—aren't known for their suicidal loyalty to these two men.

Americans shouldn't forget that after Ronald Reagan attacked Tripoli and George Bush unleashed Desert Storm, neither Qaddafi nor Hussein sent death-wish-driven terrorists against the United States. It appears that the terrorists who drove the bomb-laden trucks to the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam were willing, if not determined, to die. A Libyan or an Iraqi role in these attacks cannot be discounted, but the preferences and capabilities of both run more in the direction of hit teams and altitude-detonated bombs in planes.

Though Hassan al-Turabi, the "spiritual" leader of Sudan, has beguiled Western journalists and academics with his charm and fluent English and French, it isn't certain he commands a suicidally faithful following, either. Religious fanaticism has deep roots in Sudan, as General "Chinese" Gordon discovered in 1885 at Khartoum. But today's Sudanese Islamic state, though brutal, is neither particularly internationalist nor charismatic. Determined to reinforce his country's religious identity and willing to accept help from any quarter, al-Turabi gives safe haven to Islamic terrorists and fraternizes with Iraq and clerical Iran.

But Sudan's holy war has so far been largely confined to the subjugation of the black-African, Christian-animist southern part of the country. Even so, this jihad has unquestionably embittered and ideologically charged Sudanese life. And once sparked, the jihadist temperament can easily look beyond national borders toward the United States and Israel, favorite bogeymen of the Muslim Middle East.

No question: Sudan was philosophically and probably logistically capable of undertaking the U.S. embassy attacks. This said, however, it is more likely that Sudan, if involved, played a supporting role, allowing men who more passionately hate and fear the United States to take the lead.

Passionate hatred is a hallmark of Iran's Islamic Republic—and of bin Laden, who probably reviles the United States even more virulently than Iran's hard core. His holy-warrior language is frank, brutal, and uncompromising, shaded by none of the dissimulation and politesse of Persians. Does bin Laden, however, have the networks and operational wherewithal to launch sophisticated, clandestine attacks?

Perhaps. Much has been made of bin Laden's Afghan connections. A staunch and generous backer of the anti-Soviet Mujahedin, bin Laden has reportedly maintained his spiritual and financial links with the "Afghanis," the non-Afghan Muslims who went to Afghanistan to wage a jihad against the Soviet Union. With the Soviets vanquished, most of these "Afghanis" returned to their countries, often to continue the war against Westernizing Muslims.

But the "Afghanis" aren't subtle folks: At home or in Afghanistan, they stand out. Though the image of a CIA-trained "Afghani" killer-elite by now is well established, the truth is that most "Afghanis," like the Afghan Mujahedin themselves, weren't particularly accomplished in the black arts. Lebanon, Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank have been far better laboratories for teaching terrorist tactics than the Afghan wars since 1979. If many of these "Afghanis" descended on Kenya and Tanzania, local security services, backed up by the Americans and the Israelis, ought to have a good chance of fairly quickly discovering their guilt.

Of course, bin Laden has non-"Afghani" fundamentalist connections throughout the Middle East; they too could have been deployed, especially from Sudan, the entrepôt for nefarious types. However, the more disparate the elements in a terrorist team, the more likely are mistakes and leaks. The Middle East's terrorist bazaar should not be viewed as a well-organized comintern of suicidal brothers. Operational rules and differing local loyalties naturally engender an exclusionary mentality, even for those engaged in a common holy cause.

It's not unreasonable to assume that the comings and goings of bin Laden, his closest associates, and many in his operation's rank and file are watched by the Middle East's myriad security and police services. In the terrorist set, bin Laden is easily the biggest mouth. And good false passports and identity papers, essential for clandestine operations, aren't easy to

come by, even for multi-millionaire Saudi financiers. Somewhere along the line, a terrorist-supporting state—like Iran, Iraq, or Sudan—in all likelihood would have to lend decisive assistance to any large-scale terrorist operation by bin Laden.

Would a terrorist-supporting state want to put itself in harm's way by helping a man who can't shut up about a jihad against the United States? Killing Israelis is one thing, killing Americans quite another. U.S. naval and air power, if unleashed, is devastating. Though the Clinton administration, with its aversion to military force, engenders little awe, rogue states aren't fools. If one is going to murder the emissaries of "the Great Satan," it behooves one to be professional about it. Though bin Laden's organization and constant ranting obviously offer good cover, actually using his men for anti-American attacks is a risky proposition. Sudan and Iran might avail themselves of his ever eager services, but they would fear disclosure and would probably minimize their contact with his group. The Iranians, however, would love to blame the embassy attacks on bin Laden. Such disinformation would protect Iran while tarring the Saudi and his Iran-hating Afghan Taliban protectors. Only Saddam Hussein's Iraq, which is often dismissive of U.S. power, might conceivably employ bin Laden and be sloppily straightforward about it.

The Iranians, of course, don't need to contract out attacks to a Saudi radical. They have their own men and extensive networks in Africa and the Middle East, based primarily on Arab Shiite communities. The Iranians are quite capable, however, of making deals with their Muslim enemies if it serves a higher cause; the same is true, no doubt, for bin Laden.

For Iran's revolutionary hard core, the preeminent issue isn't operational or philosophical; it's tactical. Would blowing up U.S. embassies at this time be helpful? To one looking at the world from Tehran, the answer to that question is an emphatic yes.

At home, the Iranian hard core is under siege. The ruling clerical and lay elites—the circles revolving around Iran's revolutionary leader, Ali Khamenei, and former president Hashemi-Rafsanjani—quite correctly feel that the nation is no longer theirs.

The May 1997 presidential election of Mohammad Khatami unleashed a torrent of discontent and hope among young Iranians, who have grown tired of clerical Iran's poverty and boring "Islamic" life. Speeches

AP Photos/Sayyid Azim

Nairobi, Kenya, two days after the bombing: The U.S. embassy is the building on the left.

and violent demonstrations at Tehran University this spring, which explicitly attacked Khamenei's undemocratic rule and his campaign against Tehran's popular and progressive mayor, angered and scared the mullahs. Not long after, in a special television broadcast to the nation, Khatami reaffirmed his loyalty to the revolutionary leader, as the latter, seated above the president, looked on.

Nevertheless, the embarrassments continued. The trial of Tehran's mayor on corruption charges, also televised, became a fiasco for the regime. The mayor, a former cleric who is perhaps the most serious political threat to the ruling order, railed against the regime's inequities and cruelty. Though the trial tarnished the mayor, the process clearly showed the regime's inability to prevent serious internal challenges from becoming demeaning public spectacles.

Worse, domestic troubles became a foreign-policy nightmare. In an interview with CNN on January 7, 1998, President Khatami appealed for a limited "cultural dialogue" between the United States and Iran. This led some among the hard core—who implacably loathe America and fear any rapprochement—to wonder whether Khatami, a revolutionary cleric, had betrayed his own kind.

And the response of the United States to Khatami's appeal sent exactly the wrong message. American non-governmental organizations rushed to Iran, emphasizing reconciliation and cultural diplomacy. Iranian representatives in America were flooded with inquiries about tourist travel to the Islamic Republic. U.S. congressmen, ex-hostages, and former senior U.S. officials lined up, hoping to get visas. Stories about American tourists visiting Iran appeared in leading U.S. newspapers, which are meticulously followed in the Islamic Republic. U.S. wrestlers visited Tehran, and the Western media let loose a barrage of features about "ping-pong diplomacy" that could lead to warmer relations.

Then came the *coup de grâce*: Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and President Clinton gave conciliatory speeches directed at Iran's mullahs. They spoke of the hope born in President Khatami's election and the possibility of U.S.-Iranian reconciliation.

For the clerical hard core, these speeches were poison. The "friendly" signals President Khatami's CNN interview elicited from Americans horrified conservative Tehran. To the clerical mind, "the Great Satan" is the seducer of the Koran, who destroys the faithful through ingratiating smiles, friendly overtures, and whispers.

The hard core resisted. The mayor of Tehran was harassed and convicted. Street protesters and intellectuals were pummeled and jailed. Journalists were hauled into court. Women—who had voted for Khatami in overwhelming numbers in hopes that he would create a more female-friendly state—became the "beneficiaries" of new legislation prohibiting male doctors from treating female patients. Khatami's minister of the interior, who had permitted one too many anti-Khamenei demonstrations, was impeached. In a frightful warning to those trying to change the nature of the Islamic Republic, the commander of the Revolutionary Guard Corps threatened that the corps would "rip the tongues out" of those who challenged Khamenei's rule.

Domestically, however, Khamenei's forces can do only so much. They are uncertain of their own bases of power. Student riots terrify them because the protesters and the security forces differ little in age, background, and quite possibly in their frustration with the lack of promise in their lives. The clergy has seen security forces and the army refuse to quash rioters.

Increasingly obsessed with the American threat, the regime would undoubtedly want to strike the enemy. Blowing up American embassies would demonstrate to moderate elements in the clerical elite the hard core's militant resolve. And it would powerfully remind Khatami who calls the shots.

It is worth remembering that hard-core Iranian revolutionaries seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran not because U.S.-Iranian relations had fallen apart but because they were improving. Iranian prime minister Mehdi Bazargan met with President Carter's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, in Algiers in November 1979. To the revolution's fire-breathers—and to many U.S. officials—it appeared that the Provisional Islamic Republic and "the Great Satan" were going to normalize their relations. Khomeini's ardent faithful were horrified.

The clerical triumph in Iran was, among other things, a victory of subterfuge and violence. And politics as violence is addictive, particularly when it has worked well. There is very little doubt that Iran has long had contingency plans for terrorist strikes against U.S. installations abroad. It's not unreasonable to conjecture that after the considerable excitement provoked in Iran and the United States by the January 7 CNN interview, the hard core got seriously worried. Rumors were rampant in Tehran that the moderate elements were sending *éminences grises* to the United States to deal behind the hard core's back.

This didn't happen, of course. Secretary of State Albright and the president wouldn't have gone on TV to make their appeals if they had established productive lines of communication to Khatami. But conspira-

cies are Iran's lifeblood, and the clerical hard core—who deal with each other and the outside world in a highly Byzantine manner—see conspiracies everywhere. It's quite plausible that in the spring of 1998, when Tehran University started to boil, Khamenei and Rafsanjani gave the green light to the Ministry of Intelligence, over which Khatami has no control, to move forward with planning for terrorist attacks. Events since the spring would have reinforced their fears that the revolutionary status quo was in jeopardy.

The stalled investigation of the Khobar Towers bombing, which killed 19 U.S. servicemen in Saudi Arabia in June 1996, could have further encouraged Tehran. Though the Iranians may not have been responsible for that attack, America's inability to find its perpetrators exposed our soft underbelly. In Tehran, Saudi Arabia is viewed as an American client-state. If Washington can't control its client and force it to release information about the loss of American lives, then the "Great Satan's" empire is exploitably weak. And Iranians have a superb sixth sense for weakness. As a friend who taught school in Iran noted once, Iranian students constantly challenge the teacher's authority. If "you don't hit them, they'll eat you alive."

Though in general the American reticence to use force abroad speaks well of our national character, it ill equips us to deal with Middle East terrorism. Whoever is responsible for the attacks on our embassies needs to know that the United States will unleash a firestorm upon them. If Khamenei ordered the bombings, then a devastating U.S. reprisal will be critical for our self-defense and for the survival of those in Iran who desperately want closer U.S.-Iranian relations. While I personally hope that the Islamic Republic was not responsible for these bombings, the case against Iran makes sense. ♦

Hun's the One

Cambodia's Strongman Stages an Election

By John Buckley

Battambang, Cambodia

The night before Cambodia's July 26 election, a local election monitor rushed into the lobby of Battambang's Teo Hotel, looking for the Americans. He was not a timid man. Earlier in the day, he had exuded confidence, despite the fact that more than a dozen opposition-party activists had been murdered in the run-up to the election, the first since Hun Sen seized power in July 1997. Yet now the man was rattled by the discovery that nearly 40,000 ballots in one district had been removed from sealed polling kits.

Former congressman Tom Andrews, a member of the U.S. delegation present to observe both the polling and the subsequent count of ballots, pressed forward to hear what the man had to say. That's when the Euro spoke up.

"I'd like to remind everyone that we're just observers here," said a highly disdainful Norwegian member of the Joint International Observation Group, the largest consortium of observers. "We can't go around investigating."

"Actually," said Andrews, "what I'm observing is someone complaining about the integrity of tomorrow's vote. Do you mind?"

With that, we Americans took down the local monitor's complaint, while the European Union cast hostile glances our way. The distrust was mutual. The day before, the international observation group—which consisted not only of the EU countries but also of such democratic paragons as Burma, Vietnam, and China—had lowered the bar. No longer was the issue whether the election was free and fair, but whether it was "broadly representative" of the people's will. In mid-July, the Americans had declared themselves independent of the group, releasing a statement critical of the climate under which the ruling Cambodian People's Party was conducting the election. The reaction of the young Norwegian (dryly identified in the *Phnom Penh Post* as a student of "the mathematics of conflict resolution") to a report of electoral irregularities raised what the U.S. mission viewed as the fundamental question: whether we were participating in a gross exercise of geopolitical cynicism.

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By 7:00 the next morning, in a Buddhist wat in the district where the previous evening's mischief had occurred, all the party agents and domestic observers were in place. The stainless steel ballot box, one of 11,700 provided by the Japanese government, was on a table in the center of the room. Next to it was a small bottle of India ink, three tons of which had been delivered to Cambodia direct from India. Nearby were instructions for how election officials should insert the index finger of each voter in the bottle of ink, to prevent a repeat visit to the voting booth. There was also an elaborate protocol for what to do if the voter did not have an index finger—a not inconsequential consideration in a country where, after 30 years of war and the widest distribution of landmines in the world, roughly one in every 250 people is missing a limb.

Agents could be present from any of the 39 parties participating in the election (my favorite: The Bee Hive Party; my least favorite: The Liberal Republicans). Only the three main parties—Hun Sen's CPP, Prince Ranariddh's Funcinpec Party, and the eponymous Sam Rainsy Party—had organizations sufficient to be present in polling stations nationwide. Two Cambodian observer groups had individuals in each of the 16 polling stations we were to visit. These observers, like those of us from overseas, were there for two reasons: to see whether the balloting went according to the rules, and to encourage citizens to vote their conscience.

For weeks, there had been rumors about the various means by which the CPP would know how a person had voted. A full two-thirds of Cambodian adults had submitted to CPP fingerprinting on party cards. The folk belief—intended by the party—was that village chieftains would be able to match fingerprints to ballots. What was not just a rumor was that, to solicit support, CPP agents had offered voters packets of the cooking element MSG (really), checkered scarves, and cash. The party had done the same thing in 1993, when people pocketed the gifts and went on to vote against Hun Sen and for Prince Ranariddh anyway. No one knew what would happen this time.

Five years ago, the United Nations dedicated 18,000 troops and nearly $3 billion to administer the first nominally free election in Cambodia since the Khmer Rouge takeover. To the surprise of virtually everyone, Prince Ranariddh handily won, but when Hun Sen threatened renewed civil war, King Sihanouk and the U.N. pressured Ranariddh to accept Hun Sen as "second prime minister." The result? Government departments that, like Noah's Ark, had two of everything—two ministers (one from the CPP and one from Funcinpec), two deputy ministers, and so forth. In the stalemate that followed, Hun Sen, who had been installed by the Vietnamese occupiers in 1985, was able to use his political network and superior political skills to muscle the effete prince into virtual inconsequentiality.

Then the Khmer Rouge, supporting themselves from their jungle exile through illegal trade in logging and gems, began to unravel. When Pol Pot was deposed and put on trial by the Khmer Rouge in the spring of 1997, military forces loyal to Prince Ranariddh negotiated for the surrender of the remaining Khmer Rouge, and Hun Sen saw the military balance teeter in his opponent's favor. He staged a coup, in which more than 100 of Ranariddh's allies were murdered. By the time the dust had cleared, the prince and other opposition politicians were in exile, badly needed foreign aid was suspended, and Hun Sen was denied Cambodia's U.N. seat.

Yet even in the wake of the coup, Hun Sen pledged that elections already scheduled for July 1998 would take place. By late spring, most of the exiled politicians had come back to participate, largely under pressure from the European Union. At stake was Cambodia's return to international recognition, coupled with the resumption of aid, investment, and even tourism. In a nation that has known nothing that approaches normalcy for more than a generation, the yearning was for, minimally, peace, and, ideally, a freely elected and legitimate government.

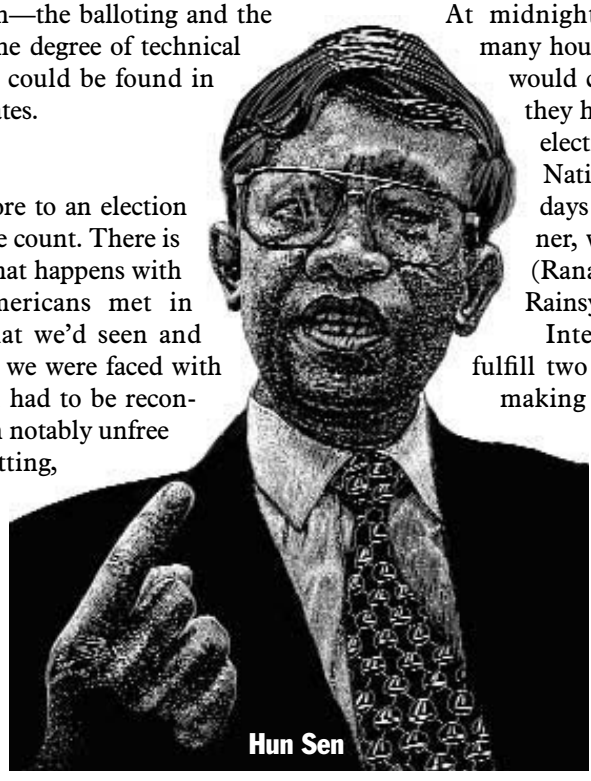
By late morning on Election Day, in tiny villages amidst what were once the Killing Fields, 90 percent of registered voters had cast their ballots. By early afternoon, Nate Thayer, the *Far Eastern Economic Review* reporter whose 1997 interview with Pol Pot was the scoop of the decade, was marveling at how well things were going. "This is not the Cambodia I know," he said. Reports from around the country held that, aside from one Khmer Rouge rocket attack near their stronghold in Anlong Veng, all was proceeding peacefully. "If this keeps up," said Thayer, "I'll be out of a job."

By the time the polls closed, we were in Anlongvil, which we had been led to believe might be a site of irregularities. Officials there sealed the ballot box with the signed concordance of the party agents and domestic observers. The box was then sealed in waterproof blue bags adorned by images of Shiva, the creator and destroyer—an appropriate icon for the election. It was then taken outside and placed on a makeshift caisson

affixed to a motorcycle and driven off to a counting station with a convoy of witnesses in tow.

The next morning, in the stations where ballots from 16 precincts were to be tallied, we watched the simultaneous striptease of the boxes, as first the blue tarps and then the seals and locks were taken off. To ensure that no single village's vote was identifiable, ballots from multiple precincts were dumped into large bags and mixed. Throughout the morning, individual ballots were inspected and affirmed by members of the counting groups, as well as by teams of party agents and domestic observers who roamed the cramped counting house. By the time the American delegation returned to Phnom Penh, we were convinced that what we had seen—the balloting and the counting—had about the same degree of technical competence and integrity as could be found in any election in the United States.

But, of course, there is more to an election than the balloting and the count. There is the campaign, and there is what happens with the results. When the Americans met in Phnom Penh to discuss what we'd seen and what we should say about it, we were faced with two different realities, which had to be reconciled. The campaign had been notably unfree and unfair, with the CPP getting, by independent analysis, eight times the news coverage of the opposition, whose lives were in danger. The *Phnom Penh Post*—contrary to the tenor of the general media—had printed the gruesome photograph of a murdered Funcinpec electoral observer whose legs were literally skinned. That image had to be weighed against the almost joyous balloting process we had observed.



Hun Sen

Kevin Chadwick

So the Americans chiseled a balanced statement. It read, in part, "The relative success of the balloting and the counting thus far cannot negate the violence, extensive intimidation, unfair media access and ruling party control of the administrative machinery that characterized the pre-election period. To their credit, the Cambodian people appear to have overcome these obstacles and to have made possible a successful exercise in national self-determination."

The statement was released at a news conference two days after the election. Members of the delegation were instantly dispirited, however, when one of our leaders, former congressman Stephen Solarz, reverting to the soundbite habits of a seasoned politician, referred to the election as the "Miracle on the Mekong." If this had indeed been a miracle, reports from the opposition that gross irregularities had taken place would have to be proven false. Yet a three-page, nuanced analysis reflecting reservations about whether the election could be deemed a success, given the intimidation and violence that had preceded it, was summed up in international wire stories by that phrase, "Miracle on the Mekong."

The Joint International Observation Group, of course, was beset by no such anguish over what to say. At midnight before Tuesday dawned—many hours before the first official tally would come in from the provinces—they had been pleased to declare the election "free and fair." It took the National Election Commission 10 days to declare Hun Sen the winner, with 41.4 percent of the vote. (Ranariddh had 32 percent, Sam Rainsy 14 percent.)

International election observers fulfill two roles: witness to the world, making it harder for the powerful to commit electoral fraud, and comfort to voters, who need reassurance that someone is watching out for chicanery. The Norwegian, alas, was right: We were observers, without the capacity or the mandate to investigate. (In fact, we were never able to run down the story about those 40,000 ballots.) The role we played may well have been symbolic, but it served notice to Hun Sen that, with so much riding on international approval, overt electoral mischief was ill advised.

It is right for the United States to set a high standard for what constitutes an acceptable election, in any country. The willingness of the Europeans to bless the Cambodian election prior to its even taking place was an act of acquiescence to Hun Sen, and a ratification of his coup of a year ago. The Europeans seemed to adhere to the cynical wisdom that Hun Sen is going to be around one way or another, so why not accommodate him? It may be safer that way. But it does precious little benefit to the world's most brutalized, and bravely resilient, people. ♦

He Thinks, Therefore We Are

No Descartes, No Modernity

By J. Bottum

Every schoolboy used to know exactly when the modern world began. It was the 10th of November 1619, when a twenty-three-year-old French soldier named René Descartes curled up for the day in a "stove" (the heated guest room off a German inn's kitchen) and started to contemplate the rules by which his mind discovers knowledge.

But this clear picture of Descartes's primacy seems to have gotten muddied in recent years. His successors—from Locke to Hume, Montesquieu to Rousseau, Leibniz to Kant—are far more often cited by students of modernity. His predecessors Machiavelli, Montaigne, and Francis Bacon have all grown up to overtop him. Even his contemporaries Galileo and Thomas Hobbes occupy much larger places in standard histories than they used to. Insofar as college graduates emerge knowing anything much about intellectual history, they seem to think nowadays that the politics of Machiavelli and the science of Bacon are the hinges on which the door to modernity opened—with Jean Jacques Rousseau the first to step completely across the threshold.

There are reasons for this Cartesian decline. Priding himself on his work in science, Descartes made some valuable contributions to mathematics (the graphing of equations on Cartesian planes and the representation of variables with Xs and Ys derive from his work) and had some interesting if usually wrong things to say about physics. So too, in his late writings, he took up some questions in ethics, primarily in response to requests from the pious Princess Elizabeth of Bavaria. But he was fundamentally a metaphysician, and metaphysics has taken a beating in recent years—especially from philosophers. Even advances in pure scholarship have helped to diminish Descartes, as historians of philosophy demonstrated the continuity of his vocabulary with that of scholastic philosophers from centuries before.

Geneviève Rodis-Lewis
Descartes
His Life and Thought
Cornell University Press, 263 pp., $40

And yet, though there are reasons for the decline of interest in Descartes, they are all ultimately mistaken. In part because of what he thought but even more because of the way in which he thought it, Descartes *is* modern times: No Descartes, no modernity.

When we discern modern threads tangled among the premodern in everyone from Machiavelli to Montesquieu, it is not because these thinkers are in fact moderns but because Descartes taught us how to tell the difference. He is modernity's measure. In the order of logical explanation, metaphysics always comes before such secondary studies as science and ethics. But the significance of Descartes is not just logical but historical: All modern thought—in art, science, psychology, political theory, historical writing—is built upon his metaphysical foundations.

The autobiographical sketch through which Descartes presents his philosophy in the 1637 *Discourse on Method*, like the first-person account of introspection in his 1641 *Meditations*, owes a considerable debt to earlier writings: the story of a thinker's growth in St. Augustine's *Confessions*, the techniques of directed imagination demanded by St. Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* (which Descartes followed at retreats during his school years at the Jesuit college of La Flèche), the authorial "I" in Montaigne's essays. We have, however, crossed a divide, left the past irretrievably behind, when Descartes begins the third of the *Meditations* with the words:

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> I will now shut my eyes, stop my ears, and withdraw all my senses. I will eliminate from my thoughts all images of bodily things, or rather, since this is hardly possible, I will regard all such images as vacuous, false, and worthless. I will converse with myself and scrutinize myself more deeply and in this way I will attempt to achieve, little by little, a more intimate knowledge of myself.

This view of self-conversation, self-knowledge, and self-scrutiny—this is modernity.

But it is also true that today's students who feel something alien in Descartes's mental world—the students who find their soulmate rather in Rousseau's *Confessions*—have in fact noticed something that cannot be entirely dismissed. It is not just the importance of God in Descartes's metaphysical system that makes him seem strange, or the corrupted medieval vocabulary in which he sometimes expresses himself. Struggling to distinguish between the seventeenth century of Descartes and the eighteenth century of Rousseau, Nietzsche discerned that the difference lay in *style*: The intellectual world of Descartes was simultaneously "proper, exact, and free"; it was "not German," but aristocratic and "firm in its encounter with the heart."

It is this style, the aristocratic unself-consciousness with which Descartes undertakes his progress of self-consciousness, that is so alien. The modern world was born the day Descartes turned from the natural world of perception to treat the intellectual world as though it actually *were* a world—as though the mind were a field through which one could walk, picking up objects here and there and weighing them in one's mental hand. The modern world, however, left Descartes's style behind the day Rousseau ceased to be "firm."

Perhaps the way to put the difference is to observe that, in their stroll through the fields of the mind, Rousseau is the amateur, drunk on the dewy, early-morning feeling of it all—far less interested in what he discovers inside himself than in the mental freedom and newness he feels while discovering it. Descartes is the professional, the naturalist with his notebooks and binoculars—the man who doesn't care how much his feet hurt, so long as he gets an accurate count of all the species that nest in a particular meadow.

Or perhaps the way to put it is rather that Descartes is the adult, unself-consciously performing the work he does well—which happens to be thinking about himself. He initiated, however, a logic of modern self-consciousness that necessarily devolves to Rousseau, the perpetual adolescent, who has become self-conscious even of his own self-consciousness. What Descartes gave us is his move into the inner spaces of the self. What he could not give us is the sovereign innocence with which he made that move.

RODIS-LEWIS AIMS TO REFUTE THOSE WHO USE DESCARTES'S "MASK" TO IMPUTE TO HIM SECRET VICES.

One technique for beginning to recapture Descartes's style is to recover the conditions of his thought, and Geneviève Rodis-Lewis's *Descartes: His Life and Thought*, first published in France in 1995 and now translated into English by Jane Marie Todd, constitutes a fine compendium of the current state of knowledge about the philosopher.

To write the life of someone who lived much before 1800 is to have to build up from too little biographical material rather than winnow down from too much, and Descartes contributed to his own mystery by hiding from his contemporaries as much of his private life as he could. In the first sentence of his earliest notebook, he writes, "Actors, taught not to let any embarrassment show on their faces, put on a mask. I will do the same. So far, I have been a spectator in this theater which is the world, but I am now about to mount the stage and I come forward masked." Even in the published *Discourse*, he ascribes his youthful travels to a desire "to wander here and there in the world, attempting to be a spectator rather than an actor in all the comedies being played out there." His first full biographer placed, around a frontispiece engraving, the Latin tag *Bene vixit, bene qui latuit*: "He lives well, who is well hidden."

Rodis-Lewis's primary concern in her straightforward account is to apply common sense to the enormous scaffolds of conjecture that have been built upon the scanty handful of facts known about the philosopher's life. In particular, she aims to refute the critics and biographers who have used Descartes's talk of a "mask" to deny his Christianity or impute to him secret vices—Maxime Leroy, for instance, who in 1929 attempted to tie Descartes to the seventeenth-century libertines who prudently hid behind the appearance of Christianity.

This sort of revisionism reached its peak in 1988 with Dimitri Davidenko's *Descartes le scandaleux*, which portrayed the philosopher as a gambler and drunkard, the lover of both Queen Christina of Sweden and Princess Elizabeth, and a writer deeply involved with the Rosicrucians. (The Rosicrucian slander has a long history, based mostly on wrong-headed attempts to take seriously a brief parody that the young Descartes put in his notebooks.) Rodis-Lewis shows a man who was hardly perfect—short-tempered, quarrelsome, distant to all his acquaintances, and the father of an illegitimate daughter—but who continued always to struggle for moral balance and who

could write Princess Elizabeth, four months before his death, that "the principal good in this life" is "advancing in the search for truth."

The son of a lawyer and grandson of a doctor, Descartes was born in the town of La Haye near Tours on March 31, 1596. The actual status of his family remains hard to determine, in part because, though they were wealthy, they seem to have presented themselves—in an effort to obtain patents of nobility—as a once-noble family fallen on hard times. (Letters of chivalry were finally granted in 1668, eighteen years after Descartes's death.) Certainly the money was sufficient that Descartes never had to work. In the *Discourse*, he admits that "my circumstances did not, thanks to God, oblige me to augment my fortune," and in a letter he speaks of the possibility of spending ten thousand crowns to buy a judgeship for himself.

The formative fact of his early life was probably the death of his mother when Descartes was a year old. Rodis-Lewis determines that she died in delivering a stillborn younger brother, but Descartes always believed that she had died merely from the weak lungs that also plagued him his whole life and caused his most famous traits: a desire always to be warm (hence the typically Cartesian detail of having his great 1619 insight inside an overheated "stove") and a need for ten or more hours of sleep a night (he rarely rose before noon).

After his schooling at La Flèche, Descartes obtained a license in law from the university in Poitiers. He was not to put his education to much immediate use, however. In 1618, he traveled to Holland to become a soldier, joining the army the Prince of Orange, Maurice of Nassau, was raising for the Thirty Years' War. (His father loudly objected, correctly pointing out that since Descartes lacked sufficient standing to become a superior officer, a soldier's career would make much less contribution than a lawyer's to the family goal of becoming noble.)

Photos: Image Select / Art Resource

Pierre Louis Dumesnil's portrait of Descartes at the court of Queen Christina of Sweden

The years from 1618 to 1620, however, proved the most intellectually significant of Descartes's life. It was while in training camp in Breda that he met his first and perhaps only passionate friend, a young Dutch mathematician named Isaac Beeckman. And it was while traveling in 1619 to reach his second army post, under the Catholic duke Maximilian of Bavaria, that he had his famous insight into the mental structure of science near the northern border of Bavaria in the town of Neuberg (and not, Rodis-Lewis asserts, the commonly cited town of Ulm). The night after that stove-warmed vision, he had the famous "three dreams" that revealed to him his life's work in seeking the metaphysical foundations of science and made him vow to undertake a pilgrimage to the shrine of Loreto in Italy.

Though Beeckman liked the young Frenchman and began to introduce him to the larger intellectual world, Descartes had made no great impression on anyone by the time he was twenty-five. And for the next eight years, before settling in the Netherlands, he did little but travel, first in Italy (where he probably ful-

filled his vow) and then in France. He began nonetheless to receive some notice, even without publishing anything. This was due in part to his growing philosophical and scientific correspondence with Father Marin Mersenne, who was the era's literary clearinghouse—the human equivalent of a modern intellectual magazine, keeping manuscripts, letters, and gossip in circulation among all the intellectuals of his time.

But Descartes's growing reputation as an unpublished genius was due most of all to a well-noticed exchange in Paris that Rodis-Lewis places in November 1627. Visiting at the home of the papal nuncio, Descartes was asked to respond to a presentation by M. de Chandoux (a charming intellectual charlatan later hanged for counterfeiting). When Chandoux made the skeptical declaration that science rested only on a series of probabilities, Descartes not only demolished his claims but suggested to an overwhelmed audience of some of the most famous intellectuals in France the basic outline for what would become his own philosophical work. The influential Oratorian, Cardinal Bérulle, in particular urged Descartes to commit his thought to print and began to speak widely of the new-found French prodigy.

In 1628, seeking solitude in order to write, Descartes moved to the Protestant Netherlands (where he would dwell for the next twenty-one years, visiting France only three more times), settling in a small city called Franeker where he could attend a private Catholic Mass: "I am of the religion of my nurse," he told one Protestant friend who asked why he didn't take the easier course and convert during his stay.

But though he found the quiet he needed to work, Descartes made two initial mistakes in his writing that delayed for nine years the philosophical statement for which Cardinal Bérulle longed. The first was a failed attempt to express the metaphysical unity he perceived in the sciences, the uncompleted *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, which he worked on from 1628 to 1629. The second was an attempt to present his metaphysics not systematically but *ad passim* in a treatise on physics entitled *Le Monde*, finished by 1634. This work might have given his anxious audience in France, primed by Bérulle and Mersenne, some clues to his system, but Descartes suppressed it when he learned of the 1633 condemnation of Galileo by the Inquisition for teaching physical doctrines not far removed from his own.

Though this suppression is often cited as an example of his merely fearful bow to Christianity by upholders of the thesis of Descartes as the "masked" libertine, Rodis-Lewis is not convinced of his insincerity: His friend Saumaise declared at the time that he would have published *Le Monde* "if he were less a good Catholic." It was during this same period, however, that Descartes sired Francine, the illegitimate daughter of a serving girl named Hélène Jans. Born in 1635, the little girl died in 1640.

WELL AWARE OF THE RISE OF SKEPTICISM, DESCARTES IN THE *MEDITATIONS* USED DOUBT TO DEFEAT DOUBT.

Finally in 1637 Descartes published the first work that would make him immortal: the *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking the Truth in the Sciences*, itself the preface to three scientific treatises on geometry, optics, and meteors. Just as Galileo had written in Italian, so Descartes composed his book in French to reach over the heads of the university faculties and appeal directly to the educated nonacademics, and his French, even more than Montaigne's, became the model for nearly all subsequent serious prose: As late as 1937, the poet Paul Valéry declared that Descartes's style of writing showed "the clearest and most visible characteristics of the French mind." (The *Discourse*, however, was almost immediately translated into Latin—hence the famous formulation *Cogito ergo sum*.)

After the biographical opening of the *Discourse*—"a history or, if you prefer, a fable"—Descartes presents his four rules for right reasoning: "to accept nothing as true which I did not clearly recognize to be so"; "to divide up each of the difficulties I examine into as many parts as possible"; "to carry on my reflections in due order, beginning with the most simple"; and "to make enumerations so complete and reviews so general that I should be certain of having omitted nothing."

The somewhat contentless quality of these long-awaited rules may deserve Leibniz's mocking comment that they amount to little more than "Take what you need, do what you should, and you will get what you want." But their importance lies less in their content than in the distinctly modern suggestions they make for how all reasoning ought to proceed.

This comes even clearer in the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, the more technical and fully developed metaphysical treatise Descartes published in Latin in 1641. Included in the text were Descartes's replies to six sets of objections (a seventh was added in the second edition) from the Catholic theologian Caterus, Hobbes, Antoine Arnauld, Pierre Gassendi, and various others among Mersenne's innumerable correspondents.

Well aware of the rise of skepticism in his own time, Descartes determined in the *Meditations* to use doubt to defeat doubt—his famous "hyperbolic" doubt that is so much more skeptical than anything the skeptics ever dreamed of. Since the senses sometimes deceive us, every-

thing sensory must be doubted and thus rejected as knowledge. Since dreams and hallucinations occasionally present the mind with images and pictures, everything that the mind represents in images and pictures must be rejected. Since an evil genie of godlike power could cause one to think falsely that one remembered a mathematical truth, even mathematics must be rejected. Everything must be doubted—except of course for the fact that "I exist," which even the act of doubting confirms, since I must exist to doubt it.

And with this foundation of the *Cogito*, Descartes in the succeeding *Meditations* quickly built up a considerable stock of mental truths now secure from the skeptics' attacks. Since man thinks, he knows something of what he is: He must be a thinking thing—a *res cogitans* whose substance is mental rather than extended materially. And since he finds in his mind an idea of God that he is incapable of having thought up for himself, there must be a God who created this thought—like "the mark of the craftsman stamped on his work." And since that idea of God includes certain infinite perfections, the mind can be assured—thanks to the goodness of the non-deceiving God—that even perceptions of material substances are true when the mind and senses are working properly.

The key to all of this is the new *style* with which Descartes begins to walk around inside his mind and make things tidy, as though it were a real space with real objects in it. The scholastically trained Caterus plaintively complained in his objections to the *Meditations* that he had been taught to define an idea as "the determination of an act of the intellect by means of an object." But these things that Descartes calls ideas seem actually to be *things*: He handles them, as we might put it, the way other people handle stones.

Perhaps the first sure example of the new Cartesian style comes in the famous *Cogito ergo sum*. In the *Meditations* Descartes drops the "ergo" he had used in the *Discourse*, giving instead the formulation: "'I am, I exist' is necessarily true whenever I utter it or conceive it in my mind." The effect is to emphasize what the twentieth-century logician Jaakko Hintikka (applying a term from J. L. Austin) has called the "performance" rather than the argument of the *Cogito*: I know clearly and distinctly that I exist not all the time but at those moments in which I pick up and examine the idea of my own existence. This is indeed how the evil genie could deceive me about mathematical reasoning. I cannot actually be mistaken about a mathematical truth that I perceive clearly and distinctly. But when I put down that truth and try to turn my attention to another, the possibility exists for making me forget what I had known just a moment before.

IT IS NOT THINKING THAT DETERMINES GOD, DESCARTES ARGUED , BUT GOD WHO DETERMINES THINKING.

Once observed, this style of Descartes in treating the mind as an open space that needs only tidying appears throughout the *Meditations*. In the second, fourth, and fifth sets of objections, his questioners complained that Descartes is caught in a circle: He needs a benevolent God to guarantee that clear and distinct perceptions are true, but his proofs of God's existence in the third and fifth of the *Meditations* already depend upon clear and distinct perceptions. This complaint, however, misses the uniqueness of Descartes's arguments. The certainty he has found in the idea of his own existence provides a model for judging the certainty of other objects he finds as he walks about in his mind. Though they are entirely mental, his arguments for the existence of God belong much more to the class of experiential, *a posteriori* arguments like those of St. Thomas Aquinas than to the class of mental, *a priori* arguments like those of St. Anselm: Descartes *experiences* an idea rather than thinks it. It is not thinking that determines God, he said of the proof in the fifth *Meditation*, but "the existence of God that determines my thinking."

The absoluteness of Descartes's style shows through most clearly in his strange doctrine of the createdness of the Eternal Truths. Except in a few letters to Mersenne eleven years earlier, Descartes never mentioned the notion until it suddenly appeared in the reply to Gassendi (who had, as the great French scholar Emile Bréhier puts it, "certainly never dreamed of attributing such ideas to Descartes"). But Descartes goes on to defend it, arguing that truths do not emanate from God "like rays from the sun," but are created and depend upon the divine will.

It is a sign of the brief life of the Cartesian style that no one—not the continental rationalists Spinoza and Leibniz or the British empiricists Locke, Berkeley, and Hume—would follow Descartes in the claim. It is because mental objects are in fact genuinely like *objects* for Descartes—theoretically changeable, just as the physical world could have been created in a different manner—that he must insist God could have made possible such logical impossibilities as mountains without valleys, circles that are square, and two plus two equal to five.

Even as Descartes became the most famous philosopher of his time, his life in the Netherlands became increasingly difficult. As late as May 25, 1637, he wrote Mersenne to blame the delay in getting printing privileges for the *Discourse* in Paris on the intrigues of the now-hated Beeckman (who had died five days

before). And from 1639 on, he seemed to grow increasingly quarrelsome. When Mersenne asked if he wanted to see other texts from the author of a book on geostatics, he replied, "Such paper can be put to only one use, and we have enough for that here." The seventh set of objections, by a French Jesuit named Bourdin, was in fact quite bad, but Descartes responded to it by writing a letter to the priest's superior to complain and then publishing the letter in the second edition of the *Meditations*. He became entangled, primarily through the over-enthusiasm of one of his disciples, in a lengthy and acrimonious wrangle with a Protestant theologian named Voetius that ended with the Dutch universities' banning of Cartesian works for the sake of peace.

His *Principles of Philosophy* appeared in 1644 and *The Passions of the Soul* in 1649, but the most significant event of his final years was also the last: The importuning by Queen Christina. He had managed to decline one invitation and then, in March of 1649, avoid a boat sent under the command of an admiral to fetch him. But at last he gave in and went to Sweden in September, filled with dark premonitions. "A man who was born in the gardens of Touraine," he wrote a friend, ought to avoid "the land of bears, between rocks and ice."

Wintering with his weak lungs in drafty Sweden houses, compelled—a man who hated rising before noon—to meet with the queen at five each morning, forced to face a Lutheran court that hated him and suspected him of turning the thoughts of the queen toward the abdication and conversion to Catholicism that she finally performed in 1654, Descartes was doomed. "I am not in my element here," he admitted in his last letter. He died early in the morning on February 11, 1650, at the age of fifty-four.

The actual thoughts that Descartes thought, the philosophical moves that he made, have in them an apparent logic of self-consciousness that would lead to the self-conscious adolescence and romanticism of Rousseau, the transcendental ego of Kant, and the ultimate denial of the reality of thoughts that we find among the postmodernists. And by his own logic—as the French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion pointed out in 1985—Descartes could have arrived in his own generation at the dead ends and the detritus of our own late modern times. That he did not is attributable primarily to the arrogant unself-consciousness, the sovereign innocence, with which he undertook his work.

The early modern promise that Descartes holds out may still exist. If we are to recover that promise, we must look to recover, first of all, his style. Geneviève Rodis-Lewis's *Descartes* is a small but helpful step toward that end. ♦

Chat Room of Their Own

The Internet Grows Up

By David Frum

Does anybody, here in 1998, still believe that on-line chat is the most important use of the Internet? Sad to say, the answer is yes—and not any old anybody, but Michael Godwin, a lawyer at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a San Francisco think tank devoted to on-line issues.

Michael Godwin
Cyber Rights
Defending Free Speech in the Digital Age
Times Books, 330 pp., $27.50

For most computer-literate people, the Internet is a device for communicating rapidly and cheaply, finding information, and—increasingly—buying and selling. But for a die-hard band of early users, the Internet is not a thing like a phone or a TV, but a place like a bar or a coffee shop. And in his newly published *Cyber Rights: Defending Free Speech in the Digital Age*, Godwin speaks for these old-timers.

"The Net is not merely a hobby or a game (or, worse, an addiction), but instead an opportunity to meet a very real need—the desire for community," Godwin explains. And he cites as evidence that the need is real and that the Internet can fill it the experience of a handful of chat groups: The Well on the West Coast, for example, and Echo in New York. "If all cyberspace gives you is an e-mail address . . . you've been cheated. What most of us will want in the future, I think, is a place where we're known and accepted on the basis of what Martin Luther King Jr. called 'the content of our character.'"

Actually, what most of us want is a cheap and convenient way to send letters and buy books and compact discs. Only for a handful of really odd people does the Internet represent an escape from the loneliness of the modern condition. There's nothing wrong with that, of course: Really odd people are entitled to their obsessions, just like the rest of us. But what is wrong is when they begin to insist that the rules that govern the Internet should be written to suit themselves alone.

Over the next few years, American courts and legislatures will have to decide a series of important questions

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about the regulation of the Internet, and Godwin's book is a brief for the interests of his fellow hobbyists. The Internet, for instance, makes it easy to appropriate and distribute intellectual property. That's ominous for the creators of intellectual property. It's equally ominous for users of intellectual property: If the next edition of Microsoft Windows can be effortlessly pirated and distributed, Microsoft will take a lot less trouble to produce it—to the loss of those of us who would have been willing to pay for it. Godwin looks at this with insouciance: "The greatest interest at stake is not that of the copyright holders or that of the database companies—it's the interest in a free and open society of ensuring that everyone has access to the facts, regardless of their economic backgrounds."

Godwin approaches libel law in the same spirit. One of the wonderful things about the Internet is that it permits a knowledgeable person with a few thousand dollars to become nationally known—as Matt Drudge has recently done. But the Internet has also given such individuals a power to damage reputations once possessed only by the largest media enterprises. This would not seem to warrant tilting American libel law even further in its already remarkably pro-defendant direction.

And yet, that's just what Godwin does argue. Libel law exists, he says, because a defamed person has no other way to repair his reputation. "But surely the Net, which has the power to empower everyone to answer injurious false statements, can change all that." Suppose, however, that you are defamed by an AP story posted to the Yahoo Web site. You can, of course, create a Web site of your own in reply. But what kind of solution is that? Your site will never attract the traffic of the Yahoo! site, and the defamation will go unanswered and unpunished. Godwin can't see this because of his hobbyist's blinkers: When he thinks of libel on the Internet, he thinks not of a defamatory remark on a Web site, but of a chat-group "flame"—a nasty remark that will be seen only by the people in a discussion group and can be answered by a posting to the same group.

Godwin's views are important primarily because the rules of the Internet are being laid down before most Americans have more than a glancing involvement with it. This is a situation in which small, interested factions have an influence far greater than their numbers warrant. Think, for example, of the difficulties that Web sites have in charging money for their services: The fanatical objection of the Internet cultists to paying for anything—an objection originating in the hippy-utopian culture of the Web's first days—has helped to shape the expectations of tens of millions of Americans about what is fair and reasonable on-line business practice.

Back when the Internet was new, its aficionados used to worry about a corporate takeover of the Internet—the day when the *New York Times* and Disney and Charles Schwab would displace the electronic newsletters and chat groups as the main attractions on the World Wide Web. That day is here. For most of us, that's good news: Quite a lot of people are interested in what the *Times* and Disney and Charles Schwab have to offer. Now that the Internet is an integral part of American society, it must be governed by the same rules that govern mass communication elsewhere. The cultists hate that. But then, if we had listened to them, the nation's newest conduit for goods, ideas, and services would be merely a high-tech background for endless games of Dungeons and Dragons. ♦

B&A

The Silent Conductor

Celibidache on Record at Last

By Jay Nordlinger

If music has a mystery man, it must be Sergiu Celibidache, the late Romanian conductor who refused to record, forsook celebrity, and held legions of admirers in his spell. He belongs with the first rank of conductors—Wilhelm Furtwängler, John Barbirolli, George Szell—yet he is relatively unknown, even to the music-appreciating public.

Scholars and musicians flocked to his (infrequent) concerts, hoping to learn the secrets of this strange visionary. One would hear tales of what "Celi" had done—"Oh, you should have been there!"—but, of course, one had no records. Or very few of them. Occasionally, a pirate recording became available, and it was treated as a forbidden text, marveled at and puzzled over.

Now, however, two years after the conductor's death at the age of eighty-four, a plethora of recordings has hit the market, giving Celibidache a wider audience than he ever allowed himself in a half-century as a major musical figure. And still, the man is a mystery—a maddening, awe-inspiring eccentric.

Celibidache was born in 1912. After graduation from a Moldavian music academy, he went to Berlin to study mathematics and philosophy. But music had seized his brain. By 1945, he was conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic, replacing Furtwängler, who was subject to denazification. He remained in that post until 1952,

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when Furtwängler was permitted to return.

Soon after, Celibidache journeyed to the Far East, where he became a devoted Buddhist ("I am a practical Zen man," he would later say). When he found his way back to Europe, he assumed a series of second-rate—even third-rate—positions, often with radio orchestras. And he decided that he would never again record.

"Music arises out of the moment," Celi liked to say, "and this moment cannot be fixed or repeated." Tempos, for example, were determined by the acoustics of a hall, for "time is space"—a concept that no recording can honor. "The gramophone," he complained, "is a dead thing," and music, "like peas, should not be canned: It loses its flavor, its scent, its life." Celibidache wrote dense tracts on the unrecordable "epiphenomena" of music, but for the layman he kept it simple: Listening to a recording was like "going to bed with a picture of Brigitte Bardot."

Neither did Celi get around much. He was difficult to book as a guest conductor, demanding as he did at least six rehearsals (a tremendous strain on an orchestra's purse) and requiring all players to conform to his idea of truth, which he did not view as subjective. Some orchestras would hire him anyway, suffering the financial loss (despite increased ticket prices). Musicians—exhausted but amazed—would practice through their breaks.

Ultimately, Celibidache must answer to posterity, and he must do so in the traditional way—through recordings, misleading as they can be. We now have twelve discs distributed by Fonit Cetra, an arm of Italian radio, and ten more printed by EMI, with the controversial blessing of the conductor's family. The first set (pirated from live broadcasts) offers a middle-aged Celibidache with shoddy provincial orchestras. The second set gives us Celi with his final orchestra, the Munich Philharmonic, in concerts captured on archival tape. Thus is Celibidache forced from the realm of myth to be judged.

The Italian recordings reveal a deeply individualistic conductor, prone to jarring heresy but usually persuasive. The Mozart C-minor Mass is spiritually and intellectually superb. Strauss's *Death and Transfiguration* is a model of control—one, long, inexorable arc. Even the Schubert B-minor Symphony, often a tired warhorse, is thrilling. The sound on these pirates is abysmal, but they are useful documents nonetheless—canned peas that suffice in the absence of fresh ones.

In the Munich set, Celi is on a rarefied plane, flouting convention, obeying what he regards as the iron logic of the score on his stand. Every performance—no matter of what: Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Debussy—is laden with gravity, a ceremony presided over by a high priest. But one man's "autumnal glow" is another man's ponderousness. Celi suffocates Beethoven's Fifth, for instance, rendering it too carefully, as though he has thought and rehearsed the piece to death. Never has the closing movement—a C-major sunbath—been so joyless. The Tchaikovsky Sixth, on the other hand, is magisterial.

Celibidache in old age was shockingly uneven: a self-indulgent kook on one night, a prophet the next. But always he was his own man, having something important—even if it struck many as wrong—to say.

Does one genuinely experience Celibidache in these recordings? Not as one did in the hall, where Celi was mesmeric, but recordings are adequate souvenirs—far better than photos of sex kittens. The pianist Glenn Gould, Celibidache's fellow dissenter, withdrew entirely from concert life and confined himself to the recording studio. Celibidache did the opposite—and neither man served the public especially well, each hunkered down in his particular absolutism.

If Celi worried that recordings would puncture his aura, he need not have: He remains inscrutable. But now the Zen master will cast his spells on disc, for an eternity that he both feared and abhorred. ♦

BCA

A Novel Education

A Proposal By America's Best College President

By Andrew Ferguson

In this important and provocative new book, a respected college president looks at the crisis in American higher education, and if this sentence doesn't make you want to stop reading right now then there's something wrong with you. But wait. Josiah Bunting III is not an ordinary college president, just as the college he leads, the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington, Virginia, is not an ordinary college. Bunting is a decorated veteran of the Vietnam war, a successful novelist (*The Lionheads*, his remarkable novel about the war, is still in print twenty-six years after publication), a trained classical pianist, a specialist in modern European history, and a prose stylist whose robust sentences and paragraphs bear comparison (I'm not kidding) to Macaulay's. He's also a Rhodes scholar, but nobody's perfect.

Given his background and range of interests, it's not surprising that

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Bunting, of all academics, might have something worthwhile to say about the "crisis in American higher education," which, as a pet subject for publishers, seems rivaled only by diets, mutual funds, and mountain climbing. But Bunting's book, *An Education for Our Time*, stands out from the other edu-crisis books. For one thing, it is less a critique than a fantasy of what education can be—less a diagnosis than a cure. For another thing, it isn't a thundering manifesto but an epistolary novel—a series of fictional letters from a dying billionaire to the executor of his estate.

As his cancer advances, the billionaire, a microchip magnate named John Adams, lays out careful and detailed plans for a new college, to be built from scratch with his money, on a vast tract of land in the foothills of Montana. This is another way in which *An Education for Our Time* differs from most books on today's colleges and universities: It is remarkably precise, with instructions on how to construct dormitories and commissaries, how to recruit students and faculty, how to design a curriculum, how to assemble a workable college administration, and, preeminently, how to mold the character of young people. This last how-to overrides all the others. The formation of character was, after all, the traditional purpose of liberal-arts schools, and in some places it is still declared to be so. But Adams really means it.

"We will aim to educate young persons," writes Adams,

> to be virtuous and disinterested citizens and leaders; patriots who more than self their country love; citizens who when they are not virtuous in their lives and works will know they are not and will labor always to sustain their determination to be virtuous, self-mastering, drawn to the accumulation of a moderate sufficient property only, and educated liberally but avid in their commitment always to remain liberally self-educating.

Adams turns out to be as high-minded, humorless, and far-seeing as the founding father for whom he was named—and as admirable, too, in the same starchy manner. We learn along the way that he was wounded on Iwo Jima and later served (with understandable disenchantment) as a systems analyst in Robert McNamara's Vietnam-era Defense Department. His idea of higher education is rigorous and austere and, as he knows, not for everyone.

He proposes that students not only receive a classical education, with a heavy emphasis on history and the biographies of great men, but also learn to handle tools, to cook and use firearms and write musical notation. Memorization being an essential element in mental discipline, students will be required to learn by heart at least two thousand lines of great writing every year; his recommendations range from Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address and Lee's Farewell to the Army of Northern Virginia to poems by Rudyard Kipling and Howard Moss. Of their five-year program, students will be required to spend one year in the military and another devoted to some menial task of public service—as hospital orderlies, for example, or tutors in the inner city. Not for everyone, as I say.

Chas Fagan

Josiah Bunting III
An Education for Our Time
Regnery, 246 pp., $24.95

But then Adams's premise is quite different from the watery, come-one, come-all mandate that has shaped colleges and universities for better and worse since the GI Bill was enacted in 1944. Adams's school is a school for the training of elites, properly understood: "The elite that our College must exemplify, and champion, is an eliteness of opportunity honestly earned and exploited, and of service to the Republic."

He is enough of a democrat to know that the raw recruits for such an education will be found among all races and classes and among both of the top two genders, and he is eloquent on the near-worthlessness of SAT scores, high-school grades, class ranks, and "life-experience essays" that flood college admissions offices every spring. "What we are looking for," he writes, "is a compound of practical intelligence, mother wit, determination, courage, certain early signs of selflessness, and a demonstrated willingness to go against the grain of expectation." This isn't the sort of thing you find on the SAT.

How then are we to find these people, the country's disinterested citizens of the future, and what and how are they to learn? The answers to these and related questions could fill a book, and now they have, for the first time in a long while. It is odd that such fundamentals are so seldom raised in the screeds that critics, most of them conservative, routinely aim at higher education.

Adams is clearly Bunting's mouthpiece, and the answers he comes up with are, to speak mildly, open to dispute. But together they make *An Education for Our Time* (this time I really mean it) an important and provocative contribution to our discussions of what an education should be, and, what amounts to the same thing, of the kind of character we want our sons and daughters to have. ♦

MIKE BARNICLE

Brain Droppings

OCTOBER 9, 1998—Over the many years he was Speaker of the House, Tip O'Neill used to call me frequently to ask for advice. Sometimes I'd have to repeat to him Barnicle's Third Law: "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." And it's that saying of mine that comes back to me today, as I return to my column after a two-month hiatus. All happy newspapers, you see, are alike, but each unhappy newspaper is unhappy in its own way. For the Boston Globe and myself, these have been the times that try men's souls, the best of times and the worst of times, a time to reap and a time to sow, for to everything there is a season. I have had to confront the fact that some people for some reason think I am intellectually sloppy, and the editors of the Globe have had time to reflect upon the fact that they are gutless wimps unwilling to stand by their decisions. For, when you think about it, how can a newspaper be great, if it is not also good?

I'm reminded of the time I was walking down the street when a little boy named Jimmy came up to me and said, "I have been addicted to crack since I was 8, but reading your columns has enabled me to come clean."

"Tommy," I replied, "let me give you a little bit of advice I used to give John F. Kennedy when he would call during the depths of the Mayaguez crisis: Neither a borrower nor a lender be. To thine own self be true. Get thee to a nunnery. We shall sell no wine before its time. And Buddy looked up at me admiringly and said, "I know you would never prevaricate with us, Mike. Not like that poet broad you used to work with." I held up a restraining hand, for we shouldn't be too hard on poor Patricia Smith, simply because she wasn't willing to mau-mau as shamelessly as I did. Patricia always reminded me of a lady who's sure all that glitters is gold and she's buying a stairway to heaven. When she gets there she knows if the stores are all closed, with a word she can get what she came for. Oh, and it makes me wonder. But, hey, not too much. With the record I've established, I could always quit this job and be president of the United States.

***Boston Globe* columnist Mike Barnicle is suspended for two months for plagiarism and misleading his editors.**
—News item