the weekly Standard

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WHAT'S AHEAD FOR ISRAEL?
CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

FOUR GORE YEARS?

Christopher Caldwell • Chester E. Finn Jr.
Matthew Rees • Irwin M. Stelzer

the weekly Standard

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Books & Arts

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At Home With the Hiss Family

Last Thursday, the *New York Times* ran one of its "At Home With . . ." features on Tony Hiss, son of the late Communist spy Alger Hiss and author of a new memoir. It would be churlish to fault Mr. Hiss's wife Lois Metzger for comparing Alger Hiss to her own grandmother, who survived the Nazi concentration camps; this, after all, is not a news article but a puff piece in the paper's "House & Home" section.

The story, which includes the jump-headline "A Son's Debt of Honor" (what debt? what honor?), describes the Hiss apartment as something of a time-capsule, largely unchanged since Alger and Priscilla Hiss moved into it in 1947. The implication is that Tony Hiss has kept the apartment as a shrine to his martyred dad, rather than decamp for more luxurious surroundings, out of a deep sense of filial piety.

But The Scrapbook couldn't help noticing that 1947 saw the very dawn of New York's notorious rent-control policies. And we find out midway through the article that this is actually a gorgeous Greenwich village apartment overlooking a rare crabapple orchard in one of the toniest (no pun intended) downtown Manhattan neighborhoods. In other words, it's an apartment that any CEO or publishing magnate or mergers-and-acquisitions specialist would give his right arm for. And what are the Hisses paying for it? (Probably $67.85 a month, though the *Times* didn't tell.)

It's not that we wouldn't want that apartment ourselves. But we wouldn't consider hanging onto it a sign of our special virtue.

It's Alive!

And it simply will not go away. Occasional Weekly Standard contributor John J. Pitney Jr. of Claremont McKenna College has been trying valiantly for years to exterminate the most widely circulated bogus quotation in hack-punditdom: "America is great because America is good," and so on, inevitably attributed—mistakenly—to Alexis de Tocqueville (probably crafted by some 20th-century ghostwriter). It's been a year and a half since The Scrapbook last reported on the progress of this war. Things are going badly, it seems. According to the following sample of recent speechmakers, columnists, and other mistaken sorts, America remains great because America is good, and it remains the case that Tocqueville said so. Except that he didn't.

* Arianna Huffington led her syndicated column with the quotation on May 16.

* Sanford N. McDonnell, chairman emeritus of McDonnell Douglas Corporation, used it in a speech at a national conference on ethics last November.

* Also in November, at a campaign rally in Roswell, Georgia, secretary of state candidate John McCallum called it a "quote . . . I know the speaker knows as well." He'd just been introduced by Newt Gingrich.

* *Chattanooga Free Press* editor and publisher Lee Anderson, in a signed editorial last September, identified it as one of Tocqueville's "penetrating observations."

* Two days earlier, during a floor appearance in the House, Rep. James Traficant of Ohio invoked the "Tocqueville" quotation in support of the notion that "Today's debate is not just about Bill Clinton."

* Which brings The Scrapbook to . . . the president himself, who told Boys' Nation delegates at a Rose Garden ceremony last July that "I'm convinced" Tocqueville was right, when he said . . .

Not that The Scrapbook disagrees with the sentiment. It just thinks America will be even greater when its columnists and speechwriters stop abusing Tocqueville.

No Cantu

In the latest reminder that racial preferences in college admissions will not go quietly, the Office for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education has been circulating draft guidelines that propose penalizing universities that use SAT scores as a leading criterion when making admissions decisions.

What's wrong with the SAT, a standardized test that has played a key role in college admissions for decades? It seems blacks and Hispanics regularly score lower on the test than whites and Asians, so *ipso facto*, the test must be discriminatory. According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, which broke the story, "the guidelines would establish a high burden of proof for institutions to show

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that [SAT-weighted admissions] policies do not violate anti-bias laws."

The individual responsible for promulgating these guidelines is assistant secretary of education Norma Cantu, a leading administration proponent of quotas. If she succeeds, the net effect will be to undo state referendums and federal court decisions that over the past few years have advanced the quaint principles of merit and race-neutral university admissions. Will any committee chairman in Congress, we wonder, have the nerve to haul Cantu up and question her about this?

It Takes a Committee

Dick Gephardt's new book won't get much attention since the ranking House Democrat decided several months ago not to run for his party's presidential nomination. There's probably no book quite so deservedly forlorn as the campaign biography without a campaign. Nonetheless, the Gephardt volume merits a footnote in the history of the genre for its ingenious title, *An Even Better Place: America in the 21st Century.* That "even better" is a piece of unparalleled craftsmanship. It manages the dual and seemingly confounding tasks of suggesting an upbeat "vision" for the future without being even microscopically critical of the present—i.e., the Clinton utopia, which it is now Democratic party dogma to praise as perhaps the finest epoch in American history. We salute the nameless dozens of Gephardt staffers responsible.

Mr. Cheerful

Does Ted Turner, as they say nowadays, have issues with young people? Not long ago CNN's aging frat-boy CEO was regretting that he had, in his words, had "five kids—boom, boom, boom—by the time I was 30," adding, "If I was doing it over again I wouldn't have done it, but I can't shoot them now that they're here." The other week, he offered this cheery observation in a graduation speech at the University of Georgia: "Here's the class of '99, and y'all are just starting out. Wouldn't it be terrible to have nuclear war in the next week or two and mess up y'all's careers before they have gotten started?" Nice guy.

Booknotes

Joseph Epstein's new collection of essays, *Narcissus Leaves the Pool*, has just been published by Houghton Mifflin, and at $25.00, it's a steal. Epstein is one of the country's premier men of letters and (no coincidence) a contributing editor to this magazine. In the new collection, readers will find his thoughts on, among many other topics, napping, Anglophilia, and heart bypass surgery—a combination that makes the book must reading not only for sleepy hospital patients with funny accents but everyone else, too. About it, and him, Tom Wolfe has written: "He moves so effortlessly from the amusingly personal to the broadly philosophical that it takes a moment before you realize how far out into the intellectual cosmos you have been taken. He is also mercilessly free of the petty intellectual etiquettes common at this moment in our national letters. It is refreshing to hear so independent a voice." Seconded.

Help Wanted

Contributing editor Charles Krauthammer seeks a research assistant. Contact Borden Flanagan at 1225 19th St., NW, Suite 620, Washington, DC 20036.

Casual

Can this Marriage Be Saved?

The personal may not be the political, as the feminists used to say, but it's still true that the political is often purely personal. I once made the mistake of working for the federal government, and the only insight I took away from the year's unpleasantness was an understanding, small but indelible, of how public events are shaped. Of the many currents and trends that might influence a government policy, the most important was the personal relationship of the policy-makers involved. A slight in the hallway, a remark in the men's room, an anecdote repeated at the wrong dinner party—these might have the effect of ruining a friendship, thereby upending a policy, and thereby (for example) raising the EPA's de-oxygenated hydrologen emissions standard from 3.4 ppm to 3.45.

I worked for the Bush administration, but regardless of the era, personality is the great unspoken determinant in most governmental transactions. "What happens in the White House," Mrs. Bush used to say, "is much less important than what happens in your house." This was certainly true of the Bush White House, where nothing would happen for months at a time. But I came away with an axiom of my own, about what is called, too grandly, "the policy-making process." "What happens in the Cabinet Room is much less important than what happens in the men's room."

And how about the bedroom? For political observers these days it's an unavoidable question. All marriages, as we know, are endlessly complicated, but the weird complications of the First Coupling have altered our culture to an unprecedented degree. Without them, for example, Mrs. Clinton might have felt no need to act out her commissar-like ambitions. There would have been no absurd health-care reform plan, and hence no Republican takeover of Congress. Without them, there would have been no Monica Lewinsky, and hence no impeachment; hence no bombing of the Sudan; maybe no Kosovo; and no Barbra Streisand sleepovers in the Lincoln Bedroom.

It promises to get weirder still. Last week, the *Washington Post* reported the "virtual certainty" that Hillary Clinton will run for the Senate from New York. The *Post* story avoided the most interesting wrinkle, which is where Mrs. Clinton would live as she campaigned—whether, in other words, she'd officially decamp from her husband's luxurious house and establish residency in New York, renting accommodations suitable for a refugee from a failed marriage. This would be a final irony to the Clintons' ultramodern partnership, which they explicitly had hoped would cause America to rethink traditional gender roles. He cheats on her, and she's the one who has to move out.

Whether the Clinton marriage is the strangest in contemporary politics, however, must remain an open question, at least for the time being. We have to wait and see how things turn out with the Doles. The usually laconic Bob gave a chatty interview last week to the *New York Times*. He noted that his candidate-wife Elizabeth is having trouble raising money. "If she can't raise the money," said Bob, "obviously, it's pretty hard to be a candidate." Bob added that he himself was thinking of giving money—to the presidential campaign of John McCain. "I've thought about ways to help McCain in particular," he said. "I think we need to keep good people in the race." His wife, however, might not be among them. "If it looks impossible, this is not her whole life." But doesn't Bob think she'd make a formidable opponent for Al Gore? "It's too early to tell," he said.

The Doles haven't been seen in public together since Bob's interview, but there's nothing unusual in that: They're rarely seen in public together. Elizabeth did give a solo interview to CBS News, however. "Bob had a little visit to the Dole woodshed," she said, conjuring a horrifying word picture of riding crops and thigh boots. "He looked pretty good there." Her smile never left her. "But obviously the interpretation was not what he intended."

No, it wasn't. My own view—to use a favorite Bob phrase—is that he intended much worse. It is increasingly clear that Bob has been sending subliminal signals for months, long before he spoke to the *Times*, in his Viagra ad about "erectile dysfunction." "It's a little embarrassing to talk about E.D.," he says in the ad. "But it's so important to millions of men and their partners that I decided to talk about it publicly." It takes courage to discuss it, he adds, but discuss it he must, "in hopes that men with E.D. will get proper treatment." Note, please: Bob Dole is not warning American men about J. McC., or G.W.B., or even A.G. It's E.D. that must be eradicated. This is a man with an agenda. If I were Mrs. Dole, I'd pull out right now.

Andrew Ferguson

Ay Caramba!

We Republicans concur with David Tell's recognition that "outreach" is more than Cinco de Mayo receptions ("Race to the Bottom," May 17). "Outreach," to be sure, is not a perfect term. In the end, only two things will allow people of all races to realize the validity of Republican ideas.

First, we must pass legislation rooted in sound conservative principles and designed to allow people to take control of their lives, their money, and their futures. Republican policies have resulted in the highest ever rate of Hispanic home ownership and a dramatic rise in the number of Hispanic-owned small businesses. As far as the 106th Congress, we will continue to produce common sense ideas for tax relief, Social Security, and education that will greatly benefit all Americans, including Hispanics.

Second, we must properly communicate our ideas, accomplishments, and goals. Republicans should take credit for results that enable all to share the American dream—results that do not come from special programs, quotas, or legal classifications. Tell's disdain for Republicans who appreciate and respect the significance of Cinco de Mayo, and his condescending tone, illustrate the magnitude of this challenge.

Republicans share the values of family, church, and personal empowerment with Hispanics. We at the House Republican Conference will not apologize for celebrating those shared values with Hispanics—and communicating them to all people—nor will we apologize for informing fellow Republicans about opportunities to deliver their message.

Since nearly every statement about the Cinco de Mayo event in Tell's editorial was plagued with untruths and false representations, a cynic might conclude that he either chose to deceive his readers or simply did not attend the event. Whatever the case, Republicans should reject such myopia and join leaders like Sen. Orrin Hatch and Rep. J.C. Watts, who believe that people of all races have a home in the Republican party. These leaders have the vision and confidence to identify with people whose heritage does not mirror their own. After all, the Cinco de Mayo holiday celebrates freedom. If we fail to find common ground in that theme, then certainly we will fail to continue as the majority party in Congress. Even worse, we will deserve to have failed.

Mario H. Lopez
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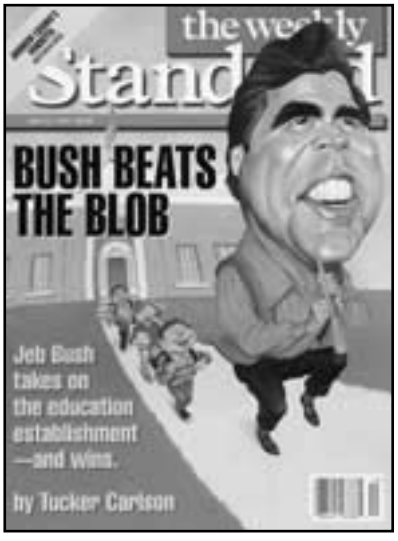
House Republican Conference
Washington, DC

One can only scratch one's head at David Tell's editorial. What lesson are we supposed to learn?

Is it that Republicans shouldn't expend energy reaching out to certain



ethnic groups through various cultural events? Well, one could devote considerable pages to the fact that, on St. Patrick's Day, politicians of every stripe don green hats, raise a toast with green beer, and start talking with silly brogues. Furthermore, during such an occasion we could raise images of the Irish "troubles" and ponder which members of each party have the most connections to a formerly terrorist organization, the IRA. We don't engage in this unfair speculation because we recognize that this is a festive moment which all Americans, not just those who claim Irish heritage, can enjoy.

Apparently, the same standard should not apply when the festive occasion in question is one of Mexican origin. No, instead this should be seen as an opportunity to attack the Republican party as pandering when it should be focused on dismantling affirmative action.

So the casual observer at the GOP's Cinco de Mayo event sees the cultural courting of an ethnic constituency, which was only being wooed as other ethnicities have been in the past. Instead, conservatives see only Republicans hanging out with affirmative-action beneficiaries: "The modern GOP . . . is totally hip to the 'hood . . . And to el barrio." And for some reason, conservatives keep getting attacked for being racially insensitive. How dare anyone doubt the conservative concept of "color blindness"? Wherever would someone come up with such a ridiculous notion? Of course, it does beg the question: How many IRA terrorists do The Weekly Standard editors look for at St. Patrick's Day parades?

Oh, but wait, perhaps the lesson we are supposed to learn is that Republicans haven't been diligent enough in overturning affirmative action. Well, unfortunate as it may be, the reality is that in the 105th Congress, the primary anti-affirmative action bill didn't get out of committee. I suppose that Tell believes the GOP should expend more political capital in the 106th Congress (where it has fewer members) to try and get the bill passed. Now, that makes a lot of strategic sense. Fight the same battle you lost once (except this time, with fewer troops), probably with the same result. End up with no law, no bill, and little for your troubles except the continuing reputation of being the party of bigots. Tell might believe that Republicans lack principle, but even he can't believe that they are that stupid.

Perhaps the lesson is that Republicans need to wage this battle just for the sake of principle. Well we have seen an interesting tactical evolution in the conservative side of the affirmative-action battle. In the 1970s, in the wake of the *Bakke* decision, the face of the victim of racial preferences was a white man. In the mid-'90s, the ideal victim championed by critics became a white woman (*Texas* v. *Hopwood*). Now, in this latest editorial, our preferred victim, "Jessie Tompkins . . . is black." Surprise! Striking gold at last, racial preference opponents may have found the perfect symbol for a corrupt program—

a black man. So the lesson we must learn is that we must get rid of affirmative action because it may eventually (ironically enough) have a "disparate impact" on black people. Now, admittedly there is an adherence to principle in this argument, however in selecting Jessie Tompkins, perchance Tell is merely suggesting the adoption of a different . . . strategy?

Attempting to maintain your principles while adopting a different strategy which may eventually bring about the political goal you seek? Hmmm. Now there's a fascinating concept.

ROBERT A. GEORGE
WASHINGTON, DC

I'd like to take off my sombrero to David Tell for his analysis of the GOP's amateurish pandering to the so-called "Hispanic vote." Republican outreach experts seem to think that Hispanics will be converted by transparent "cultural celebration." What's next? A Ricky Martin concert with Jim Nicholson giggling in the front row?

Republican attempts to learn "Spinnish" neglect a crucial fact: The GOP will never win the votes of Hispanics whose top achievement in life is being Hispanic. They can win the votes of Hispanics whose goal is to make it in America, a goal that will require a knowledge of our common language—English.

MAURO E. MUJICA
WASHINGTON, DC

JANE'S ADDICTION

I thoroughly enjoyed reading Victorino Matus's article on the Jane's books, which brought the following memory to mind ("Jane's Lovers," May 17). My father was a navigator on a B-29 in the South Pacific during the Second World War. Over his lifetime he greatly enjoyed talking about his war experiences, and prior to his death three years ago, he introduced my nephew to his collection of books and photographs of World War II aircraft.

At Christmas each year my brother and sister-in-law provide the rest of the family with "wish lists" for gifts for their two sons. For Christmas 1997, my then 7-year-old nephew wanted several of the Jane's aircraft publications, which I gladly provided. For a period of time he went nowhere without one of his Jane's books in tow. Perhaps he qualifies as the youngest Jane's lover.

MICHAEL PENCE
PHILADELPHIA, PA

PRIOR ENGAGEMENT

Peter D. Feaver's criticism of the Clinton administration's policy of constructive engagement toward China makes the valid point that American concessions alone will not ensure reciprocity ("I Love Zhu, Zhu Love Me: Clinton's China Policy," April 26). But in a pattern oft repeated in your pages, Feaver presents a version of *Hamlet* without the prince. The Clinton policy is not based simply on concessions. Foreseeing a three-power balance in East Asia, it took steps after 1994 to revitalize the U.S.-Japan security treaty. Koichi Kato, one of the Liberal Democratic party's highest-ranking officials, recently called this action "the most significant achievement of the decade." By making sure that China could not play a Japan card against us, the United States erected a structure that creates incentives for China to improve its behavior.

From this position of strength, the United States can respond sternly (for example, by sending carriers off the coast of Taiwan) or in an accommodating manner (for example, on World Trade Organization accession) as circumstances warrant. Treating China as a friend will not guarantee friendship, but it keeps that option open for the future. Treating China as an enemy forecloses that potential future and unnecessarily sells short America's long-term national interest.

JOSEPH S. NYE JR.
CAMBRIDGE, MA

FUTURAMA

It's ironic that H.G. Wells, one of our century's clearest writers, remains one of our most misread, as evidenced by Brian Murray ("Future Perfect," May 17). He's always patronized as a mindless promoter of progress through science and the virtues of the world state. In fact, much of his best work seriously questions those premises. *The Island of Dr. Moreau* is a sustained criticism of science and disembodied intellect.

Many of his prophetic views held up and still hold up. When Hitler invaded Russia, the debate among Western observers was largely confined to how many weeks it would take Russia to collapse—even the normally acute George Orwell missed that one. Wells was almost alone in predicting catastrophe for the Nazis, writing that they had finally come up against something "solid through and through." Furthermore, he not only foresaw air forces at a time when there were barely any flightworthy aircraft, but he deduced the inherent weakness of air power. In the novel, the German air fleet bombs the hell out of New York City, creating all manner of destruction, but since they can't occupy an acre of ground, their victory goes for nothing.

In fact, if Wells could see the air campaign in the Balkans, he'd once again say "God damn it, I told you so!"

DON O'CONNOR
KREAMER, PA

the weekly Standard

Mr. Wobbly

In 1990 a British prime minister sought to stiffen the spine of an American president trying to decide whether to reverse Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Margaret Thatcher's famous injunction—"George, this is no time to go wobbly"—helped give President Bush the moral courage to take Americans to war against Saddam Hussein. Nine years later we see history repeating itself, but unfortunately only on the British side.

For the past few weeks, Tony Blair has been trying to convince Bill Clinton that the air campaign in Yugoslavia cannot succeed and that preparations must be made to send ground troops into Kosovo to drive the Serbs out. So far, Clinton has essentially told his good friend Blair to shut up.

Before the NATO summit in Washington on April 23, Blair and his foreign secretary, Robin Cook, sought Clinton's support for taking up the ground war issue with the rest of the alliance. Clinton said no. Last week, Robin Cook visited Washington again to make the case that NATO at least needs to prepare for the possibility of ground forces. But Clinton officials rebuffed him, again. Clinton's declaration last week that no options had been taken "off the table" seems to have been aimed chiefly at getting Blair off his back.

Blair's Thatcherite gutsiness is proving an annoying embarrassment to the president, who so far lacks the stomach to match it. Last week Clinton officials grumbled to reporters that Blair's constant pressure for ground troops was making Clinton look weak by comparison with John McCain. True enough. Senator McCain embarrassed Clinton when he offered a resolution two weeks ago authorizing the president to use "all necessary force" to win the war in Kosovo. Clinton lobbied furiously to defeat McCain's resolution. He wanted McCain to shut up, too. So for the past two months, we have had this situation: A U.S. president who has been a lot friendlier to those who want us to lose this war, like the Russians and the Chinese, than he has been to allies and members of Congress who want to win. Sorry, Mr. Blair, your American friend has indeed gone "wobbly."

The disastrous consequences of the president's wobbliness become more apparent with each passing day. Nine weeks into the air war, the NATO alliance is showing signs of weariness. German chancellor Gerhard Schröder is publicly sniping at Blair, and allied political leaders are quarreling over military and diplomatic strategy. The Italian government has called for a bombing pause. Schröder himself, after beating back a challenge from the Green party—which also wants a bombing pause—sounds as if he is desperate for a diplomatic solution. That evident desperation, along with all the international-alliance squabbling, has probably emboldened Milosevic to hold out for a diplomatic settlement on his terms, not NATO's. Whatever punishment NATO is inflicting on Milosevic's forces—and that punishment does not seem to stop Serb forces in Kosovo from doing just about whatever they please—the big question is who will give in first: Milosevic or NATO? Right now, it's by no means clear.

All this disarray is a consequence of the badly planned and badly implemented air campaign. But it is also, more importantly, the result of Clinton's unwillingness to rally an alliance that depends on clear and vigorous American leadership. The president, with an ever-watchful eye on the polls, clings desperately to the hope that Milosevic will buckle under the air attack. Clinton's own military commanders and his own closest allies in NATO have become convinced that only a ground attack can drive Milosevic from Kosovo and secure a victory on NATO's terms. And it is the obvious inadequacy of the air campaign that has created the recent disunity in the alliance. But Clinton officials, cynical to the core, use the disunity as an excuse for not pressing ahead for a ground attack.

Can NATO allies be brought around to support a ground war in Kosovo if necessary? The answer is yes. Right now the British and French want to win this war, no matter what it takes. If President Clinton ever summoned the will to lead, it is highly unlikely that a ground option favored by the three most important allies in NATO would be blocked by the likes of the Italians, the Greeks, or even the Germans. We suspect that the German government's chief objection is to the use of German troops in a ground action. Fine. With British, French, and American forces available, NATO doesn't need German forces on the ground in Kosovo.

Late last week, General Wesley Clark bluntly told his superiors that unless the United States began to

move ahead with the deployment of ground troops soon, the possibility of having a ground force ready before winter in the Balkans would be foreclosed. In other words, unless the president starts to prepare for a ground war in the very near future, there is a real chance that we will fail to achieve our basic objectives. Such failure should be unacceptable.

The war can be won. The war should be won. And the main obstacle to winning it isn't Slobodan Milosevic. It isn't our allies. It isn't the weather in the Balkans. It's Bill Clinton.

—William Kristol and Robert Kagan, for the Editors

Gun Shy

It's really not about guns. And it's not only Gary Bauer and Dan Quayle who say so. In their post-Littleton speeches, President Clinton and Vice President Al Gore have made the same point, indirectly but unmistakably. When they list cures for what ails America, they get to gun control last. No doubt White House pollsters have cautioned them to be restrained in promoting anti-gun legislation now. So even while exulting last week over his tie-breaking Senate vote to crack down on gun shows, Gore was careful to cite—and cite first—more urgent needs such as "better parenting" and "more discipline in schools" and "more self-restraint in the media."

And yet Washington pretends the solution to Littleton and to the shooting last week at a Conyers, Georgia, high school can be reduced to one thing: more gun control. In fact, the measures passed by the Senate, if the House goes along, would have almost no effect. Child locks on guns? They'd have to be purchased along with a gun, but actually attaching them to the gun is voluntary. And any teenager, particularly determined ones like Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, would be able to saw through such locks in minutes. Background checks stretching over three days at gun shows? This would cause more private gun sales to go underground, denying authorities some of what they know now about gun trafficking.

So who's to blame for allowing the No. 1 lesson of Littleton to be defined in Washington as gun control? In order of culpability, Senate Democratic leader Tom Daschle, majority leader Trent Lott, and Republican senators John McCain and Gordon Smith. Daschle's role was cynical in the extreme. After Littleton, he declared that no new gun laws were needed. Then, only days later, he insisted Democrats would disrupt the Senate and block all legislation until there was action on gun control. Daschle gambled that even if Democrats looked exploitative, Republicans would be forced to defy anti-gun sentiment in the country and look even worse. He won the gamble.

Lott should have called Daschle's bluff. Indeed, a number of Republican senators urged him to do exactly that. Lott could have explained the Senate had more urgent business. But having already slated the juvenile justice bill for the Senate floor, Lott was wary of postponing it past Memorial Day, when cooler heads might prevail. He's obsessive about sticking to the schedule, and so he did. This allowed the juvenile justice bill to be the vehicle for gun control—and for GOP humiliation.

In spite of Lott's capitulation, Republicans still might have disposed of gun control in one day and averted embarrassment. A tantrum by McCain and Smith prevented this. The day after the Senate voted for the Republican position of voluntary background checks at gun shows, and when the legislative battle seemed resolved, at least for the time being, the two senators pointed alarmingly to newspaper headlines about GOP connivance in keeping "loopholes" in the gun laws. Calling this a disaster for Republicans, they said background checks should be made mandatory. The next day, the Senate reversed itself and adopted this position—the Democratic position all along. But Democrats, sensing Republican weakness, now demanded more. They pointed to more "loopholes," the press dutifully played these up, the debate on guns dragged on, and Republicans suffered. And on the key vote, they lost, with Al Gore casting the deciding vote and gloating about it on national TV afterwards.

Some Republicans, Lott included, acted surprised that Democrats would be so cynical and partisan. But these were the same Democratic senators who, for cynical and partisan reasons, had rushed to Clinton's defense in the impeachment struggle. Other Republicans, like McCain and Smith, were shocked the media would strongly take the side of Democratic gun control advocates. But this shouldn't have startled anyone. The Washington press corps has been credulous about the merits of gun control forever.

There's a message for Republicans in their missteps over the gun issue. After being in the majority for nearly five years, they still haven't figured out the politics of running Congress. They should take a break, study the George Mitchell years during the Bush presidency, and learn how to play hardball.

—Fred Barnes, for the Editors

The Gore Tax

by Christopher Caldwell

Hotels list pornographic videos on their guests' bills as "room charges." College liquor stores itemize keg purchases as "provisions" or "supplies." And for the last year and a half, the Federal Communications Commission has levied a phone tax and called it a "universal service charge." It comes to $12.50 per household per year, and on May 27 the FCC will vote to double it.

Influential Democrats back the charge, known more formally as the e-rate, which was introduced in 1997 under the tenure of FCC chairman (and ur-Gore crony) Reed Hundt. It's not only consistent with a century-long pattern of uncontroversial phone levies, Democrats argue—it's a way to wire schools and libraries to the Internet that was explicitly approved by Congress under Section 254 of the 1996 Telecommunications Act. Republicans counter that it's taxation without representation and that it's unnecessary: 70 percent of schools were already wired before the subsidy started. But what clearly bugs them most is that the "Schools and Libraries" Internet program is a centerpiece of Al Gore's 2000 presidential campaign. Gore's influence at the FCC is ongoing, and current FCC chairman William Kennard has made three recent campaign-style appearances with the vice president: one on the e-rate, one (in Los Angeles) on children's television, and one (in New York) on minority advertising. That deep degree of Gore involvement has left Republicans desperate to turn voters against the "Gore tax."

In the wake of school shootings for which the public has given the Internet a share of the blame, the vice president shows signs of nervousness.

Both sides have a point. In the name of "universal service," implicit subsidies have been built into the phone system ever since it became a national one. Urban customers pay above-market rates to subsidize more expensive rural hookups; businesses subsidize residences; and long-distance traffic subsidizes local calls. In negotiations over the 1996 act, a group of rural senators, led by Democrat Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia and Republican Olympia Snowe of Maine, joined to protect this setup. Under the language of the bill, schools and libraries—along with rural hospitals and other needy institutions—can be subsidized for phone hookups.

That is where the controversy began. Republicans point out that the legislative language—even in its most forgiving reading—applies only to wiring, which accounts for just 4 percent of the subsidies the FCC doles out, with the rest going to high-tech hardware. (There have even been cases of schools trying to defraud the FCC by using the subsidies for various office equipment.) That led to a further complaint: cronyism. Opponents of the tax note that its biggest beneficiaries are not schools but the high-tech companies that install Internet equipment: Cisco, which controls a huge share of the "router" market, Lucent, Nortel, Compaq, 3Com. Oddly enough, Cisco and 3Com—whose lobbying operations are devoted largely to campaigning against Internet regulation—are using the FCC's regulating authority to reap windfalls in hardware sales.

The FCC has sought to disguise the tax by pressuring the companies it regulates to describe it as a "charge." At the same time it has tried to keep big business happy by pairing fee hikes with fee cuts. With the subsidy for schools and libraries set for a billion-dollar rise—from $1.25 to $2.25 billion a year—the commission has announced a $1.1 billion cut in long-distance carriers' "access charges," which are a vestige of the Ma Bell-era long-distance surcharges used to keep local calls cheap.

The benefits and burdens are not borne equally. Big carriers like AT&T and MCI can get the access charge back; smaller ones, including all cell-phone companies and all pager companies, don't pay the access charge in the first place, so they have to eat the "Gore tax." That's why GTE sued over the charge in the 5th Circuit, on the grounds the FCC had gone beyond statutory authority. Oral arguments were heard last December and the decision is pending.

Other legal developments could doom the universal service charge. A D.C. circuit court decision

last August—*Thomas* v. *Network Solutions*—creates the basis for an unlawful-tax claim on the FCC levy. *Thomas* involved a National Science Foundation policy of charging fees for Internet domain names, with the revenues to be used for education. The court ruled that, since payers and beneficiaries were not the same people, the NSF's fee was a de facto tax. Another promising legal avenue is "non-delegation" doctrine, under which the D.C. circuit overturned certain Environmental Protection Agency ozone and smog guidelines in May. The court's reasoning—that the EPA was working on such a vague mandate that it was effectively making law as it went along—could apply to the FCC's universal service charge.

It's certain that many in Congress look at the FCC's program as a usurpation. Virginia representative Thomas Bliley's Commerce committee has been hostile to the e-rate. Even the committee's ranking minority member John Dingell of Michigan—not generally known as an enemy of regulation—has called publicly for Kennard's resignation. The commissioners will appear before the Senate on May 26 to answer what senators promise will be some "tough questions." But that's just *pro forma*. For now, little will be done about the e-rate, unless a court decision overturns it. For Congress to reopen the 1996 Telecommunications Act is politically unthinkable right now.

The five-person FCC, which meets the day after the Senate hearings, is split between three Clintonite Democrats (including Kennard) and one conservative Republican (economist Harold Furchtgott-Roth), with Colin Powell's son Michael providing a liberal-Republican middle-ground vote. Powell typically votes with the Democrats, while issuing qualifying statements of "concern" that echo Furchtgott-Roth's. So it is a virtual certainty that the e-rate program will get hiked all the way up to its $2.25-billion FCC-mandated ceiling.

One way that Republicans could make headway against the e-rate would be to question Al Gore's project of wiring schools to the Internet in the first place. In the wake of school shootings for which the public has given the Internet a share of the blame, the vice president shows signs of nervousness. In early May, he tried to claim credit for an industry initiative to create "firewalls" to protect children from inappropriate Internet material. Arizona senator John McCain, meanwhile, urges legislation that would make schools install software to block pornography and violence before they can become eligible for Internet-installation subsidies. But even in the wake of Littleton, Gore has declined to back it. He doesn't have to. Vulnerable though he may be on the Internet-in-schools issue, Republicans feel themselves to be even more vulnerable. According to a senior congressional staffer who handles a lot of telecom issues, "The whole [Republican] conference is—almost to a person—petrified of letting anyone paint them as 'anti-education.'"

So, barring a dramatic national change of heart, Gore has guaranteed himself a win on a key issue. In so doing, he's shown he can take a page from the master's playbook. In 1996, President Clinton ran for reelection as both the author of welfare reform—and the only man who could keep it from being enforced. Next year Al Gore will run for president as both the man who brought the Internet into every classroom—and the only man who can protect teenagers from the snuff graphics and smut that are increasingly the Internet's raison d'être.

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TIPPER CAN DO AND AL GORE TOO

by Matthew Rees

LAST NOVEMBER, after Hurricane Mitch devastated Nicaragua and Honduras, President Clinton dispatched a delegation led by Tipper Gore to assess the damage. "The scale of the disaster is beyond anything we have ever witnessed," she would write in a "Report to the President" that's featured on the White House Web site with photos from the trip. Part of Mrs. Gore's report described her work at a school in Honduras submerged in mud. "Our delegation pitched in to help, spending the day shoveling mud and caring for young children." And later that evening, wrote Gore, "we slept in tents outside a shelter" and talked with "a blind man who had to find his way out of danger by touching the wet and slippery walls."

Tipper's relief work garnered lots of coverage, including interviews with CNN and the *Today* show. But one reporter on the scene, Phil Davison of the London *Independent*, had a different take on Tipper's

activities. He described how everything she did was stage managed for the press, quoting her aide Nathan Naylor telling television reporters how to get the best picture during the clean-up: "She's gonna be shovellin' mud. Then she'll wipe the sweat from her brow, like this. Make sure you get that shot, all right?" When Gore arrived at the designated spot, Davison observed, "I counted eight shovelfuls and, sure enough, up came the glove to flick away the sweat."

The episode nicely captures the two Tipper Gores. Her public profile is that of the anti-Hillary, an ebullient mother of four who's said the "the most wonderful part of the vice presidency" is having Navy stewards who cook for the family. By contrast, the private Tipper is an astute, image-conscious political operative who engineered the recent hiring of Tony Coelho to manage her husband's presidential campaign and who's used her position to press for expanded health-insurance coverage for mental disorders. She says she doesn't want to use her access to become a policy activist—"I've never done it that way," she told the Associated Press in March—but on her Web site she calls herself "something of a crusader at heart." Her husband isn't complaining. He told *Newsweek* recently that she's his "closest adviser," adding, "I'm a better person when I'm with her."

Michael Ramirez

Tipper Gore

Tipper will be highly influential in Al's bid for the White House. And should he succeed, her model will be less Hillary than Nancy Reagan, who quietly held enormous sway in her husband's presidency.

What does this mean in policy terms? Tipper is a conventional liberal, neither to the left nor the right of her husband. But given her position as "the most visible advocate for mental health care services nationwide," as the Gore 2000 Web site puts it, he'll be hard pressed to ignore her views on that subject.

A staple of any story about Tipper is her parents' divorce when she was 4, caused in part by her mother's bouts of depression. This has led to her long-standing interest in mental health—she holds bachelor's and master's degrees in psychology—and after the 1992 election she assumed two titles: second lady and mental health adviser to the president.

As Hillary Clinton, Ira Magaziner, and others crafted the administration's health-care proposal back in 1993, Tipper had one goal in mind: guaranteed treatment for anyone with a mental disorder that posed "a serious risk for functional impairment in family, work, school or community activities." But this elastic notion was too much even for Hillary, who according to the *New York Times* expressed reservations about its "political and financial feasibility." The provision was dropped from the administration's final plan.

Tipper didn't give up. In July 1994, as ClintonCare was dying a bipartisan death in Congress, she applauded a White House directive calling on the federal government to stop asking questions about employees' mental-health history before giving them security clearances. "There's no reason why seeing a psychiatrist makes anyone more of a security threat than seeing an oncologist for colon cancer," she said. In the spring of 1996, she worked closely with Senators Pete Domenici, a Republican, and Paul Wellstone, a Democrat, to win passage of a bill requiring health insurers to provide the same coverage for mental as for physical illnesses. The three are now working to expand the reach of this parity requirement.

Tipper's crusade bears the hallmark of do-good liberalism: It strives toward an admirable goal—helping people get treatment for mental disorders—while giving little heed to costs. An analysis of her mental-health parity proposal, performed by the Congressional Budget Office, predicted the measure would raise the cost of health-insurance premiums 4

percent a year and boost the number of uninsured by 400,000.

The impact could be even more dramatic if her work with Domenici and Wellstone succeeds. That's because mental disorders are notoriously difficult to cure—and even to define. The American Psychiatric Association's manual of mental disorders lists, for example, "Oppositional Defiant Disorder," which it describes as "a recurrent pattern of negativistic, defiant, disobedient and hostile behavior toward authority figures that persists for at least six months." Another illness is called "Malingering," with symptoms like "avoiding military duty, avoiding work, obtaining financial compensation, evading criminal prosecution, or obtaining drugs." A White House conference on mental health, scheduled for June 7, will give Tipper an opportunity to explain what "mental-health parity" means.

Tipper's persistence on mental-health issues contrasts with her retreat from an earlier high-profile crusade. In 1985 she grabbed headlines when she and other Washington women formed the Parents Music Resource Center, to lobby for warning labels on records with explicit lyrics. Soon the Senate Commerce Committee, where Al Gore sat as a junior member, held a hearing that attracted hordes of media. Tipper was attacked at the hearing by musicians ranging from Frank Zappa to John Denver and emerged as a nationally recognized critic of the entertainment industry. She went on to write *Raising PG Kids in an X-Rated Society*, published early in 1987.

Asked by Cokie Roberts about her earlier challenge to the entertainment industry, Tipper begged off with the excuse that "it's a complex issue."

But in October that year, when Al was in the throes of a presidential campaign and desperately in need of money, he and Tipper met with top executives from the entertainment industry—a popular fund-raising source for Democrats—and retracted their earlier statements. An article in *Daily Variety*, based on a secret audio tape of the meeting, quoted Tipper calling the 1985 Senate hearing "a mistake" that "sent the wrong message. . . . If I could rewrite the script I certainly would."

Thus ended Tipper's lobbying to clean up rock music, movies, and video games. Since her husband became vice president, she's barely uttered a peep about the entertainment industry, which gives millions to the Democratic party, and she's disassociated herself from the PMRC. In keeping with her metamorphosis into a cultural liberal, she cavorted at a California fund-raiser last month with former members of the Grateful Dead, a band that celebrates practices she once preached against.

The Littleton, Colorado, shootings, however, gave Tipper an opportunity to speak out against violence. She appeared on *Meet the Press, This Week*, and *Larry King Live*, and penned articles for *Time* and *USA Today*. She also squeezed in a couple of speeches—in Iowa and New Hampshire.

But in her appearances she didn't exactly sound like Bill Bennett. Asked by ABC's Cokie Roberts about her earlier challenge to the entertainment industry, Tipper offered only the mildest criticism and begged off with the excuse that "it's a complex issue."

Of all the media exposure she's enjoyed, the most significant was an interview with *USA Today*, published on May 7, in which she revealed she'd taken medication for "situational depression" after her son was seriously injured in a car accident in 1989. The interview, splashed across the front page and accompanied by a color photo, was picked up across the country. Tipper's office vehemently denied politics factored into the admission; she said in the interview she came forward because she's "comfortable now." But after Al's past exploitation of personal tragedies, the public wasn't entirely convinced: 40 percent of those asked in a *Newsweek* poll said educational concerns dictated the disclosure; 36 percent said politics.

Given Tipper's increasingly partisan profile—she thundered against the Republicans at the California Democratic convention in March—the public's readiness to question her motives is perhaps inevitable. But one of Tipper's greatest political assets is her appeal to the apolitical suburban soccer moms whom she tries, with some success, to resemble. As her image changes, her popularity may wane, which wouldn't help her husband's hopes for becoming president.

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The Education Vice President

by Chester E. Finn Jr.

Al Gore is no fool. He knows that education is on voters' minds and has been a political winner for Bill Clinton. He knows he has no track record as an education reformer. So on May 16, he seized an opportunity—a college commencement address in a tiny Iowa town—to stake out a forceful position on this contentious issue.

His timing was shrewd. No other candidate save former education secretary Lamar Alexander has had much to say on the topic. This placed Gore out front. Then within days, the administration unveiled its massive, draconian scheme to overhaul the federal role in K-12 education, which both boosted interest in the issue and—remarkably—made the veep look like a "good cop" by comparison.

No, Gore's seven points don't add up to a coherent plan. They're more like fine-sounding themes or goals and some nebulous proposals. They rely on a systematic blurring of the line between what a President Gore could have the federal government do and what he could only harangue states and communities to do for themselves.

That distinction makes education a tricky national issue for Republicans. They cannot elide it as easily as Gore. Their affection for the 10th Amendment and local control of schools leaves GOP office-seekers perplexed about how to tackle a nationwide concern without expanding Washington's role. This is a special problem in the primaries, where much of the Republican "base" thinks Uncle Sam should have *nothing* to do with the schools—a fatal stance in the general election. Gore, though, has the good fortune to be a Democrat, and thus joins a long list of politicians who deftly erase the boundary between "national" and "federal." This intellectual dishonesty leads to policy promiscuity, but it also yields seductive speeches and happy audiences.

I wish I had a dollar for every focus group Gore's seven themes were tried out on before he shared them with the Graceland College class of '99. They touch all the bases: better and more professional teachers, universal access to *both* preschool and college, character and values, discipline and safety, computers, school accountability, smaller classes, parent involvement, "turning around" failing schools, and on and on.

It was a good speech, for Gore, and got lots of attention. Had he been running for prime minister of Britain or any other country with a unitary school system and parliamentary government, it might even have been termed an honest speech. Listeners would have understood that he was setting forth the policies of the government he hoped to lead and that, if he

were elected, the education system would change in the stated ways.

In the American context, however, it was basically dishonest, because it was not moored in the reality of what a U.S. president can do. To put any of these proposals into operation from Washington would require congressional assent and budget authority—and a vast expansion of Uncle Sam's involvement in the country's schools.

That prospect seems not to trouble the vice president. He called for widening the Family and Medical Leave Act to make employers excuse parents for all conferences with teachers. He contemplates new tax-exempt savings accounts "for job training, education, and lifelong learning." He wants Washington to give a $10,000 scholarship to anyone who agrees "to spend four years teaching in a school that needs your help" provided they also "pass a rigorous exam."

Very shrewd. Gore responds to widespread anxiety about teachers' competence—and the popularity of making them demonstrate their knowledge—while offering more money to teachers, yet limits both test and reward to those who serve in needy, tough, urban schools. Along the way, he would have the federal government intrude as never before into decisions about what teachers should know and which schools need which teachers. But never mind.

Other vice presidential proposals are vaguer. It's impossible to determine whom he expects to do what to bring them about. Thus: "We should provide bonuses to all teachers in schools where students have made significant gains. . . . We need a renewed focus on discipline, character, the right values, and safety. . . . We should increase our commitment to after-school care. . . . We should provide incentives to create smaller high schools. . . . We need to make summer school much more widely available." And on and on.

Those vague promises, however, are the good cop speaking. A few days later, education secretary Richard Riley unveiled the Clinton administration's plan to overhaul the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Goals 2000 program. Congress last reworked these huge statutes just before the Republican victory of 1994, and at the time critics termed them a worrisome expansion of federal control over the nation's schools.

Well, hold onto your hat and lock your children up some place safe. The era of big government is back with a vengeance. So far as one can tell from Riley's remarks and Education Department press releases—the hundreds of pages of fine print are not yet public—we are looking at an epochal enlargement of federal control of U.S. schools. Not since the heyday of the federal courts' incursions into school management in the name of desegregation have we seen anything like this Potomac power grab.

Gore would have the federal government intrude as never before into decisions about what teachers should know and which schools need which teachers.

But the lever this time is not enforcement of constitutional rights. It's the lure of federal dollars. The administration is saying that states and communities that want to keep getting their share of the $12 billion or so in school aid that flows each year from Washington must henceforth obey many more rules that flow from Washington. The operative phrases in the Department's 17-page handout are "require states" and "states must."

The new requirements are breathtaking in their audacity. In the name of "fairness," for example, Riley would require all the schools in a district to have "equivalent pupil-teacher ratios, their teachers [to] have equal qualifications, and the curriculum, instructional materials, range of courses and the condition of safety of school facilities all must be comparable." He doesn't mean "comparable" as in "able to be compared." He means identical, uniform, equal, unvarying.

In the name of "qualified" teachers, the administration would require every state to ensure that 95 percent of its instructors are "fully certified"—that is, products of the teacher-education cartel—leaving districts and charter schools even less leeway to hire other people who might do a better job.

In the name of a "stimulating, career-long learning environment for teachers," the administration would require every district to set aside 10 percent of its Title I funding for "professional development." In other words, take $800 million a year out of direct services to low income children and spend it instead on the motley array of prosperous hucksters, itinerant experts, and mediocre ed schools that dispense "in-service education."

In the name of orderly schools, the administration

would "require states to hold school districts and schools accountable for having discipline policies that focus on prevention, are consistent and fair." Imagine the regulatory apparatus that will be needed to see whether 50 states have done this satisfactorily in 16,000 local districts and 85,000 public schools. But it's even more complicated, for the White House is sensitive to concerns that tough discipline will actually lead to troublesome kids' being kicked out of school. So yet another provision would require states "to ensure that schools have a plan to help students who are expelled or suspended continue to meet the challenging state standards." Think of it as the Bureau of High Standards for Bad Kids.

Were all this and more to happen, the U.S. secretary of education would become the national superintendent of schools. Reform-minded governors and mayors might as well fold their education tents. Advocates of education improvement via school diversity and competition would face a historic setback. Parents—while they may find themselves required to become more "involved" with their children's schools—will have ever less say in their kids' education. And Al Gore will be made a more honest man, for the country whose presidency he seeks will have an education system far more like the unitary, nationalized, government-run versions of other lands.

One would like to say that the education battle lines are being drawn in Washington, but it's doubtful the GOP will mount a coherent counterattack. Congressional leaders' initial response to the Clinton plan has been, "Yes, but." There is no sign of effective leadership on this issue on the Republican side of the aisle. After an initial flurry of attention, the country's energetic "education governors" seem to have surrendered the field. Although the "Super Ed-Flex" idea—giving a handful of states greater freedom with their federal dollars in return for evidence of improved pupil achievement—is attracting some interest on Capitol Hill, it is already being compromised with conditions, set-asides, and hold-harmless provisions that will render it practically meaningless.

Just as Gore is gambling that, when it comes to education, voters prefer action to inaction and concrete programs to quibbles about federalism, so are Clinton and Riley assuming that the country is ready for an activist government to take charge of the schools. Sixteen years after being declared a "nation at risk," the United States still provides a K-12 education that is perilously weak. The Democrats have decided that the public is weary of false starts and excuses and is prepared to let Washington run things, maybe even to reward politicians who promise vigor. For their part—to their great shame and likely political cost—the Republicans still cannot explain what a better approach would be.

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Commander Interruptus

by Cheryl Benard

WHY ARE WE PROCEEDING with an air campaign that made no dent in ethnic cleansing? Why were ground troops ruled out as an option from the start, against the advice of military and strategic experts? I can't speak to the military issues, but I suggest that the real explanation may lie elsewhere, namely in the inner workings of our commander-in-chief. What we know of his personal behavior—and after this last year, most of us know more than we care to—indicates that some distinctive patterns shape his behavior. They are now also reflected in his conduct of the Balkan war.

The first striking eccentricity in Clinton's makeup is his inclination to engage in bold, risk-taking behavior but to stop just short of the customary conclusions of his acts. To wit: This is a man who will smoke marijuana, but not inhale. He will have an affair, but scrupulously insist to his partner from the start that intercourse is not an option, and require much coaxing to accept other culminations. I suggest that in our commander-in-chief's categorical exclusion of ground troops—the deployment of which is the logical and customary consummation of any war previously known to humankind—we may see his selective abstemiousness transposed to matters martial.

Think about it. This man will possess and use an illegal substance, he will dally with an intern, he will risk discovery, disgrace and impeachment, but he will deliberately stop short of the usual gratifications. This is not the way people normally act, and on the face of it, it doesn't make sense. People smoke marijuana for the high, have sex for the, well, for the sex. Why take the risks if you're going to refuse the rewards? For Clinton, we can answer that. He believes that refrain-

Michael Ramirez

ing from the ultimate conclusion will allow him, when push comes to shove, to escape the ultimate sanction. To many people, that still doesn't make sense, but Clinton has good subjective reasons to believe it does: It has worked for him. Clinton appears to have concluded that safety lies in remaining one step back from whatever dangerous act he is engaging in, because you can then wiggle out on a technicality. And get elected. And remain in office.

Now let's look at Kosovo, by any measure a very strange war. Civilians are getting killed, Serb soldiers are on the rampage. Our own soldiers are there, sort of, but they are not engaging the enemy. Instead, we're staying well up in the skies, sincerely trying to distinguish friend from foe and regretfully calling it collateral damage when we err. Ethnic cleansing not only continued but was immensely accelerated during the intervention we launched to prevent it. This produced enormous numbers of refugees and untold misery. While we were bombing bridges many miles away, our Albanian charges were being slaughtered in massacres.

Many have remarked on this disconnect between what we are doing in the air and what is happening on the ground, between what we set out to do and what, it is starting to seem, we might settle for. Our elected representatives seem willing to go further, the public appears supportive, but our president is holding firm to his limited air war. My hypothesis: because that is his style whenever things are dangerous, because that gives him the ambiguity he needs for comfort.

Is it conceivable that this whole enterprise might end with some halfhearted compromise? Given the enormity of the human drama unfolding on the TV screens before us, and given our rhetoric, it doesn't seem possible for us to back down, or to settle for a dubious outcome. There's too much at stake: the lives of hundreds of thousands of Kosovar Albanians, the stability of Europe, the precedent of arbitrary, brutal expulsions of entire population groups, our national honor, the credibility of NATO.

But Clinton has a second eccentric feature: He is able to take an incredible amount of embarrassment. Not many people would have had the stamina to get through the Starr affair, the hearings, the international airing of cigar and Altoids anecdotes, and at the end of it, an impeachment. Someone else would have resigned rather than face that kind of humiliation. Clinton's ability to withstand punishment is, and I say this without malice, truly exceptional. This is an admirable trait when it comes to personal adversity but may work less well as a foreign policy stance for a superpower.

That brings us to the third worrisome feature in Clinton's behavior, his inclination to solve problems by taking refuge in ambiguity. When backed into a corner, he resorts to linguistic obfuscations. He may believe that if things go badly, we can wiggle out of our Balkans engagement with a few scrupulous redefinitions of what our goal was. I never want to hear the speech in which we learn that signing some wishy-washy deal is a fine outcome because after all, we never really went to war with that man, Milosevic. Or that it wasn't really ethnic cleansing, because the Albanians aren't an ethnic minority in the exact strict anthropological sense of the word. And besides, we never put our feet on the ground, so we weren't really there, we were just flying over. "It depends on what you mean by war": That's the speech I don't want to hear.

I hope that I am wrong, and the president is not constrained by the idiosyncrasies of his personality. People are dying, we said we'd protect them, our military is there, we said we wouldn't fail. That must not be parsed, and it deserves our best effort, not the decaffeinated, alcohol-free, sort-of-a-war-but-not-really version. Maybe not with Lewinsky, but with Milosevic, President Clinton may have to go all the way.

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Hijacking Medicare

by Robert M. Goldberg

Why are the White House and congressional Democrats afraid of reforming Medicare? Three months ago, when the co-chairmen of the National Bipartisan Commission on the Future of Medicare produced a plan for saving Medicare, the White House instructed Clinton appointees to the commission to vote against it. Their votes denied the Breaux-Thomas plan (named for senator John Breaux and congressman Bill Thomas) the supermajority of commission members required to forward the proposal to Congress for an immediate vote.

More recently, the White House has fought to keep Congress from considering Breaux-Thomas at all. At the end of March, Senate Finance chairman William Roth asked for a "sense of the Senate" vote to gauge the Senate's interest in debating the measure. The White House mobilized the entire cabinet to call every Senate Democrat and instruct them to vote "nay." Breaux and John Kerry were the only Democrats to break ranks.

The administration is afraid of Breaux-Thomas because it could neutralize the issue Al Gore and key congressional Democrats believe their party can ride to victory in the next elections: prescription-drug benefits. Breaux-Thomas is a bold plan for reforming Medicare that would give seniors a choice of health plans, including some with drug coverage. It would operate through "premium supports," a euphemism for vouchers.

Democrats have countered with at least five proposals to give seniors a drug benefit, and Clinton is expected to weigh in soon with his own scheme. Currently, House Democrats are rallying around a bill called the Prescription Drug Fairness for Seniors Act. In district after district, House Democrats have used their sponsorship of the bill to generate publicity and organize events at which seniors, bused in by labor

unions, demand action on the legislation.

Internal GOP polls show that by a 3-1 margin, voters support a hypothetical Democrat who favors a drug benefit over Republican candidates who oppose one. But Republicans could easily turn the tables—first, by showing that the Prescription Drug Fairness Act isn't what it's cracked up to be, and then by touting their own superior proposal.

Rather than protect seniors directly, by providing them health-insurance coverage for prescription drugs, the Drug Fairness legislation would operate through price controls and what amount to phantom discounts. It would force drug and biotech companies to sell at a price set by the government any product purchased by seniors. It is thus the drug companies' customers—the pharmacies, not individual consumers—that would receive the price break, which they might or might not pass along to private consumers. Experience with such arrangements is not encouraging. Similar caps on the prices of drugs sold through Medicaid were imposed in 1990, requiring pharmaceutical firms to give the government the same discounts they gave private customers. The result was that private discounts were cut to make up for revenue lost in sales to the government, and drug spending in the private sector rose. The same thing can be expected to happen under the Prescription Drug Fairness Act: The 70 percent of seniors who now supplement their Medicare coverage with private-sector drug benefits will see their costs increase.

The Prescription Drug Fairness for Seniors Act, then, does not actually provide drug coverage, even for poor seniors. The contrast with Breaux-Thomas—under which many seniors would choose health plans that include drug benefits—offers Republicans a tremendous opportunity to blunt the Democratic charge. Naturally, the Democrats are nervous. The White House wants to avoid a Finance Committee vote on the proposal at all costs because it knows the reform would pass. Then Bill Thomas, who has been building his own bipartisan majority on the Ways and Means Committee, could secure the bill's passage in the House. And if both houses passed Breaux-Thomas in some form, Clinton would be forced to veto legislation protecting the Medicare entitlement and providing a prescription-drug benefit for the first time.

So the question is, Why are Republicans doing nothing to force a vote on Breaux-Thomas? The answer—all too familiar—is that House speaker Dennis Hastert and Senate majority leader Trent Lott themselves fear a vote on Medicare reform. They know the Democrats will seize on the fact that Breaux-Thomas would gradually raise the age of eligibility for Medicare from 65 to 67 (just as present law already provides for Social Security) to mendaciously portray it as ending the Medicare entitlement. The Republicans are as frightened about being beaten up by Democrats as the Democrats are of having their favorite issue stolen.

Internal White House documents reveal how weak the Democrats' position on Medicare really is. One memo claims that because of the rising age of eligibility, millions of seniors would go without coverage. In reality, Breaux-Thomas would allow people under 67 to buy into Medicare, and other Republican proposals now before Congress would provide them a variety of health-care tax credits and deductions. What's more, Breaux-Thomas would actually reduce the amount of money most seniors spend on health insurance because it would relieve them of having to buy supplemental coverage, as many now do, for such items as prescription drugs.

THE REPUBLICANS ARE AS FRIGHTENED OF BEING BEATEN UP BY DEMOCRATS AS THE DEMOCRATS ARE OF HAVING THEIR FAVORITE ISSUE STOLEN.

True, there are other Democratic bills that would create a drug benefit for seniors. But they would authorize the government to decide what drugs seniors could receive, put price controls on new biotech products, create an open-ended entitlement funded by taxes, and impose higher out-of-pocket expenses on seniors. Another advantage of Breaux-Thomas, noted by Medicare commission member Deborah Steelman: It would provide a drug benefit without tapping the 15 percent of the Social Security surplus that the president, in his State of the Union message, said he intended to dedicate to that end.

The White House is expected to unveil its own Medicare reform plan sometime in June, and the word is it will contain drug benefits in the form of price controls. At bottom, though, neither Clinton and Gore nor congressional Democrats are interested in passing a drug benefit, much less overall Medicare reform, before the 2000 election. That is why Republicans should play offense. Pushing prescription-drug coverage as part of a sound Medicare reform would rob the Democrats of control over an issue that is crucial to their political fortunes. The sooner the GOP rallies around Breaux-Thomas, the sooner the Democratic effort to seduce seniors with phantom discounts will be defeated.

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Meg Greenfield's Legacy

by Michael Barone

Meg Greenfield, the editorial-page editor of the *Washington Post*, who died May 13, was one of the great patrons of conservative ideas over the last 25 years. Not that she was a conservative herself: Her views were still recognizably rooted in 1950s liberalism, in the ideas that were in the air around Adlai Stevenson, Hubert Humphrey, and Henry Jackson. But those views were never entirely fixed. As readers of her columns and editorials know, she was exquisitely sensitive to the weakness of the ideas of her own side as well as those of others. She had a visceral dislike of boilerplate, and the liberal ideas that seemed fresh, even daring, in the Greenwich Village of the 1950s had started to read like stale boilerplate in the Washington of the 1970s.

Kevin Chadwick

Which is when Meg Greenfield came to a position of power, as the proprietor not only of the editorial page but also of the op-ed page of the *Washington Post*. She came to Washington in 1961 to write long pieces of reporting and analysis for the *Reporter*, at a time when Washington was replacing New York as the news capital of the country. In 1968 the *Reporter* folded—its owner Max Ascoli was a strong supporter of the Vietnam war, by then a verboten position on the left—and Greenfield was hired as an editorial writer at the *Post*. In 1969 she became deputy editorial-page editor and in 1979 editor.

This was just after newspapers had started the full page of columns we have all called by the unbeautiful name of the op-ed page ever since. Before that, the *Post* ran perhaps two columns by regulars on the editorial page—Walter Lippmann, Joseph Alsop, the zesty new Evans and Novak. Now there was much more space to fill. Most of the available columnists were liberals, just as most of the nation's editorial pages were conservative. But Meg was looking for columnists who made for interesting, not obligatory, reading. And interesting ideas, she was one of the first to recognize, were increasingly to be found on the right.

Interesting, and funny. Greenfield had a finely honed and sharp sense of humor, applied with scorn at boilerplate and with glee at work she admired. After the 1972 election, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* competed for the op-ed services of William Safire, the indubitably funny Nixon speechwriter. The *Times* won. Meg went out and got George Will. She met him, he writes, in May 1972 at a conference at Kenyon College, when he was a staffer for Senator Gordon Allott. "Who is that smartaleck at the end of the table?" she asked her seatmate. Soon she had him writing columns, and in 1973 he began appearing regularly in the *Post*.

Similarly, she discovered Charles Krauthammer, trained as a psychiatrist, when he was on his way from the liberal middle (where he remains on some issues) toward the rigorous right (where he now is on most). She perceived in him, as in Will, the originality and feistiness that have enabled them to thrive over what are now long careers. Her relationships with conservatives, as with liberals, have not always been smooth.

She ruled the op-ed page with an iron hand, editing columns down, placing them on the page, deciding which ones would get "art," even when she was traveling. Sometimes she cut Robert Novak's columns, despite his complaints. She fell in and out of love with many writers, like Bob Tyrrell. But over time the liveliest reading on the op-ed page has mostly been on the right. And she invented the Saturday page filled with political cartoons, very many of them conservative—a wonderful idea in a golden age of political cartoons.

This patronage of the right came less out of a sense of obligation to present all sides—I suspect she would have rejected that phrase as boilerplate—but out of a desire to present ideas, arguments, and reporting that are interesting, original, smart. Qualities found more often, I would argue, in the conservatism of the 1980s and the liberalism of the 1950s than in the liberalism of the 1980s and the conservatism of the 1950s. But Meg Greenfield was not just responding to the signals of the intellectual marketplace, she was also transmitting them, in her writing and in the writers she put before the public. 1990s conservatives owe a lot to this 1950s liberal.

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Al Gore's Treasury Secretary

Summers time, and the living won't be easy

By Irwin M. Stelzer

Larry Summers is smart. Too smart to work as a temp. Which is what he would be if he had agreed to replace Bob Rubin as Treasury secretary for the waning months of the Clinton administration with no assurance—too strong a word in this administration; perhaps "indication" is more apt—that he will keep his job in a Gore administration. After all, as an economist with a brilliant academic career on hold, Summers knows that what he would call the "opportunity cost" of taking on the top Treasury job is very high indeed: It might well include giving up the Nobel Prize that would be in his grasp were he to return to Harvard, where at the age of 28 he became the university's youngest-ever tenured professor.

But there are other reasons for believing that Summers, who came to some political prominence as a top adviser to Michael Dukakis's 1988 presidential campaign, will keep the job should Tipper get an opportunity to redecorate the White House in 2001. For one thing, the administration is eager to keep the good times rolling. As the *Financial Times* put it, "If Mr. Gore is elected, Mr. Summers offers a prospect of further continuity on the economic front." If Bill Clinton is steadfast in anything, it is in his belief that a Gore victory would be a vindication before history of Clinton's policies and, perhaps, even of his behavior, since the vice president has loyally defended both. So the president is not likely to harm the Gore campaign by imposing on it an economic spokesman that it does not find congenial, especially one likely to appear on the talk shows to analyze the state of the economy during the months leading up to the elections.

Summers knows that he can't count on Rubinesque charm to bail him out, should the domestic economy turn sour or the world economy plunge into crisis.

Then there is the state of the economy, so robust as to pose a real danger to Summers's reputation. It is difficult to succeed by succeeding a success. Bob Rubin knew when to go home. The stock market is booming, everyone who wants a job has one, inflation is more or less tame, the federal budget is in surplus as such things are (mis)measured here in Washington, and the so-called world financial crisis is easing. Exit Rubin, smiling (too cool a customer to gloat).

Never mind that he had little to do with these successes, which belong to Ronald Reagan's tax reforms and his willingness to take a recession in order to sweat inflation out of the economy; to Alan Greenspan, whose fine "feel" for trends in the economy has kept it moving smartly along; and to a newly vibrant private sector, restructured by a combination of Mike Milken's junk bond revolution and increased global competition. Or that Rubin was not the unalloyed success that the media would have us believe. There were, after all, some spectacular failures on his watch. It was Rubin who defied Congress and, with Summers as his point man before hostile congressional committees, used Treasury funds to bail out imprudent private investors in Mexico, sending a signal that the government would protect the reckless (creating what Summers would call "moral hazard," were he still at Harvard). It was Rubin who misdiag-

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nosed the crisis in Asia and sent Summers country-hopping to prescribe a lethal medicine of tight monetary and fiscal policies, thereby deepening recessions and causing massive social upheavals. And it was Rubin, relying on Summers's economic analysis, according to the press, who decided to pour $4 billion down the Russian rathole before realizing that the funds merely passed through Moscow en route to private bank accounts in Switzerland.

But Rubin leaves, reputation intact—indeed, enhanced. Any chickens that come home to roost will find their homes in Larry Summers's Treasury office. All of which Summers knows. He knows the economy is so good that it can't get better, and might well get worse. He knows that the recovery in Asia is fragile, and might well prove a mere blip in a continued fall. He knows that he can't count on Rubinesque charm to bail him out, should the domestic economy turn sour or the world economy plunge into crisis. Quite the contrary: His acerbic tongue and impatience with those dimmer than he—which includes just about everyone—have earned him enemies on the Hill and in the media, enemies that are waiting for this academic protégé to slip up.

Kevin Chadwick

Lawrence Summers

Even pro-Clinton newspapers are preparing to sink Summers at the first sign of trouble. The *New York Times*, after attributing to Rubin such massive credibility that "the power of his presence" helped to halt the October 1997 stock market slide, notes that Summers and Rubin "could not be more different." Summers has "an inclination to be more interventionist. . . . Whether he can speak the language of the markets—whether he can walk down the Treasury's steps and convey a sense of calm—is a test yet to come." The *Washington Post* is also avoiding the praise it usually heaps on Clinton nominees. "Summers suffers in some important respects by comparison with Rubin, whose self-control and ease with himself are as evident as his deputy's insecurities," writes Paul Blustein, who then reports a poll of "elite global investors" showing that 37 percent believe financial upheaval would be at least "somewhat more likely" if Summers moves into Rubin's office.

Only the promise of a long-term job could prompt this economist—who knows how to balance short-term risk against long-term gain—to sign on with Clinton-Gore. Which makes him the first important appointment of a Gore administration. Which is worrisome.

If nothing else, Rubin's success as a trader at Goldman Sachs, and his deliberative demeanor, enabled him to act as a shield between Clinton and the woolier ideas emerging from the pizza-eating talkfests that were such a prominent feature of the White House in the early days of the Clinton administration. Rubin was able to shoot down then-Labor Secretary Robert Reich's plans to redistribute income in good Old Democrat fashion. He was able to trump James Carville's populist pandering by reminding Clinton that the bond market punishes profligate politicians by raising interest rates to slow down the economy and increase unemployment. That's what prompted the Ragin' Cajun to voice his famous wish to be reincarnated as the bond market, rather than as president, pope, or .400 hitter.

Gore will have Summers, not Rubin, at his elbow. A bad combination. For both are more inclined to intervene in the economy than are their predecessors. Both are beholden to the trade unions, although for different reasons. Gore quite simply wants their troops in the field during the primaries and the general election, and the money they extract from their members. Summers's attachment to unions is more abstract. In a paper written with Jonathan Gruber and Rodrigo Vergara for the National Bureau of Economic Research, Summers flirts with the notion that "union bosses in corporatist nations" can more intelligently perceive the relationship between the taxes paid by workers and the benefits they receive, than can individual workers. Therefore, the widespread presence of trade unions makes the tax system more efficient, and higher taxes more palatable. Summers cites Sweden as an example of a country in which "the evolution of centralized bargaining" may have made possible higher taxes on labor, not a bad thing in Summers's book, one suspects.

Gore and Summers are also as one in their disgust with entrepreneurs who seek short-term profits. Never

mind that such profit-seeking is good for the economy. If you have any doubt that the invisible hand of the private sector trumps the heavy hand of government, just compare the productivity gains and increase in living standards resulting from the capital investments of greedy American profit-seekers, with the waste and poverty resulting from investments chosen in the national interest by Japanese and Indonesian finance ministers and politicians.

But neither experience nor theory can stay Gore and Summers from their interventionist rounds. Gore, in his astonishing environmentalist screed, *Earth in the Balance*, rails against the way markets distribute incomes and goods among the nations of the world; objects to "our transitory methods of calculating value," preferring instead some system that would attach us more closely to nature; says that people who lease land "for short-term profits often don't consider the future" (forgetting that the owner must do just that in setting the terms of the lease); and proposes "government purchasing programs" to stimulate technologies he favors but that private investors deem too costly and risky to finance—a bureaucratic picking of winners that brought the British economy to ruin in the pre-Thatcher years.

Summers is unlikely to play Bob Rubin to Al Gore's Bill Clinton and to argue in the inner circles of a Gore administration that markets might, just might, direct capital more efficiently than the man he hopes will be his boss, come 2001. Again, let's look at his writings. Economists generally agree that arbitrageurs and speculators perform a valuable function. Arbitrageurs pursue profits by buying a good in markets where it is cheap, and selling it in markets where it is dear, thereby moving resources to where they are most needed and bringing prices in all markets into line with one another. Speculators, writes Paul Samuelson, Summers's Nobel laureate uncle and author of the world's most famous economics textbook, "'move' goods from periods of abundance to periods of scarcity . . . , help[ing to] even out . . . price differences . . . among regions or over time."

But Summers has no use for the arbitrageurs who make markets more efficient. To him, they are "economic parasites." Indeed, the entire stock market consists of a game that "redistributes wealth between winners and losers, but . . . does not create wealth." Really? Most economists believe that efficient stock markets reflect the latest information in the price of shares. That in turn permits firms with the best prospects to attract more capital cheaply. Recently, we have seen investors flee oil stocks and bid up the price of shares in high-tech companies. This diverts capital from an industry that is in decline and directs it to industries in which more capital is needed to develop new, productivity-enhancing products.

Summers has no use for the arbitrageurs who make markets more efficient. To him, they are "economic parasites," and the stock market "doesn't create wealth."

Which is one reason why, as Samuelson and co-author William Nordhaus explain in the latest edition of *Economics*, "When the countries of Eastern Europe decided to scrap their centrally planned systems and become market economies, one of their first acts was to introduce a stock market to buy and sell ownership rights in companies." Unlike Summers, those who suffered for years without an efficient mechanism for allocating capital know a good thing when they see it. It will certainly come as news to those countries that envy the depth and efficiency of America's capital markets to learn that the incoming secretary of the Treasury believes arbitrage and trading in shares are bad things. And that he favors a tax "on the purchase or sale of financial instruments" to discourage speculators and other "economic parasites" (presumably including Rubin, if he regresses to his old Goldman Sachs ways) from plying their trade, as Summers proposed in an unrepudiated article in the *Boston Globe* some years ago.

Nor is Summers likely to be curbed by dissenting colleagues. There won't be any. Consider Gene Sperling, director of the National Economic Council, responsible for coordinating the administration's economic policies. No one doubts that Sperling can have a job with the Gore administration if he wants one. Summers met Sperling when both worked on the Dukakis campaign, after Sperling had graduated from Yale Law School and dropped out of the Wharton School. Sperling went on to work for New York governor Mario Cuomo before joining the Clinton campaigns. George Stephanopoulos reminds us that both

he and Sperling regard Mario Cuomo as their "hero." Cuomo, recall, is the man who almost bankrupted New York state with tax-and-spend policies that drove businesses and taxpayers out and brought welfare claimants in.

No matter. After failing to persuade Cuomo to give up Albany for a seat on the Supreme Court, Sperling and Stephanopoulos led the charge to have Cuomo's policies adopted on a national scale by Clinton. When the Clinton team broke into warring camps, with the deficit-reducers on one side and the "Putting People First" liberals on the other, it was Stephanopoulos and Sperling who held out for more spending, the deficit be damned. As one spending program after another gave way to the need to project fiscal prudence to voters who were nervous that, if elected, Clinton and the Democrats would spend and tax, Sperling and his partner-in-spending, as Stephanopoulos tells it, became more and more "dejected as we watched promise after promise disappear under the budget director's blue pencil."

The Summers appointment tells us a lot about Gore. Summers is more liberal and more interventionist than Rubin, which suits Gore just fine.

Gore, who has a list of spending projects longer even than Clinton's, quite naturally finds Sperling's views congenial. Gore is, after all, more beholden to the trade unions and to other constituencies that will encourage him to loosen the purse strings. Public transportation, a higher minimum wage, spending on inner cities, research for exotic technologies to replace fossil fuels, sidewalks for the suburbs, higher pay for teachers, and more school buildings in which not to educate still another generation of children—these are only a few of the items on the Gore agenda.

Now picture the meeting in which Gore explores the budgetary implications of this wish list. No Rubin to suggest that Wall Street might react negatively. Only Summers, who has no use for the Wall Street "parasites," and Sperling, who learned how to tax and spend at the feet of the master of those arts, Mario Cuomo. Both know that Gore's deepest wish is to impose an energy tax, for which he argued strongly during the Clinton years, and which a Democratic House—a distinct possibility—might grant him in return for approval of some of the spending programs that they have deferred in the dry years since Newt Gingrich led the Republicans to victory in 1994.

If there are any doubts that such a tax would be a good thing, they will not be heard from Carol Browner, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency and virtually certain to have a cabinet-level appointment in a Gore administration. Browner's efforts to push environmental restrictions to the point where the costs clearly exceed the benefits, have been documented both in this magazine ("Gore's Green Guys," March 31, 1997) and by Resources for the Future, the respected and nonpartisan think tank. And her efforts to pile on still more regulations without congressional approval have recently come a cropper in the federal courts, which ruled that her proposed new clean air standards are based on shoddy science and anyhow represent a usurpation of Congress's law-making authority.

Browner agrees with Gore that ours is a "dysfunctional civilization" and plans to help him put it right. Lest you think that this means only regulations affecting big business, consider that Gore's acolytes at the Department of Energy are now considering a rule requiring all washing machines to be front-loading rather than top-loading because front-loaders use less hot water. Bad back doesn't let you bend to empty a front-loader? Tell it to Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson, high on the list of possible Gore running mates.

So the Summers appointment tells us as much about Gore as it does about Clinton. Even those eager to push the appointment quietly through the Republican Senate concede that Summers is more liberal and more interventionist than Rubin, which suits Gore just fine. For the vice president has very strong views on just how each of us should be permitted by the government to live, and what portion of our incomes should go to pay to bring his vision of a better world into being, a world in which we all have "a kind of inner ecology that relies on the same principles of balance and holism that characterize a healthy environment." Add to Summers and Sperling the team that Gore has in waiting at Energy, the EPA, and other agencies, and before we are very far into the next century, we might wish for the return of Bill Clinton, interns and all. ♦

The Israeli Earthquake

What Bibi did, what Barak will do

By Charles Krauthammer

Ehud Barak did not win last week's Israeli election so much as Benjamin (Bibi) Netanyahu lost it. He lost it badly, 56 percent to 44 percent. In Israeli terms, that is a landslide.

Why did the election come out the way it did? First, the timing. Bibi did not want this election. His plan was to wait until next year. Not just because his mandate ran till then, but because Israel has been in a mild recession, somewhat comparable to the recession that President Bush suffered under in the '91-'92 campaign. Netanyahu cut the deficit in half, broke inflation, and launched the deregulation of one of the last socialist economies, but the immediate result was a rise in unemployment and slowing of growth.

In a parliamentary system, where the prime minister has the prerogative of calling an election, recession is an odd time to call one. But Netanyahu did not have the prerogative. Why? Because the zealots in his own coalition brought his government down.

Which brings us to a second, larger reason for his defeat: the fracturing of the political right.

The basic problem for Netanyahu throughout his three years was that the Oslo peace agreements created a crisis of ideology for the Israeli right. Before Oslo, the right could simply unite under the banner of Greater Israel. Concede no territory. Instead, offer the Palestinians autonomy, as defined by Menachem Begin in the Camp David accords: The Palestinians run their lives but do not control the soil on which they live.

After Oslo, that kind of autonomy, always a Likud wish, became demonstrably a pipe dream. Once Arafat already had Gaza and Jericho and Nablus and Jenin and the soil under them, the Begin idea of autonomy became entirely obsolete.

When Yitzhak Rabin sprang Oslo on Israel in 1993, the right opposed it. But by presenting a *fait accompli*, Rabin ideologically undermined Likud forever. When elected in 1996, Netanyahu knew he couldn't tear up what Israel as a country had signed on to. He had to keep Oslo, yet minimize its damage.

Navigating a nationalist coalition (historically opposed to any territorial compromise) through Oslo was a harrowing task. Yet Netanyahu succeeded to a remarkable extent. He got Likud to give up Hebron, which marked the first time in Israeli history that the right gave up West Bank territory. Over the next three years, Netanyahu forged a broad national consensus, again for the first time in Israeli history, for territorial compromise. His last such compromise was the Wye River Memorandum, a relatively small concession of territory in return for relatively serious concessions on security by the Palestinians.

Unfortunately, this was not good enough for the people in his own coalition. The more traditional and conservative elements accused Bibi of capitulation and weakness. The National Religious party, tribune of the West Bank settlers, withdrew its support on the grounds that Wye gave away too much. The government collapsed. Elections were called.

It was the kind of political stupidity conservatives are famous for. The very parties that brought Netanyahu down then immediately turned around and spent the last six months frantically trying to reelect him, because the alternative—the Labour party—would give away far more. Alas, too late. Not only did Labour win, but the NRP saw its vote (and parliamentary strength) cut in half. And Benny Begin, son of Menachem Begin, who had quit the government even earlier and taken the more extreme Likud elements out of the party to form his own, did so badly in the election that the next day he not only resigned as head of his splinter party, he quit politics altogether, admitting that he had lost the argument. And indeed he had. In a Knesset of 120 members, there are now exactly 4 who oppose all the agreements signed with the Palestinians. Condign punishment for zealotry.

But there was another fault line that fractured the right. The Netanyahu political coalition fell apart not just over territory. It fell apart over the dominant domestic issue of the day: religion.

There is no group on the Israeli political spectrum more religious than the Shas party (representing traditional Israelis of Sephardic, i.e., mostly North

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African, origin). And there is no political group in Israel more secular than the recent immigrants from the Soviet empire, collectively known as the Russians.

They are both huge constituencies. The Russians constitute one of the largest immigrations not just in Israeli history but in world history: a million, in a population of 6 million. And Shas last week won almost one sixth of the seats in parliament. In 1993, the Russians and Shas were part of the outsider coalition constructed by Netanyahu against Labour's secular, Ashkenazi (i.e., of European origin) landed establishment.

But the tensions between secular and religious Jews in Israel found their most acute expression in the tension that developed between Shas and the Russians. Shas controlled the Interior Ministry, which controls the privileges of citizenship: residency papers, marriage licenses, burial rights. Shas used its power to question the Jewishness of many of the Russian immigrants, some of whom, after 70 years of state-enforced atheism, were highly alienated from their Jewish roots, and some of whom, notably spouses and relatives, were not Jewish at all.

Kevin Chadwick

Ehud Barak

The resentment that built up among the Russians against the orthodox establishment that they saw discriminating against them was exploited by Barak, the Labour candidate. He very cleverly offered the Russians the Interior Ministry. That may sound like an arcane and minor offer to Americans, whose interior ministry looks after Yellowstone Park and Smokey the Bear. But in Israel it controls the essence of civil life. Netanyahu could not match Barak's offer for fear of playing one constituency against another. As a result, he lost the Russians. In 1996, he got 60 percent of their votes. Last week, he got 40.

But beyond the timing and the structural problems in the conservative coalition there was the problem of Bibi himself. This was his worst campaign ever. He was off-stride, ill at ease. Barak, on the other hand, ran a smart, minimalist campaign. He basically hid. Hiding is a very useful technique for a politician—whenever Newt Gingrich curtailed his public exposure his poll ratings went up—and particularly for a politician with the kind of Eisenhower candidacy that Barak presented.

There was endless debate over whether Barak is really a dove or a hawk. That is because he was really a sphinx. His pronouncements were generally bland and vague. His slogan was Carvillean: "Change." As a decorated war hero and former commando, he had the kind of reputation and popularity that allowed Ike in '52 to say he'd get us out of Korea without exactly telling us how. Barak said he'd get Israelis out of Lebanon in a year without telling them how either.

His low profile served him well. There was only one debate in this campaign. The three major candidates (at the time) were invited. Netanyahu showed up. Yitzhak Mordechai, former defense minister who defected from Bibi's party to head a new center party, showed up. Barak didn't. The empty chair won.

Mordechai and Netanyahu savaged each other and both sank in the polls. Perhaps for the first time in his career, Bibi looked flustered on television. The reviews were terrible. And not just for this performance. It is safe to say that no candidate has ever been as consistently and universally vilified by the press as has Netanyahu. Already two years ago, an article that violated the anti-Netanyahu consensus—a sympathetic article by a man of the left called "The year of Hating Bibi"—caused a sensation. Typical during the election campaign was a column by Israel's leading columnist in Israel's leading newspaper entitled "The Prince of Darkness and Hate."

This is not to say that Barak was a bystander in his own successful campaign. He was very disciplined and very cautious. But his victory, encouraged by everyone from Yasser Arafat to Hosni Mubarak to Bill Clinton, does not herald the kind of supine Israel that they are hoping for. The Clinton administration

in particular, which did everything but break out the champagne and bongo drums on election night, is being very premature in assuming that Barak will be a malleable figure.

First, Barak is no Shimon Peres. Peres, the former Labour prime minister whom Netanyahu defeated, was a dreamer, and a dangerous one. He believed that we had come to a kind of end of history where power politics was obsolete, where borders didn't count, and where Israel and the Palestinians and the Jordanians would live together in harmony like Benelux.

Barak, on the other hand, is a realist. A military man all his life, a man concerned with security, he has already given the first hint of where he is going by indicating that he wants to bring Likud into his government. Most important is the reason he gave: not only to create a national consensus but to signal the Palestinians to "expect to receive less."


Kevin Chadwick

Benjamin Netanyahu

Moreover, the Labour party that Barak is leading is not the Labour party that Peres led. Barak has consciously tried to steer it towards the center, using Tony Blair and Bill Clinton as his model. His will be a different Labour government with a far different coalition. Rabin built his—and pushed Oslo through—with a very narrow coalition of the left, indeed a majority of one in the Knesset. Barak seems intent on building a broad coalition that represents the overwhelming 80 percent national consensus—bequeathed him, ironically, by Netanyahu—that favors territorial compromise so long as it does not return Israel to the '67 borders or redivide Jerusalem.

In the short run, Barak will be a lot easier for Arafat and Clinton to deal with. In the long run, he will be a lot harder. In the short run, he will undoubtedly go ahead with the rest of the Wye agreement. Wye commits Israel to pulling out of 13 percent of the West Bank. Netanyahu had pulled out of 2 percent when he halted the process and his government collapsed.

There is no doubt that Barak will give up the other 11 percent fairly rapidly. The result will be new life to the "peace process"—since "peace process" is a euphemism for Israeli withdrawal. This will create much goodwill. Barak will be received in all the Arab capitals with a handshake and a smile. He will be toasted in Washington. He might even get as warm a reception from Bill Clinton as Yasser Arafat now routinely gets.

But this will all be temporary, because coming up are the final-status negotiations which are to determine once and for all the final borders between Israel and the Palestinians, the question of Palestinian statehood, the status of Jerusalem, and the future of the Palestinian refugees. On these issues, there is very little difference between Barak and Netanyahu. Barak might be a bit more willing to give a bit more territory with a bit more contiguity and show more tolerance for a Palestinian state. But Likud had all but conceded that there was going to be a Palestinian state. The only question is whether its powers be circumscribed. Will it be able to have an army? Will it be allowed to have alliances with Iraq and Syria or any other neighbor at war with Israel? Will it be allowed to have weapons of mass destruction? Will it have control of the air above and the water below?

Barak is not very far from Netanyahu and, indeed, from the Israeli consensus in believing that the answer to these questions must be no—otherwise Israel becomes an unviable state and Palestine's creation makes Israel's demise only a question of time.

How long will the honeymoon last? I give it six months. It will come to an abrupt end when the Wye withdrawals have been completed and final-status negotiations are deadlocked. Barak will take a position identical to Netanyahu's against dividing Jerusalem, against a Palestinian state with unrestricted powers, against the return of refugees to Israel, and

against retreating to the 1967 borders. On all of these demands the Palestinians have not moved an inch in the six years since Oslo.

That is when the crunch will come. That is when this administration—which fancies itself, against all evidence, the most pro-Israel administration in American history—will be tested. It is sure to be tested, because something has happened on the Palestinian side of this equation that has been entirely overlooked by the press and allowed to pass unmentioned by the administration: While everyone had their eyes fixed on Netanyahu, Arafat moved the goal posts.

Remember: Oslo is explicitly based on U.N. Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, which call for a return of the territories captured in 1967 in exchange for peace. But for the last few months Arafat has been going around the world saying that the new Palestinian position is to establish a state based on U.N. General Assembly Resolution 181 of 1947.

That may all sound arcane. But it is not. The U.N. partition plan of 1947 created a Jewish state in part of Palestine. It was unanimously rejected by the Arab states and the Palestinians, who responded by launching a war to destroy the newly created Israel. But the Jewish state outlined in Resolution 181 was a much smaller state than the one that emerged from the war launched by the Arabs to nullify it. Not only were parts of the Galilee and the Negev given to the Arabs under this plan, but Jerusalem was an international city. To return to 181 means that not just East Jerusalem (captured in '67) would be lost to Israel, but West Jerusalem—exclusively and always Jewish—as well.

Arafat's new stance is an astonishing violation of the spirit of Oslo. After all, the whole idea of Oslo was that both sides would start from initial positions and over time move towards each other with concessions. That Israel has done. It has essentially accepted a Palestinian state. It has recognized the PLO. It has given legitimacy to Arafat and his Palestinian Authority. It has given up large amounts of territory. It has transferred 98 percent of Palestinians from Israeli occupation to Palestinian self-rule.

And yet at the same time, the Palestinians are moving in precisely the opposite direction, demanding not just all of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, but now, under 181, claiming large chunks of pre-'67 Israel and delegitimizing Israeli claims to any part of Jerusalem, east or west.

While receiving almost no attention in the United States, this radical expansion of Palestinian claims has received a sympathetic hearing in Europe. The European Union sent a letter to Israel, written by the German foreign minister, saying that the EU position on Jerusalem is that it is a "corpus separatum"—a separate body, an international zone as understood in resolution 181—which means that the EU questions Israel's sovereignty over even West Jerusalem.

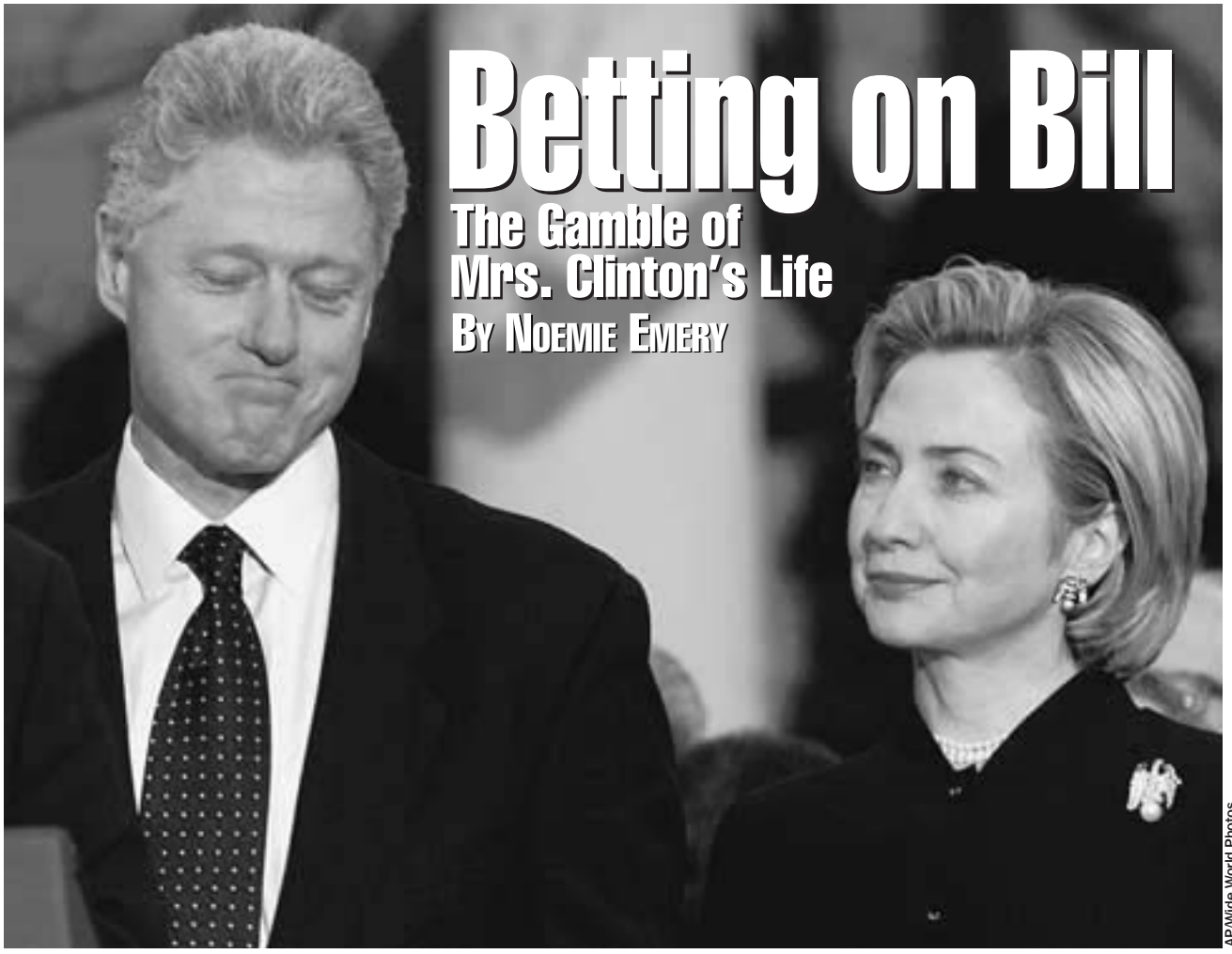
One would have thought that the administration, committed as it is to Oslo, might have protested this development and reprimanded Arafat for this gross retrogression. Instead, Clinton has greeted him with kisses on both cheeks.

Why is Arafat doing this? Robert Satloff, head of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, calls this 181 maneuver Arafat's "insurance against Barak." Satloff's theory is that by moving the goal posts, Arafat makes certain that even a Labour-led government can never come to a final agreement with him, because no one in Israel is going to give up parts of the Galilee and Negev and West Jerusalem.

Why would Arafat want to prevent an agreement? Because through his entire career he has lived on crisis, conflict, and tension which he tries to exploit to advance his cause, which, as he tells his own people if not Americans, is ultimately a Palestinian state sovereign over all of Palestine. Maybe not in this lifetime, but eventually.

He doesn't want to close the case. He doesn't want to give up claims irrevocably. He would like one interim agreement after another—always advancing, always gaining more territory, yet always leaving the question of Israel's legitimacy and Israel's territorial integrity in play. In short, he wants a peace process, not peace. Because real peace—a real final-status agreement—means the obsolescence of the Palestinian cause and the end of the Palestinian dream. Those he is not prepared to give up.

Even if one takes the more benign view—that Arafat is simply doing this to give himself more negotiating cards to play—the resurrection of the long-dead Resolution 181 spells great trouble ahead. Barak's election means just a short postponement of that trouble. Those who believe peace is at hand are sadly mistaken. Even if Barak were to go much further than he wants to go today, he can never go near Arafat's new goal post. For all of the goodwill and the handshaking and the hugging that you will see in the next few months between Arafat and Clinton and Barak and the rest, there is trouble over the horizon. In six months, after Wye, Barak will say no. And then Clinton and Arafat and the world will recognize that the problem was not Netanyahu but the Israeli consensus for peace he helped forge—a consensus that will not mindlessly keep moving toward the Palestinians as the Palestinians move away. ♦



Betting on Bill

The Gamble of Mrs. Clinton's Life

By Noemie Emery

AP/Wide World Photos

"When a woman with servants spends the weekend cleaning out her closets, it usually is not a good sign," Joyce Milton begins her new biography, *The First Partner: Hillary Rodham Clinton*, the first in what promises to be a torrent of post-Monica Hillary books. The woman, of course, is Hillary Clinton, the servants are the staff of the White House, and the weekend was the one in January 1998 when Bill Clinton had spent a grim Saturday being deposed by lawyers in the Paula Jones lawsuit, kicking off the strangest year ever in American politics.

It's fitting that a woman who hungered for fame as a policy maker should be introduced in these pages performing domestic chores, for the path she chose to power—marriage to an electable male politician—has fixed her forever in our minds as the very model of an ill-done-by wife who decides to stand by her man.

Is Mrs. Clinton as bright as she thinks she is? Well, yes and no. She has a high degree of a certain specialized intelligence—which is different from general genius and does not always translate into other fields. "Hillary had a razor-like mind," Joyce Milton observes, and quotes someone else saying that she is "very good at communicating her intelligence" and possibly at amplifying it. But her mind is unsubtle and poor at the abstractions necessary for politics. As a lawyer, she might have been outstanding—Milton quotes a school friend as saying, "She was a big star at Yale"—but she turned down a legal career for derivative, spousal power, life in Little Rock, and desultory work at the Rose Law Firm on things like Castle Grande. It was only the first in a long series of trade-offs that would eventually bring her to the White House—and to scandal, impeachment, and the cover of *Vogue* magazine.

JOYCE MILTON
The First Partner
Hillary Rodham Clinton
William Morrow & Co., 448 pp., $27.00

Hillary Clinton came to Washington in 1992 not only determined to become co-president, but with a complex political agenda of her own: "Health care is just a short-term objective," her deputy chief of staff had confided to the press. As Milton reveals, she has a long history of trying to use a specific cause that sounds laudable—the condition of children, legal rights for the poor, universal health care—as the wedge for general assaults on the culture. Said a classmate in high school, "I always felt that Hillary thought she knew what was best, and that's what everybody should do."

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Thus Mrs. Clinton bonded early with Marian Wright Edelman, who would later admit that her Children's Defense Fund was largely designed to use feelings for children to impose an entitlement program. Through Edelman, Hillary was hired in 1977 to work on a report published by the Carnegie Council on Children, which Milton calls "a blueprint for undermining the authority of parents whose values the authors considered outmoded."

Similarly, the Legal Services Corporation, whose board Hillary chaired in the late 1970s, had as its ostensible mission free legal aid to the indigent. But the aid that poor people actually wanted—help with their landlord disputes, child custody cases, domestic abuse, and the like—was dismissed as "uninformed demand" that must take second place to harassing the establishment, increasing "people's sense of grievance and entitlement," and expanding welfare rolls.

Milton concedes that Hillary might not have known of all that was undertaken during her time at the Children's Defense Fund and the Legal Services Corporation. But the tactics of the first lady's health care plan and other "reform" projects come straight out of the Children's Defense Fund playbook, and her attempts to defend her president husband are presaged by the maneuvers of the Legal Services Corporation. As Milton writes, "By the late 1970's, LSC training programs were teaching harassment techniques," filing nuisance lawsuits, "digging up dirt on opponents" by interviewing their ex-wives and unearthing "juicy tidbits" from court records. There are no signs this bothered Hillary at all.

For all the intensity of her political belief in entitlements and centralized power, it comes as a shock to realize that the administration Hillary Clinton fought so hard to elect and maintain will be praised in the end for one thing: a welfare reform act that empowered the states, effectively checked the entitlement culture, and enabled her husband to claim that the "era of big government is over." It enraged the Hillary branch of the party; her old patron, Peter Edelman, resigned from his government job and penned a magazine article that called the act the most immoral thing that Bill Clinton, or possibly anyone, had ever committed.

What Hillary thought of it remains a mystery, as she has never said a public word—which brings us to the great theme of Hillary Clinton's life: For all her activist passion, whenever her principles have come into conflict with what is politically good for Bill Clinton, she has always put her husband first.

This is the key to the great Clinton drama. It's not about marriage or power or gender, but all about trade-offs and deals. What people give up, to get something they hope will be better. The bargains they make and gambles they accept in pursuit of ambition. The things they hand off, and the things that they cling to. What they can, and cannot, bear to lose. The great gamble of Hillary's life was her decision to submerge her political life in her husband's, forgoing the future she might have had as a lawyer or possibly an elected official for the derivative power she could have as the wife of a powerful man.

The first part of the gamble was that with her help he could become president—and she won that bet. The second part of the gamble was that once he was in the White House, she could change the role of first lady into a kind of co-president, wielding executive power without the usual annoying and time-wasting checks—and this is the bet that she lost.

But it wasn't a hopeless bet to start with. A first lady has instant, world-wide celebrity. And genial Bill was a better bet to win voters' hearts than the more rigid and hard-edged Hillary. Milton thinks, as do other biographers that Hillary loved Bill when they married, and indeed still may do so; but that the marriage was inextricably entwined in their public ambitions—the traditional kind of political marriage, the union of jockey and horse. And when the horse crossed the finish line, so would the rider.

But Clinton's talent came at a price. With Bill the vote-getter came Bill the unbuttoned roisterer whose endless sexual exploits constantly threatened to upend their political future. Almost immediately, Hillary's political energies were directed to damage control. And damage control eventually became her main focus, her main source of value, and surely the thing for which she will be cited in history: attacking his critics, defaming his vic-

AP/Wide World Photos

Hillary shares a laugh with Kathie Lee Gifford on the set of Live with Regis and Kathie Lee.

tims, always defending her man. As a way of coping, she took to displacing her anger onto others—onto his women and onto those, like Ken Starr, who tried to hold him accountable—so that even his misdeeds tended to bind them together. "Campaign workers who happened to overhear her and Bill discussing the 'bitches' who were making her life miserable were shocked by the level of vitriol," Milton says of this tactic. "Hillary had almost worked herself around to believing that Bill was the sexual harassment victim, beset by predatory females who were being used by his enemies to bring him down."

Whatever the wifely Hillary might have felt about a philandering spouse, the political Hillary could not break with her front man. And so her introduction to the American people came in January 1992, on Super Bowl Sunday, when she appeared on *60 Minutes* to lie about her husband's affair with Gennifer Flowers. And her most vivid moment in the administration came in January 1998, when she appeared on the *Today* show and *Good Morning America* to lie once again about his relations with an intern barely older than her daughter. The woman who hoped to be seen as a serious feminist mover and shaker stands most widely known as a put-upon consort. Bette Davis couldn't have played it better.

The standard reading of the Clintons is that they complement one another's strengths: her discipline and his political talent. But it is just as easy to read them as a *follie à deux*—the classic lethal pairing of two flawed, gifted people who draw out one another's weaknesses. Linked as they were, they could not afford to crack down on each other, and too often the Clinton years seemed a combination of his discipline and her political skills. Reports emerged periodically of violent fights in the White House over his strayings, but since he knew that she would never walk out, her ravings were meaningless—and her constant public excuses for him encouraged him to go on. Indebted to her support, he didn't dare correct her political errors, letting her egregious mishandling of the health care bill go unchecked.

AP/Wide World Photos

On their way to Renaissance Weekend: the first family in Beaufort, S.C., Dec. 30, 1998

The Clinton marriage may have been the reason they got to the White House, but it's also the reason that their administration has been mired in scandal and gotten little done. At the end of his first year in office, the Clintons were hit by the Paula Jones charges (his license) and the Whitewater scandals (her arrogance). She mishandled the health care proposal (her arrogance), which was one of the key factors in the 1994 midterm election of a Republican Congress that four years later would examine the Monica Lewinsky affair (his license). The relation is always circular: Without Bill's excesses, there would have been no scandal; without Hillary's arrogance, there would have been no means to force any accounting. Together, they set themselves up for the fall.

It was the Lewinsky affair that revealed the Clintons' bargain for all to see. Hillary at once sprang to the defense of her husband, manning the war room, bracing the staff, appearing on television talk shows. Denial had become her life project.

Did she believe what she said? Milton claims that Governor Clinton was carrying on five different affairs in 1989, with many late-night phone calls and nocturnal absences. Yet when the state troopers came out with their charges in 1993, "Hillary told a friend that the accounts were all lies." But once it was admitted in the case of Monica, everything changed. The carefully structured mechanism of denial was shattered. For the first time, Hillary could not wholly blame other people for the damage her husband had done.

As Milton says, "Hillary was said to be bitterly angry . . . though it is hard to say whether she was more upset about his infidelity or his sheer ineptitude in concealing it." She would force herself to pose beside him in the Rose Garden on the day of impeachment,

but she had nothing to say when he was acquitted, as if she could no longer be bothered. (There are also stories that she believed the Juanita Broaddrick rape charges.) By now, as the Clintons' joint political project nears its conclusion, their marriage may be seriously damaged as well.

Weighing a Senate run at just past fifty years old, the first lady Hillary Clinton is just about where the lawyer-activist Hillary Rodham might have found herself had she not decided to work through Bill Clinton. But the terms of the run would have been different. Hillary Clinton is now a tabloid queen, a personality puzzle, and her high approval ratings, when she does have them, are not about her few accomplishments but about her oh-so-public private life. The buzz about her is celebrity buzz. Her main appeal to voters is that of a woman in a novel by the likes of Danielle Steele—a woman wronged who rises from the ashes, gets a job as a salesclerk, and ends up running the company.

Was the gamble of Hillary Clinton worth it? She did make her husband president and became a famous first lady. But his terms have been tarnished, and her efforts to become a policy maker have failed. Instead of remaking the government, she has been driven back to traditional wifely activities: giving advice in private, defending her attacked spouse, and making nice to the wounded. No laws bear her imprint, and she's done nothing symbolic to match the gesture Eleanor Roosevelt made in 1939 defending Marian Anderson when the Daughters of the American Revolution refused to let the great contralto perform in Constitution Hall. There are no important legal cases she has tried and won. The people who proclaim her brilliance cannot point with conviction to any one brilliant thing she has done—except save her husband.

It's true that in this case, she has been daring, resourceful, ferocious, and canny: changing the course of presidential history when she led the 1992 counter attack against Gennifer Flowers, and again in January 1998 when she stepped in front of the speeding train bearing down on her husband and gave him the chance to escape.

Each time, she did for him the one thing that could not be done by a judge, a lawyer, an elected official, or an aide, but only by a wife. By a wife. And there is the great drama of Hillary. She became Bill Clinton's wife at least in part for the fast track to political power, but found in doing so she had no time to wield that power to make policy. She is no more than Bill Clinton's keeper, defined by the terms of their marriage.

Today, Hillary Clinton seems to be attempting one last gamble, trying to barter the celebrity buzz she owns as a wife and victim for one last stab at political power as Senator Moynihan's successor in New York. If the bet comes off, will she think it's all been worth it? And what if she fails? One suspects she is tempted, like her husband, to quote Nicolai Rubashov in *Darkness at Noon*: "What a mess we have made of our golden generation"—and of ourselves. ♦

Lifeboat Ethics

The Enduring Fascination of the Titanic

By Christopher Caldwell

Stephen Cox, a literature professor at the University of California-San Diego and a *Titanic* buff, makes no apology for this little bout of intellectual slumming.

Because it's *not* slumming, according to Cox. Of the 2,228 passengers who boarded the ship for its maiden voyage from Southampton to New York in 1912, only a third survived. The conduct of survivors and dead provide us with chances to ask what we would have done in similar conditions of extreme duress—particularly moral duress. And that's what literature does.

STEPHEN COX
The Titanic Story
Hard Choices, Dangerous Decisions
Open Court, 152 pp., $16.95

"The *Titanic* has endured," Cox thinks, "because it presents the great problems of morality . . . in the exacting form that one expects from a great work of artifice." Cox is right. There are more comprehensive treatments of the *Titanic* than this new book, but none that better conveys why we should now care how a couple thousand people spent two hours in the middle of one hellish night in the North Atlantic eighty-seven years ago.

The drama of the *Titanic* rests in its passengers' need to make snap decisions about survival, duty, and justice, with only imperfect information at their disposal. Only 700 of the 1,178 lifeboat places wound up occupied. There are many reasons for this waste of life, but a chief one is that, even as the ship went down, not everyone *wanted* to get in the lifeboats.

The passengers' assumption that the boat was "unsinkable" was reasonable, Cox shows. The *Titanic*'s hold was divided into sixteen watertight compartments, and the ship could have survived the flooding of any three. None of the boat's designers, builders, or crew could imagine any kind of collision that would have taken out more than two. As it happened, the *Titanic* didn't "collide" with anything. It brushed by an iceberg so lightly that very few people on board even felt it. The iceberg opened a 300-feet-long zipper of pockmarks that flooded six compartments on the boat's starboard side.

Was it unreasonable not to have planned for such a scrape? Not at all,

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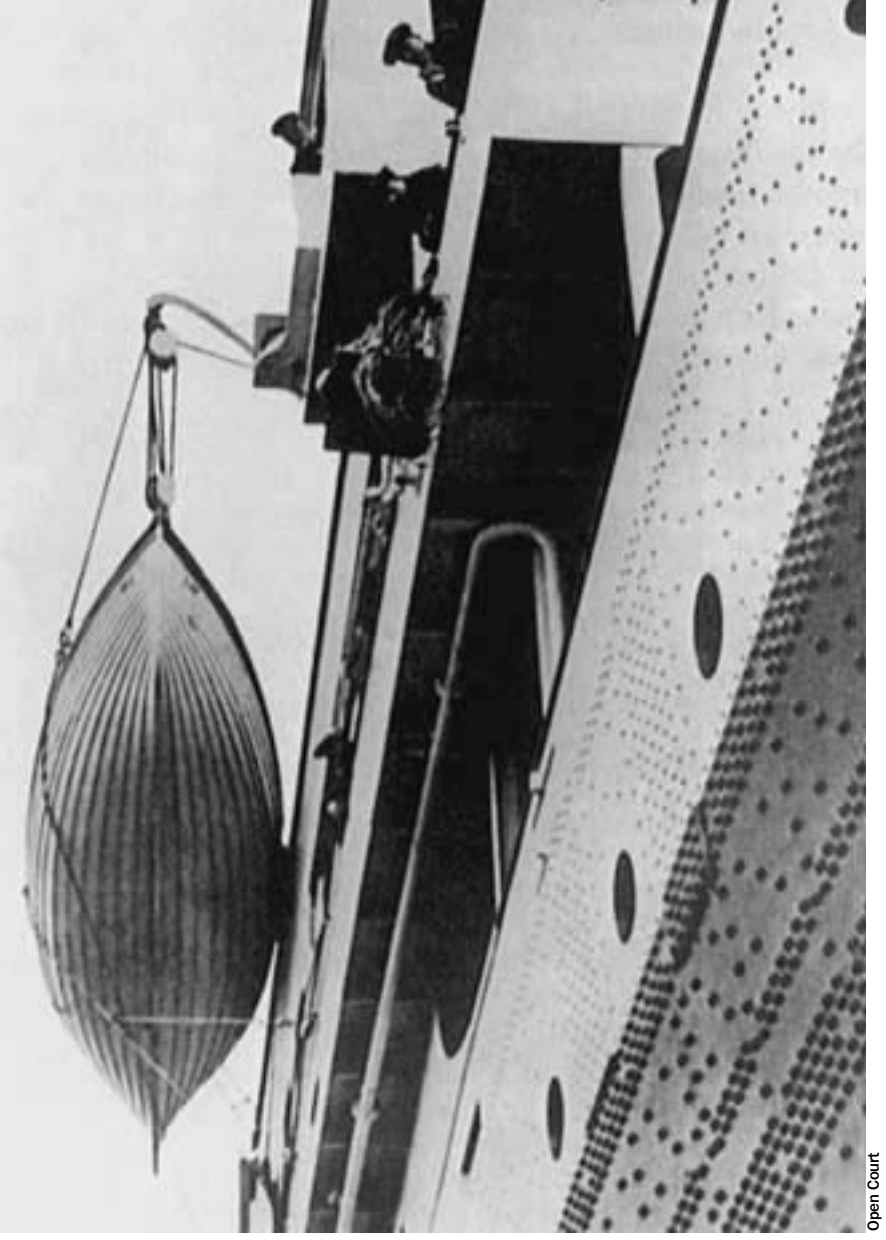
says Cox, because there was no record of any such accident in all the annals of transatlantic travel—which was extraordinarily safe to begin with. Nine million passengers had made transatlantic crossings in the two decades before the *Titanic* sank, with only eighty-two deaths.

The accident, that is, was a fluke. Had the weather not been absolutely perfect for sea travel, the crashing surf around the bottom of the black iceberg would have made it visible. Had the ship's first officer William Murdoch simply rammed into the iceberg rather than turning, two hundred people in the front holds would probably have been killed, but the ship would have stayed afloat.

Cox is contemptuous of those who, in the wake of such an ironic disaster, sought to pluck politically convenient scapegoats out of a run of bad luck. For Michigan senator William Alden Smith, who launched a congressional inquisition into the matter, the problem was "laxity of regulation." So his fellow progressive, Robert La Follette of Wisconsin, passed the onerous Seaman's Act of 1915, which had two effects: First, costly regulation put American transpacific passenger ships out of business, destroying what, on the eve of the act, had been a near-monopoly for the United States. And second, on July 24, 1915, the Lake Michigan pleasure cruiser *Eastland* capsized under the weight of its Seaman's Act-mandated lifeboats, killing 844 passengers and crew.

To Cox's thinking, such "ingenuous busybodies" do nothing but harm. He even shows rare forbearance towards the Smith hearings' whipping boy, the White Star Line's managing director Joseph Bruce Ismay. Because he had boarded a lifeboat on the *Titanic*, Ismay became for months the most reviled man in the world. (The most delightful of dozens of delightful footnotes concerns two American towns called Ismay that mulled changing their names: "Ismay, Texas, did change. Ismay, Montana, . . . heroically resisted—until 1993, when it renamed itself Joe, Montana, in honor of Joe Montana.")



Open Court

The lifeboat next to the bridge, in which Sir Cosmo Duff Gordon and his family escaped

The 1997 movie *Titanic* is similarly reductionist—with its suggestion "that if you have money then you are very probably deficient morally; and if you have morality, you are very probably low on cash." In fact, with exceptions, the rich behaved considerably better than the poor as the *Titanic* went down. Fourteen upper-crust women rowed their lifeboat back to the ship as it foundered, searching for survivors even at the risk of swamping their boat.

The most appalling memories come from the testimony of society matron Mrs. J. Stuart White, which Cox excerpts at length. Mrs. White and several other first-class women and their children, many of whom had left their husbands and fathers on board the *Titanic* to drown, suddenly found themselves sharing a boat with a half dozen roughneck stewards.

"All of these men escaped under the pretense of being oarsmen," Mrs. White remembered. "The man who rowed me took his oar and rowed all over the boat, in every direction. I said to him, 'Why don't you put the oar in the oarlock?' He said, 'Do you put it in that hole?' . . . It is simply unbearable. . . . I never saw a finer body of men in my life than the men passengers on this trip—athletes and men of sense—and if they had been permitted to enter these lifeboats with their families the boats would have been appropriately manned and many more lives saved."

One exception to the rule of gentlemen behaving as such was the British

aristocrat Sir Cosmo Duff Gordon. Gordon commandeered Boat No. 1 (which could have seated forty), with his wife, their retinue, and a few crew members, and rowed away a quarter full—not because they had anywhere to go but because they were trying to "stop the sound" of the drowning passengers' screams.

What is astonishing is that several sharply diverging micro-societies came into being, complete with customs, rules, and manners, in the two hours and forty minutes it took the ship to sink. On the starboard side, men were allowed onto the lifeboats as soon as they were filled with all the women and children who could be found; on the port side only ninety feet away, a cult of chivalry developed under which no men were permitted in the boats under any circumstances—yet another reason so many lifeboats were launched half-empty.

What proves Cox's point about the *Titanic* as a literary story is its illustration of the irrepressibility of human difference: Isidor Straus (part-owner of Macy's) and his wife refused repeated urgings to board the lifeboats, choosing instead to meet their end walking and chatting together on the deck; Benjamin Guggenheim, who had been rushing home to his nine-year-old daughter's birthday party, spent the two hours scampering around the boat helping other people's children, then returned to the deck in dinner jacket with his secretary and said, "We're dressed up in our best, and are prepared to go down like gentlemen"; W.T. Stead, the mystical author, chose to spend his final hours reading, which he did with exquisite calm and concentration; and a ragtime band kept playing on the steepening deck until the ship pitched them into the freezing water that killed every last one of them.

And this is not even to mention some stunning examples of wholly anonymous nobility. A man treading water swam up to a crowded lifeboat and asked the survivors if he could board. They told him sharply that they had no room. He replied, "That is all right, boys. Keep cool. God bless you." Then he swam away and drowned. ♦

A Novel of Name-Dropping

Kurt Andersen's Millennium

By David Skinner

Kurt Andersen is most famous, or infamous, or notorious, or *something* for founding and editing *Spy*, the satirical magazine from the 1980s that pioneered, for instance, the amiable practice of pasting the faces of celebrities into compromising photographs. And now he has written a novel, *Turn of the Century*, in which dozens of real-life characters, from Bill Gates to William Bennett, are pasted into the story of a modern Manhattan marriage.

If you think that using celebrities, journalists, businessmen, and politicians in a satire would make an author unpopular, think again. "I know Kurt Andersen. Everyone knows Kurt Andersen," the reviewer in *Time* volunteered. The world where *everyone knows* is in fact a world wide open to a guy like Andersen, whose regular post these days is at the *New Yorker*, where highbrow celebrity-worship has become just another beat.

KURT ANDERSEN
Turn of the Century
Random House, 659 pp., $24.95

Turn of the Century, in fact, reads as though it were written by a reporter with a voracious appetite for the anecdotal scoop, who has been granted almost infinite access. This may be a great starting point for a celebrity article, but it isn't, one has to observe, a great starting point for a novel.

As *Turn of the Century* opens, the year is 2000 and George and his wife Lizzie live and work in the two most mercurial industries of modern-day America, entertainment and high-tech. Their friends are powerful, upper-class types as well, and together form a sort of pageant of important social types, an ad hoc Manhattanite aristocracy. George and Lizzie's home life is equally *au courant*, with three kids whose lives testify to the sometimes morbid detachment from reality that proximity to celebrity and the impulse to be absolutely modern can effect.

George used to be a journalist, and he even lost part of his arm covering Nicaragua back in the 1980s. But now he's a producer of two television shows that blend fact and fiction. Along with *NARCS*, a successful law enforcement drama in which real-life present-day crime stories are dramatized and intertwined with real police busts, he is producing a new postmodern news show called *Real Time* that mixes full-blown news with heart-wrenching dramatic pieces, a sort of *Nightline* with soap-opera subplots.

The struggle to produce *Real Time* pits George against the huge entertainment empire that owns his television network. And meanwhile, in her own profession, his wife Lizzie faces an equally overwhelming beast: Bill Gates's Microsoft, which is forming a partnership with her company.

First the software giant lowballs her on the price and says it wants only a

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sliver of ownership. After a bit of corporate espionage, however, they discover that Lizzie is considering a deal with a wacko researcher who seems to be looking for the technological holy grail, the point at which humans are superseded by computers. Microsoft suddenly wants half of Lizzie's company and offers a breathtaking price. But the "mirage of millions" soon disappears, and Lizzie ends up working with George's corporate enemies as a technology vice president.

Turn of the Century may not be much of a novel, but—like this year's Bret Easton Ellis flop, *Glamorama*—it does relish its own in-the-know-ness. The thrill of seeing today's celebrities in a fictional context wears off quickly, however, and leaves one wondering about the half-life of any story that tries to score points with subjects that are studied well enough by picking up *Variety* or *New York* magazine (which Andersen once edited) or the *New York Observer*.

The demands Andersen makes of his readers include an appreciation for contemporary detail that borders on fetishism. What one literary critic calls "the shlock of recognition" weighs down far too much contemporary fiction, and in Andersen's case, it smothers the plot with an almost pornographic interest in the mental ticks and creature comforts of the story's characters. One would think Andersen was describing the pyramids of Egypt or the politics of ancient Rome, for all the digressive attention he devotes, for example, to cell phones.

And this creates another problem: The most amusing characters turn out to be the one- or two-note secondary characters whose self-revealing riffs at least have the advantage of being reliably humorous. Comic relief shouldn't be so relieving.

While the two big-deal plots lumber forward, the novel does manage to deliver a pair of enjoyable sideshows. Cubby Koplowitz, George's brother-in-law, a man bubbling over with truly bizarre get-rich schemes, has built a miniature futurist city in his garage. Following no particular conception of what the future will be, he has instead pursued any whim that strikes him, and the result is a colorful and fantastic little cosmos.

So too, when George visits Las Vegas, Andersen invents a theme park financed by an eccentric capitalist genius. Called BarbieWorld, it is filled with hundreds of living replicas of Barbies and Kens. The passage describing the procession of white limos dropping off the dollfaces, the paparazzi who treat them like actual celebrities, and the many manifestations of Barbie inside the casino conveys far more than any of the scenes that drive the sordid stories of George and Lizzie's respective careers.

And yet, an interesting question is raised in *Turn of the Century*, though the author has buried it in reams of meaningless description. Do our attachments to brand-names—a television show, for example, or a particular corporation's products—define us more accurately than does our religion or our politics? Andersen assumes the answer is "yes": At one point in the novel, George compares finding a TV audience to "keeping Soccer moms and Social Security recipients all voting Democratic"; at another, Lizzie (stealing a line of Umberto Eco's) compares the animosity some people feel towards Microsoft to a religion.

Kurt Andersen isn't exactly wrong. One does find computer geeks and style-conscious consumers who bring a sort of born-again zeal to their brand preferences. But scratch the surface and you may find the same people have more enduring and more profound attachments. The great novel we are still waiting for will be the book that takes up the divide between these aspects of the American character. If Andersen had been willing to take his own question seriously, *Turn of the Century* might have been something more than the book that, this season, *everyone knows*. ♦

B&A

Sitcom Shakespeare

'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' Lost in the Woods

By J. Bottum & Jonathan V. Last

Maybe *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—Shakespeare's purest, frothiest comedy—is simply a play about how funny we are while we're in love.

There's love so lustful that it looks like an animal in heat, as the love-potioned Titania, high queen of all the fairies, flatters and paws Bottom, the lower-class weaver who's been changed into an ass.

There's love so stately that it looks like international policy, as Theseus, warrior duke of Athens, and Hippolyta, ruler of the Amazons, tread their self-important way toward marriage.

There's love so operatic that it shakes the heavens, as Oberon and his fairy queen storm in marital battle through the raging night.

There's love so romantic that what it mostly loves is the sheer idea of being in love, as the rose-lipped girls Hermia and Helena, and the lightfoot boys Lysander and Demetrius, flee the stern parental law of Athens for one confused, enchanted, love-charged night in the lawless woods before they pair off with their proper mates for marriage.

And always there's love so comically coiled around itself that we cannot come to the end of it: *For aught that I could ever read, / Could ever hear by tale or history, / The course of true love never did run smooth*.

Or maybe *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is just about its poetry. Like *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Tempest*, the play is one of the few that Shakespeare made up from scratch, without any clearly identifiable source (though the tale of *Pyramus and Thisbe*—the play-within-the-play butchered by Bottom and his fellow "mechanicals"—is lifted from Ovid). And though hardly any viewer has ever been able to keep straight the seven or eight different plots roiling through it, what everyone remembers from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the language.

This is the play in which Helena mourns that women *cannot fight for love, as men may do, / We should be woo'd and were not made to woo*; the play in which Hermia's angry schoolmate explains, *Though she be but little, she is fierce*; the play in which the scornful Theseus declares, *The lunatic, the lover, and the poet / Are of imagination all compact*. When in the opening lines Hippolyta describes *The moon, like to a silver bow / New-bent in heaven*—or Lysander adds,

> *Swift as a shadow, short as any dream;*
> *Brief as the lightning in the collied night,*
> *That in a spleen unfolds both heaven and earth,*
> *And ere a man hath power to say, "Behold!"*
> *The jaws of darkness do devour it up:*
> *So quick bright things come to confusion.*

—Shakespeare has passed beyond all questions of sense and nonsense. He's floating so far above language, you cannot touch him.

It may even be that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is about nothing except theater and theatrical convention, for scarcely an action occurs without someone observing it—the audience outside the play continually viewing an audience inside the play. The attempt of the "hempen home-spuns," the "rude mechanicals," to perform *Pyramus and Thisbe* comes complete with gibing asides by the watching duke. Titania's asinine frolics are overseen by her wondering fairy attendants. Theseus and Hippolyta invariably carry themselves as formal actors parading before their royal court. The four sex-pixilated adolescents wandering through the woods are so self-dramatized, they hardly need an audience, but the invisible Oberon looks out for them and the "mad spirit" Puck looks in on them: *Those things do best please me / That befall preposterously*. And was there ever any other comedy with so many characters watching other characters sleep?

But whatever *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is about, it's about *something*—which is one feature that the director Michael Hoffman left out of his new film version of the comedy.

Hoffman has been one of mainstream Hollywood's few real finds in recent years. His 1991 *Soapdish* was an inspired and far-underrated comedy about the lives of soap-opera stars. His 1995 *Restoration* remains an interesting stab at costume drama. And in 1996, he directed Michelle Pfeiffer and George Clooney in *One Fine Day*, an attempt to recreate sweet, traditional romantic comedy. If *One Fine Day* wasn't quite as classic as it pretended to be—back in the late 1930s, the movie studios were turning out a dozen of its equivalents every year—it was nonetheless a rarity for modern cinema.

But Shakespeare remains impenetrable, though Hoffman has obviously filled his production with directorial choices: Every scene, every costume, every setting, every cast member, every really neat idea the director had seems to shout, "Look at me!" But somehow, at the same time, Hoffman never manages to make the final choice of what he wants the entire play to say.

All productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* start with a problem of incoherence. What are English folk-fairies like "Pease-Blossom" and "Robin Goodfellow" doing in ancient Greece? And why are Oberon and Titania arguing outside Athens about a changeling Hindu boy they stole from India? And exactly how do Elizabethan workmen with English names like Snout and Starveling come to perform rustic Italian Renaissance dances for pre-classical Greek heroes like Theseus? Samuel Pepys described it in 1662 as "the most insipid ridiculous play that I ever saw in my life," and it was rarely performed until the fame of Felix Mendelssohn's incidental music, composed to accompany a German translation, brought the play back into favor in the nineteenth century.

But this new production's many

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Kevin Kline as Bottom and Michelle Pfeiffer as Titania in A Midsummer Night's Dream

show-off decisions mostly serve to add to the incoherence. Instead of setting the play in ancient Athens, Hoffman relocates to nineteenth-century Italy—apparently so he can have his actors race around on bicycles. If a director has a coherent vision for Shakespeare, this kind of modern setting can help expound it: In 1996, Baz Luhrmann placed his surprisingly successful filming of *Romeo and Juliet* in a modern Miami Beach; in 1995, Richard Loncraine used 1930s London for a movie version of *Richard III* that was at least a clear reading of the play, even if a wrong one. But Hoffman seems to have reset his *Midsummer Night's Dream* just for the sake of resetting it. Aside from putting opera in the score and having a stray poster written in Italian, he makes no use of his new locale.

The ostentatious directorial whims show most of all in the casting: The balding, thirty-nine-year-old straightman Stanley Tucci plays the mischievous Puck; Calista Flockhart of television's *Ally McBeal* takes on the neglected Helena; the demure French actress Sophie Marceau appears as the regal Hippolyta; and the brittle-voiced character actor David Strathairn is the manly Theseus.

Instead of forcing the roles to form the actors, Hoffman lets the actors form the roles. Kevin Kline is interesting as Bottom—usually mistaken in his over-the-top renditions, but interesting. But then, Kline is the one cast member without a single, well-defined screen persona. The others merely play themselves. In the case of Flockhart, it actually works: She acts the put-upon, lovesick Helena as the doe-eyed, neurotic Ally McBeal, and you can in fact picture Ally crinkling her nose and spitting, *Oh spite!* But mostly it flops like a pat of butter falling flat on the floor. Even Starveling (his constant snuff-taking translated to chain-smoking) is played by Max Wright with all of the mannerisms of his Willie Tanner from the late 1980s television series *ALF*. There are few rules in film, but surely one of them is "Thou shalt not mix *ALF* with Shakespeare."

To the playwright's busiest play, the director has strapped even more theatrical business and spectacle. The film introduces Puck in an overwrought fairy tavern, complete with drunken goblins. At the height of the four lovers' confusions, Hoffman tumbles the girls into a muddy pond, stripped to their underwear—forgetting that American actors have enough trouble speaking Shakespeare without having to talk through mud.

At other times, Hoffman expects the audience to miss the play's jokes: When Bottom flubs his Pyramus line and declares that a *lion vile hath here deflower'd my dear*, the camera shifts to Peter Quince mouthing *devour'd*, just in case we didn't get it. And what exactly possessed the director to make the mechanicals' play end on a note of deep-felt drama? You haven't lived till you've heard Sam Rockwell (playing Flute, the bellows-mender who performs as Thisbe) try to read *His eyes were green as leeks* as a serious line. To add a glimmer of Hollywood-happy ending, the film concludes with Bottom's being granted one last look at the glowing fairies—who flit prettily across the screen to Mendelssohn and step all over Puck's final monologue.

With such beautiful people as Flockhart's Helena, Dominic West's Lysander, Rupert Everett's Oberon, and Michelle Pfeiffer's Titania, Hoffman could have made his *Midsummer Night's Dream* about sex, for Shakespeare knows better than anyone else that sexual desire is a funny thing—funny comic and funny strange: *Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind, / And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind*.

With Kline's Bottom and the fine British character actor Roger Rees's Peter Quince, he could have made his film about Shakespeare's language: *The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling, / Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven*.

With the multiple perspectives the camera allows, the director could even have made it a comedy about theatrical comedies: *What! a play toward*, says Puck as he comes upon the mechanicals' rehearsal in the woods. *I'll be an auditor; / An actor too perhaps, if I see cause*.

But mostly what Hoffman needed was to make his *Midsummer Night's Dream* be about *something*. And all the odd little choices that he made along the way seem to have kept him from ever deciding what that was. ♦

Internal DNC/PLA Document

TOP SECRET
(PLEASE DESTROY)

To: Al Gore/Jiang Zemin
From: Tony Coelho

Al, Jiang,
Our tap on George W.'s phone picked up the following conversation, which might give us some hints about the shrub's thinking on the running-mate issue.
rgds,
Tony

Phone Transcript
July 7, 2000
Record of call made from suite of George W. Bush (Fairmont Hotel) to suite of Bob and Elizabeth Dole (Four Seasons). 6:19 p.m.

Dole: Hello? Bob Dole speaking. Who's calling at this hour? Don't you know "The Golden Girls" is on?
Bush: It's me, Bob. George. George W. Is Elizabeth there?
Dole: George! Congratulations on winning the nomination! Not that you had much competition. A Christian dwarf, a millionaire dweeb, and the Stepford wife.
Bush: Well I was looking for a vice-presidential candidate, you see, and I thought your wife . . .
Dole: George! I'd be happy to be your running mate. We'd make a great team. You with all your, uh, inheritance and me with my knowledge and experience.
Bush: Well actually, Bob, I was going to pick your wi— . . . What I mean to say is, is Elizabeth there?
Dole: E.D.? I can defrost her if you like, but it'll take a few minutes. But never mind that. Let's talk strategy. I've had a lot of time to lie around and think . . . you know, while recuperating in the hospital.
Bush: The whole country appreciates your war service . . .
Dole: No, I mean when they stapled my cheeks behind my ears. Now I'm taut and ready. Got a face like a saddle. No more old Bob Dole. Ooooh, wait till I tell Liddy I'm on the ticket. This ought to burn her guts out!
Bush: I guess she was mad when you started running those attack ads against her in New Hampshire.
Dole: Those were not attack ads. They were issue ads. I just thought the voters should know she has her staff prepare cue cards to bring to bed.
Bush: She said she'd take you to the woodshed.
Dole: Yea, that was just the image the country wanted to think about— Liddy Dole with a paddle.
Bush: Listen, Bob. Maybe we should forget I called. You don't happen to have Tom Ridge's number, do you?
Dole: No, don't hang up. I'm ready to rumble. What a ticket! Two virile manly men. Two men who've looked impotency in the face and didn't blink. Or at least one. It takes courage, George, a special kind of courage. Most things do.