the weekly Standard

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WHY ELIAN SHOULD STAY
THE EDITORS

On To Mars

After the moon landing, America lost its nerve. Here's how to regain it.

BY CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

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Cover: Detail of digitally rendered Martian landscape by Hugh Syme. The full image can be found, in color, on page 22.

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BPA INTERNATIONAL

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Newt American Leadership

Newt Gingrich sent out a press release the other day announcing the formation of a new "platform from which Newt Gingrich can communicate his vision for America." According to the release, this "solution-oriented institution," called the Committee for New American Leadership, will be "profoundly different from traditional political organizations." How so? For starters, announced Gingrich, "We believe that the American people ought to influence the politicians in Washington, not the other way around." (In contrast, presumably, to the many other political organizations whose stated goal is to manipulate the masses from above.)

Yet another anti-Beltway K Street lobby group run by people who've lived in Washington for 25 years? So far, so banal. Why would Gingrich, who is busy ducking questions about his longtime affair with a Hill staffer and cashing in on lucrative speaking gigs, bother to start something like this? For one thing, it's hard to maintain a cult of personality without an official headquarters. The Committee for New American Leadership gives Gingrich a place to hang his résumé. And, boy, does he. NAL's website devotes paragraph after paragraph to describing the former speaker's internationally acclaimed attributes and accomplishments. During his years in Congress, Gingrich's bio exclaims, Gingrich became a "world-renowned strategist," the one man capable of "re-establishing the House of Representatives as 'The People's House.'" So far-reaching was his impact that the *Washington Times* called him "the indispensable leader."

And that was just in politics. In the field of health, "his contributions have been so great that the American Diabetes Association awarded him their highest non-medical award and the March of Dimes named him their 1995 Georgia Citizen of the Year."

Georgia Citizen of the Year!

Wait, there's more. Gingrich, writes Gingrich, is not only a best-selling author, not just "widely recognized for his commitment to the environment," but is also—and one suspects this gets to the heart of how Gingrich conceives of himself—"recognized worldwide as an expert on world history, military issues and international affairs."

Of course Gingrich is recognized for other things, too. Like his towering ego and relentless solipsism. And, most of all, as the man who unintentionally sabotaged the very "revolution" he boasts of starting.

Which leads to the second obvious purpose of the Committee for New American Leadership—rewriting history. As Gingrich puts it in the press release: "I don't think that currently the leaders in either party understand these ideas [which he describes as "big ideas," "profound conclusions," "new solutions and new visions"] or how to communicate them." And that, Gingrich says, "is precisely why I left office, and precisely why I founded the Committee for New American Leadership."

Some of us remember that Gingrich left office because Republicans, under his leadership, becamse the first party in eons to lose seats in an off-year election in which they didn't control the White House. ♦

Chris Matthews's Finest Hour

A memorable exchange on *Hardball*, brought to The Scrapbook's attention by the Media Research Center's CyberAlert; host Chris Matthews and *USA Today*'s Tom Squitieri are discussing Hillary Clinton's appearance on David Letterman's show:

Squitieri: I'll tell you something, Chris. That appearance last night is why there's a lot of guys out there who secretly think Hillary Rodham Clinton would be a great date.

Matthews: Date?

Squitieri: Date, D-A-T-E. A woman you go out to dinner with, take her to the show, talk and have a great time. Because there was a great allure to it. She came into New York . . .

Matthews: Is there any woman you think wouldn't be a great date, Tom?

Badda-boom! ♦

The Silence of Song

Chinese authorities have arrested Yongyi Song, a Chinese researcher from Dickinson College in Pennsylvania, for the "crime" of collecting documents on the Cultural Revolution. In response, more than a hundred Sinologists have signed a letter of protest, complaining that Song's arrest jeopardizes academic research and imperils exchange programs with the People's Republic.

The Scrapbook shares their indignation. But, of course, we wonder where many of these same scholars, such as Chinapologist Michel Oksenberg, former White House adviser on China policy and now a political scientist at Stanford, have been over the past year while China was busy rounding up hundreds of citizens whose great offense was practicing their faith.

Or, for that matter, where the foreign policy "realists" among them were when Beijing's leaders decided to help prop up Slobodan Milosevic's regime in Belgrade with $300 million in new credit. It seems there is nothing like a threat to academic freedom to really raise the ol' scholarly blood pressure. ♦

Not Joan Crawford!

Dr. Laura Schlessinger is getting her own TV show. The popular radio host, who boasts 20 million daily listeners and has another book coming out this spring, *Parenting by Proxy*, is developing a syndicated program with Paramount Television. Unless the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) gets its way. Fresh from cajoling Walter Isaacson and *Time* into running a series of gay achievement items, media-savvy GLAAD is ready to dig into Dr. Laura for her anti-gay rhetoric. As an Orthodox Jew, Dr. Laura believes that homosexuality is contrary to God's law and on her show has referred to it as "deviant."

Statistically speaking, of course, Dr. Laura is correct. The human norm is heterosexuality. But that's not really what worries the folks at GLAAD, who have been rallying anti-Dr. Laura troops in the gay community. Joe Keenan, a writer and producer with the show *Frasier* (produced by Paramount Television) put it best when he said, "What gay person working for Paramount could be happy about this? We feel the way the Von Trapp children would feel if Dad decided to divorce Maria and marry Joan Crawford."

Perhaps not surprisingly, Paramount is showing signs of wobbliness. Executives have already agreed to meet with GLAAD to discuss Dr. Laura's show. At the February 14 meeting, GLAAD plans to request that she not be allowed to use "inflammatory" words like "deviance" and that she be required to present "balanced" views on homosexuality. In other words, they want to vet her show for political correctness.

This type of policing might seem outrageous, but not to GLAAD's entertainment director Scott Seomin. "We like to think we're influential," Seomin told the *Washington Times*. ♦

With Friends Like This

Barbra Streisand explains to *TV Guide* why she'll be supporting Al Gore this year: He's easy to brush off.

"Gore is a good guy. You watch and think, 'You need [media] lessons.' Bradley is much more comfortable. Gore [she shakes her head]—he actually called from Air Force One [for advice]. I couldn't take the call. I was in the middle of something." ♦

Headline of the Week

From the Jan. 21 *Washington Post*: "Panel Calls for Egalitarian House of Lords." ♦

Casual

On the McBain Beat

There's a 73-year-old guy, born in East Harlem and named Salvatore Lombino, who writes under two different noms de plume. One of those names—either Evan Hunter or Ed McBain—is now his official name, only I can't remember which.

As Ed McBain, he has just published a novel called *The Last Dance*, the latest in a series dating back to 1956 about a squad of detectives who work for a big-city police department. Over the past 20 years, I've read every novel in the "87th precinct" series. *The Last Dance* is the fiftieth, and I was halfway into it when it occurred to me that this meant I have read more books by Sal Lombino than by any other author.

This isn't surprising in one sense, since Sal Lombino has published 95 books in 45 years—69 as Ed McBain and 26 as Evan Hunter. (I've read a few Hunters, like *The Blackboard Jungle* and *Love, Dad*, and some other, non-87th precinct McBains as well, so I figure I'm somewhere around 62 Lombino titles total.)

Now, for most people who scribble for a living, the very idea of producing so many books is surreal. That's why it doesn't seem all that strange that the science-fiction writer Isaac Asimov supposedly wrote 500 novels before his death—because Asimov was writing *about* surreal things.

But Ed McBain writes about everyday things, the things urban dwellers all see and experience. And he even does *research*—ah, research, the bane of every writer, because it's hard, it's time-consuming, and it reveals just how little you really know and how much of what you think you know is arrant nonsense.

The 87th precinct books deal, in detail, with the ways in which cops gather evidence, build cases, and make arrests, and they do so (police officers have told me) more realistically than any other novels. McBain began writing them before anyone had ever heard of Miranda rights or Uzis or crack or crank or gentrification—and, like police departments themselves and the cities they serve, the books have been forced to change with the times. (McBain, who is no conservative despite the hagiographic way he depicts cops, has on occasion had his characters defend the Miranda decision and gun control.)

Darren Gygi

Sal Lombino, aka Ed McBain

They're mostly short, these books, around 60,000 words (to give you an idea of what that means, this article runs 850 words, while *The Bonfire of the Vanities* has 250,000). And what they offer, over time, is a collective portrait of urban change unparalleled in contemporary writing. The 87th precinct cops, who never age, have seen it all—the neighborhood they protect, in which the middle class and the poor once lived cheek by jowl, has been through juvenile delinquency in the 1950s, hippies in the 1960s, white flight in the 1970s, crack wars in the 1980s, and yuppification in the 1990s.

Taken as a whole, the 87th precinct books are a real accomplishment, in some ways more a journalistic than novelistic one. That helps explain why I've been able to read all 50 of them—because they're the sort of books you can plow through without paying really close attention. I couldn't tell you which one was which; I couldn't begin to advise you on where to start. I have no memory of *Cop Hater*, the first one, and as I write this very moment I'm having trouble remembering the plot of *The Last Dance*, which I finished a week ago.

But I don't read these books for the plot—I read them for the atmosphere, for the portrait of the 87th precinct in constant change and the overall portrait of the large and chaotic city of Isola (which bears the same relation to New York that Ed McBain bears to Sal Lombino). I think this is true of a lot of people who read mystery novels—we couldn't care less about who did it, we just like the characters and the setting. A friend of mine keeps a list of the Dick Francis books he's completed so that he doesn't make the mistake of buying one he has already read.

I wish I could say that I had read all of Anthony Trollope's 50 novels or Honore de Balzac's 37; they're both writers for whom I have a particular fondness. But who has that kind of time? First of all, their books are immensely long. But more important, their greatness forces you to slow down and do some spadework to mine the riches therein. Sometimes, you just don't want to work that hard. Sometimes, reading is play just as TV is play or movies are play.

And for those times, there's the remarkable Sal Lombino, who I suspect is not really a man at all but an amalgam of machine and alien. For who but a robot could literally write down so many words without developing terminal carpal tunnel syndrome? And who but an alien would be so unaffected by the human tendency to loaf, to slough off?

Oh, and he also wrote the screenplay for Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds.*

Yeah, definitely an alien.

John Podhoretz

The Gay Marriage War

I agree with David Frum that the decision of the Vermont supreme court regarding same-sex marriage is the opening move in a national, largely judicial campaign to deprive the institution of heterosexual marriage of its traditional, uniquely privileged social status ("The End of Marriage?" Jan. 17). But I am far more pessimistic than he appears to be about whether the conservative position has any chance of prevailing.

It is astonishing how swiftly and completely the pro-gay rights position has swept the boards in this and other Western nations, virtually demolishing such paltry and apologetic opposition as it has encountered. This has been most true within the legal profession, particularly among "elite" judges and lawyers who have the most influence. Being one myself, I would estimate that at least 75 percent of American law professors approve unreservedly of the Vermont decision, and regard opposition to it as nothing more than benighted bigotry. Among the highly educated professional classes, resistance to any claims on behalf of "gay rights" is far more likely to elicit scorn and indignation than is homosexuality itself.

I've reluctantly come to agree with those cultural conservatives who have concluded that we have decisively lost America's culture wars, and that there is little, if anything, conservative politicians can or will do to retrieve this situation. And without the support of religious conviction about the unique, sacramental character of traditional marriage, the purely pragmatic and anthropological objections to same-sex marriage simply fail to stem the libertarian tide, as they probably should, since they are quite unpersuasive. No one, therefore, should be in the least surprised that the Vermont justices should not find anything uniquely precious about traditional marriage, or deem it nothing more than just one of many "alternative lifestyles."

Maury Holland
Eugene, OR

The Weekly Standard is among my favorite magazines; when it comes to foreign policy, PC mania, education, art criticism, and general good sense, your magazine is first rate. What I can't understand is why you are so concerned about homosexuality.

Take David Frum's editorial about the Vermont supreme court's decision that same-sex domestic unions must be accorded the same legal rights as married couples. Why does this amount to a "legal crisis of the American family"? The few flimsy reasons Frum gives don't support the claim. That the analogy of segregation doesn't work is still no reason why "heterosexual monogamy is the only form of sexual organization consistent with republican self-government." *Why* does same-sex marriage lead to "a new system of temporary, fluctuating unions

that elevate the wishes of adults over the welfare of children"? The opposite would seem to be the case, since marriage means commitment to permanence. *Why* will the law no longer be able to recognize the special connection between mothers and children? Frum vastly underestimates the ability of lawyers to draw distinctions. The editorial ends with a dramatic charge that by discarding the family we are discarding our humanity and citizenship. Really! How is same-sex marriage a threat to "the family"? Show how my gay neighbors are a threat to the integrity of my family, because I sure don't see it.

David Orgon Coolidge writes a more substantive article ("What the Vermont Court Has Wrought"), but it, too, begs the question: Why will toleration of homosexual unions mean the ruination of the family? Yes, the Vermont decision probably takes American jurisprudence a step closer to allowing gay marriage, but it is not at all clear to me why that is a problem.

Government has the clear responsibility to protect its citizens from assault in the forms of murder, theft, and molestation, but what takes place between consenting adults, repugnant though it may be to the straight majority, does not amount to a clear assault on the family or society. Therefore, gays should be able to wed.

April Susky
Homer, AK

The reason the major presidential candidates have been silent on the issue of gay marriage after the Vermont decision is that it's a non-issue. I've had contact with a few couples of the same sex, and their commitment and devotion to each other could be a lesson to most "normal" married couples. There is no reason at all why their partners should not be granted the same legal rights as any heterosexual partner in a normal marriage. And the example, cited in David Frum's hysterical editorial, of other states recognizing "next-of-kin" status would only become an issue had the deceased not made a will making his or her partner the beneficiary (which is, of course, entirely legal—unless you think that this too is wrong).

If I want to make my cat the beneficiary of my estate, I can do so. Most of the arguments involving same-sex marriage concern themselves with benefits. If a heterosexual couple gets married in a civil ceremony, the legal partnership is assured. If I take on a partner of either gender in my business, the partnership benefits are likewise assured. What's the difference between these two examples and any other kind of partnership? And lest anyone make the argument that gay partnerships break up frequently, has anyone checked the divorce rate recently?

While I am a staunch conservative, I resent court or government intrusion into my private life. For the state to decide who should be my life partner is pernicious in the extreme, especially

when the rationale is based upon religious grounds.

KIM DU TOIT
Prospect Heights, IL

THE GAY RIGHTS LOBBY lost the first legal battle for same-sex marriage in Hawaii, but has unfortunately won the second legal battle in Vermont. If the 1996 federal Defense of Marriage Act proves ineffective, as David Frum suggests, then the only sure way to prevent the scourge of same-sex marriage—or its "domestic partnership" equivalent—from sweeping the nation is by amending the Constitution.

Pro-family conservatives inside and outside Congress should propose a constitutional amendment defining "marriage" as a legal union between one adult male and one adult female who are not close blood relatives. Its language should expressly prohibit Congress and the states from permitting or recognizing any marriage, or granting any status equivalent to marriage, where the couple in question does not meet the above definition.

Furthermore, such an amendment should also expressly allow Congress and the states to confer special privileges upon married couples that they shall not confer on same-sex or unmarried couples (namely, the current privileges of inheritance, joint ownership of property, child rearing, and various tax benefits).

Proposing such an amendment is the best way for pro-family conservatives to seize control of the social and cultural agenda from the gay rights lobby, their liberal supporters, and timid moderates in both parties. Bold leadership is needed before the cause of same-sex marriage gains further momentum.

JOSEPH F. SALZGEBER
Brunswick, OH

THE MONEY PIT

ROBERT NOVAK IS CRITICAL of Republicans for "trying their best to block every proposal" for campaign finance reform ("The GOP and Campaign Finance," Jan. 17). But the one real reform that would have the positive effect of reinvigorating our democracy with more competitive congressional races—eliminating the $1,000 individual contribution limit to federal candidates—is casually dismissed. "That won't happen," Novak writes. He then argues for more likely "reforms" in the McCain-Feingold mold, namely, restrictions on PACs and soft-dollar contributions, and support for the curious notion that federal "candidates raise 70 percent or 80 percent of their campaign money in their own state or district." The latter is okay with me, as long as the candidate promises not to vote on any legislation that impacts outside his state or district.

Novak may be right that not all Republicans wrapping themselves in the mantle of the First Amendment on this issue are sincere. That doesn't mean that the First Amendment doesn't apply. In fact, money is a proxy for information in campaigns, and any restrictions on it keep voters in the dark while enhancing the information gatekeeping power of the media. It's not for nothing that the networks and the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* are rabid proponents of campaign finance reform. But as the Supreme Court ruled in *Buckley* v. *Valeo*, "the concept that government may restrict the speech of some elements of our society in order to enhance the relative voices of others is wholly foreign to the First Amendment."

In a free society, there will always be some who have more influence on elections than others. Garry Trudeau's *Doonesbury* comic strip frequently attacks George W. Bush and Steve Forbes. It appears in over 600 newspapers nationwide. The impact of those strips on campaigns must be in the neighborhood of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars. The same is true for Rush Limbaugh's radio show and, for that matter, Robert Novak's nationally ubiquitous commentary in print and on the air. They play an important role in an open, vigorous democracy. But do they have First Amendment rights the rest of us don't have merely by virtue of their involvement in the media? One would hope not.

Novak equates money not with information, but with corruption. In fact, corruption is the raison d'être of campaign finance reform for groups ranging from Common Cause to the League of Women Voters. Yet, strangely, fingers are never pointed. Just who are these "corrupt" congressmen (other than the constantly self-flagellating McCain) whose abuse of the system requires us to give up our First Amendment rights? Silence. Besides, with a 98 percent reelection rate (as was the case in the House of Representatives in 1998), who needs to be corrupt? The system is so rigged in favor of incumbents that it's absurd to suggest that $5,000 PAC contributions are going to make any congressman stand up and salute. The real advantages incumbents have are found in all the free publicity, the name recognition, the franking privilege, and large staffs devoted to "constituent services"—the permanent campaign. Even more importantly, the lack of resources available to their challengers that results from the $1,000 contribution limit reduces both the quality and effectiveness of those challengers.

Novak wrings his hands over the fact that "the lobbyists are intimately and inextricably involved in the campaign finance issue." He warns that "this process is not a good thing." Maybe not, but it's an inevitable thing, given a $1.8 trillion federal budget. The proper way to get rid of the army of lobbyists in Washington is by ending corporate welfare, junking the IRS code in favor of a flat tax, and returning to constitutional first principles. Campaigns would then be of significantly less interest to lobbyists.

The truth is that the "reformers" want elections to be the private preserve of the political class. The thing that the political class fears most is a well-funded challenger. Indeed, those who would shake up the status quo would benefit most by removing contribution limits. Gene McCarthy shook things up in 1968 with the help of six-figure contributions from Stewart Mott and other wealthy liberal opponents of the Vietnam war. Had the 1974 amendments to the Federal Election Campaign Act been in effect then, McCarthy says, there's no way he could have waged a campaign. As McCarthy puts it, the Founders pledged their "lives, fortunes, and sacred honor" to the Revolution. They didn't say their "lives and fortunes up to $1,000."

EDWARD H. CRANE
President, Cato Institute
Washington, DC

the weekly Standard

Elián Should Stay

Last week, lawyers for 6-year-old Elián González filed a motion in federal court to prevent the boy from being sent back to Cuba. It's an uphill battle.

On Thanksgiving Day, Elián, one of 14 people who had fled Cuba on a rickety raft, was found strapped to an innertube with a drowned 60-year-old woman bobbing alongside. Ten others had died in the attempted crossing, including Elián's mother and stepfather. Since the boy's rescue, hundreds of thousands have marched in Miami to demand that his dead mother's wishes be respected—that he be allowed to live in America, with members of his extended family. Similar marches in Havana have demanded Elián's return to Cuba, where his father still lives. Cuban-Americans say we must not condemn a boy to life in a totalitarian state. Cubans say we must not break apart a father and his son.

Almost every powerful institution in North America has lined up on the Cubans' side. The Immigration and Naturalization Service would have summarily returned the boy in December, but legal motions filed by Elián's relatives prompted Attorney General Janet Reno to wait for a federal court decision. The president favors Elián's return. The *Economist* calls the Miami exile community "deaf to reason." Fifty-six percent of Americans tell pollsters they think Elián should be shipped back.

But they're wrong. The marching Miamians understand something the others do not. Castro's Cuba—Americans, for some reason, need be reminded—is the most repressive society in the Western hemisphere, and one of the most repressive on earth. According to Freedom House, Cuba's respect for political and human rights ranks lower than that of Cambodia, Iran, both Congos, and Serbia—and no better than Vietnam and the Sudan.

We are here talking not just of Castro's crimes against would-be emigrants, grisly though they sometimes are. (In the summer of 1994, the Cuban coast guard fired water cannons at a refugee tugboat at 2 o'clock in the morning, washing dozens into the sea, where they drowned. Amnesty International called it an "extrajudicial execution.") Nor is it merely a question of the "laws" Cuba applies to the unfortunates it manages to retain. (Cuban citizens may be jailed for "dangerousness," "disrespect," or even for owning a fax machine.)

Rather, it is the way Castroism treats families and children that renders ludicrous the notion that any Cuban father can speak freely about what is best for his son. Family members are Cuban hostages. It is a routine.

Orlando "El Duque" Hernández, now of the New York Yankees, was banned from Cuban baseball for life because *his brother* defected to the United States. Before El Duque himself boarded a raft for the Bahamas and freedom, he was earning nine dollars a month mopping floors in a hospital—and living in a cinderblock outhouse.

Earlier this month in Havana, opposition journalist Victor Rolando Arroyo got a six-month jail term for cooperating with a Miami charity that sends toys to poor Cuban children for Christmas (celebration of which has been legal only since the pope's visit in 1998). Arroyo was convicted of "hoarding toys."

Not even the daughter of Raúl Castro, Fidel's brother and designated successor, was allowed to accept a scholarship to study in Mexico, for fear she would defect.

We hear about these things only when they happen to famous people, but "family life" in Cuba is tens of thousands of such incidents, 365 days a year. Cuban children have a political dossier—the notorious *Expediente cumulativo escolar*—kept on them from the moment they enter school. It determines whether they are politically reliable enough to go on to higher education or even to hold jobs. And when someone proves unreliable, it is often children who are required to take part in the Cuban state's Maoist response: an "act of repudiation." It has already happened in Elián's case. Ten-year-olds are being trundled onto Cuban television to denounce the "bandits," "worms," and "kidnappers" hosting the boy in Miami.

It is to *this* the United States would return Elián.

Two things make it necessary that Elián have his day in court—with his father in the United States. First, in Castro's Cuba, we simply cannot know the underlying facts. Elián's grandmother, Raquel Rodríguez, was asked in Cuba why she wanted the boy returned—against the wishes of his late mother, Elisabet, Rodríguez's daughter. "What do they know about her?" Raquel Rodríguez replied. "Who are they to say what her will is?" Assuming Elisabet wasn't simply showing her son what sharks look like up close, we have a pretty clear idea of what her wishes were, of course. Perhaps Mrs. Rodríguez has been rendered irrational by grief. But more likely she understands that her daughter was guilty of a counterrevolutionary, unpatriotic "illegal exit," and that she herself is consequently at risk—in a

state where "failure to comply with the duty to denounce" is also a crime.

Mrs. Rodríguez has been portrayed sympathetically by a disgracefully incurious North American press, which has tended to adopt the rest of Castro's line, as well: Elián's drowned stepfather, Lazaro Munero, is a bandit and a "smuggler." It has been up to Elián's lawyers to root out that Munero was a dissident who was jailed, beaten, isolated, and deprived of food. Elián's mother, Elisabet, meanwhile, is portrayed as a flighty tart trailing after her boyfriend. It is never mentioned that she, too, was interrogated on several occasions for political deviation. Meanwhile, the boy's father, Juan Miguel González, is depicted as a saint. And maybe he is. But lost in the discussion is the fact that it is González's Miami relatives, not Elisabet's, who want to keep Elián; that González never publicly demanded Elián's return until after Castro did; and that there is evidence González may originally have approved of his ex-wife's flight. Who called the boy's Miami relatives to alert them he was on his way? His father.

The second reason this case must be carefully adjudicated is that it deeply implicates American law. The behavior of the Clinton administration and the INS has been highly irregular. Every alien resident on American soil is protected by the Fifth and Fourteenth amendments, and has a right to apply for asylum. But the Clinton administration has tried to short-circuit that procedure. In early December, an hour after Fidel complained that he hadn't been informed of American immigration rules, the U.S. interests section in Havana made contact with Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Relations to explain: All the father would have to do is provide proof of paternity, and state that he was willing to care for his son and wanted him back. An INS source told Spain's *El País* that the required interview "could take place wherever the father wants, not necessarily inside the U.S. diplomatic mission." After conducting such an interview with Juan Miguel González in Havana, the INS withdrew Elián's application on his behalf.

All of which flew in the face of American precedent. The INS has guidelines for cases in which a child applies for asylum and his "interests are adverse with those of the parent." According to these guidelines, "the parent shall be given notice of the juvenile's application for relief, and shall be afforded an opportunity to present his or her views and assert his or her interest to the district director or immigration judge before a determination is made as to the merits of the request." Parents do *not* have the right to withdraw their children's applications for asylum. In other words, Elián's father—whose wishes are filtered through the *raison d'état* of a totalitarian regime—is enjoying greater rights than he would if he were on American soil.

Particularly noxious is the rationale INS commissioner Doris Meissner is using to justify Elián's possible return. "Family reunification," Meissner says, "has long been a cornerstone of both American immigration law and INS practice." Well, yes. But unifying families has generally meant bringing them together in free societies, not repressive ones. No one ever suggested in the 1970s that we return refusenik relatives to Brezhnev's Russia, or in the 1980s that Sandinista opponents in Miami be forcibly reunited with their persecuted families in Nicaragua.

In an asylum case, the country of origin is always on trial, and the country of origin knows it. Fidel Castro understands that if Elián can be sent back without a court hearing, the whole of U.S. Cuba policy—the trade embargo, Helms-Burton, isolation through the OAS—will collapse into incoherence. After all, if this is a regime to which a defenseless 6-year-old dissident-by-association can be entrusted, by what logic do we block grown men from trading microchips for cigars? Elián González is a means by which Castro can undermine the trade embargo for free—no human rights concessions required.

It has been clear since 1994, when the Clinton administration agreed to repatriate Cubans found in international waters, that thawed relations with Castro are what the president wishes, too. Miami's Cubans are alleged to be politicizing this case while Washington hews to principle. But the reverse is true. At its crudest, the case sets up Al Gore—who has been admirably forthright in his insistence that Elián's family be brought to the United States—as a hero to Florida's swing voters. More broadly, the president is getting the rapprochement with Castro he wants, but dares not admit.

Last week, the State Department announced that both Elián's grandmothers had been given U.S. visas. They are welcome here, but not material to the case. We need the father, Juan Miguel González—along with his wife, Elián's newborn stepsister, and anyone else Castro might later employ as a hostage—before we even *consider* sending Elián back to Cuba.

That does not, however, mean that Elián's return should be automatic, even if his father continues to insist on it. There is a direct legal precedent here. The 1971 case *In re B.G., Vlasta Z.* v. *San Bernardino County* concerned a Czech dissident and his 5- and 6-year-old children, who had fled Czechoslovakia after the 1968 Soviet invasion—against the mother's will. The father died of cancer weeks after arriving, leaving a testament expressing his wish that the children stay. Two years later, the mother arrived in California to demand her children's return. She was a "fit parent," the court found. But it also ruled on the inhumanity of the Prague regime—and ordered that the children remain.

If Juan Miguel González won't take a 90-mile trip to retrieve his child, then he's hardly the father he says he is. If, as is more likely, he is *forbidden* to take a 90-mile trip to retrieve his child, then Cuba is self-evidently not a free enough country to send *anyone* back to without due process—least of all a 6-year-old kid.

—Christopher Caldwell, for the Editors

This Is an Election, Not a Tea Party

Shouldn't the candidates attack each other and stop whining? BY ANDREW FERGUSON

THE CAMPAIGN SEASON is young, so I could still be proved wrong, but for the moment this much seems likely: History will record that the most revolting moment of the election year came during a recent debate among the Republican presidential candidates, held in the otherwise inoffensive city of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

A question was selected from the audience (always a mistake): "Will you propose and agree," asked an earnest young college student, "not to run any negative ads against each other?" The front-runner for the nomination, George W. Bush, put on his most serious face—absolutely smirkless. "I'll run positive ads," he said. "I don't mind debates. I do mind Republicans tearing each other down." At this his closest rival, John McCain, crossed the stage, extended his hand, and said grimly, "I'd like to shake hands right now. We will not run negative ads." The audience erupted in applause. And as the moderator gave a breathless play-by-play—"McCain and Bush just agreed not to run negative ads!"—the two candidates tried to execute one of those awkward soul-brother handshakes that many middle-aged white men have seen during televised sports events but have never quite mastered themselves.

Reasonable persons may, in good faith, differ about this, of course. To them, the most revolting moment of the campaign may have come after Bill Bradley mentioned a vote Al Gore had cast in favor of tobacco companies many years ago. "This smacks of the most desperate kind of negative campaigning," Gore responded. "He said he wouldn't do this, but I guess he changed his mind." (A Gore campaign spokesman was even more deeply hurt: Bradley, he said, was "the professor of petulance.")

Or it may have come last week when Bob Dole—a war hero at Anzio—published a paid advertisement in the *Des Moines Register* complaining that Steve Forbes—an honors student at Far Hills Country Day—had ruined Dole's chances of getting elected president in 1996. How? By running ads that were so . . . so *negative*.

Or it may have come when the campaign of John McCain (another war hero) issued a press backgrounder calling George Bush's tax plan "political." Yes, *political*: Now it can be told. Bush's spokesman was hurt. He called the backgrounder "an attack flier." And McCain apologized! A "cheap shot," he said, reprimanding his staff.

Or it may have come . . . But why go on? Too many such moments present themselves, creating a pastel tableau of exquisitely sensitive politicians so easily bruised, almost constantly pained, nursing wounds too deep for tears. One candidate calling another "negative," other candidates terrified that someone will call them "negative," yet another candidate daring to "go negative" but only

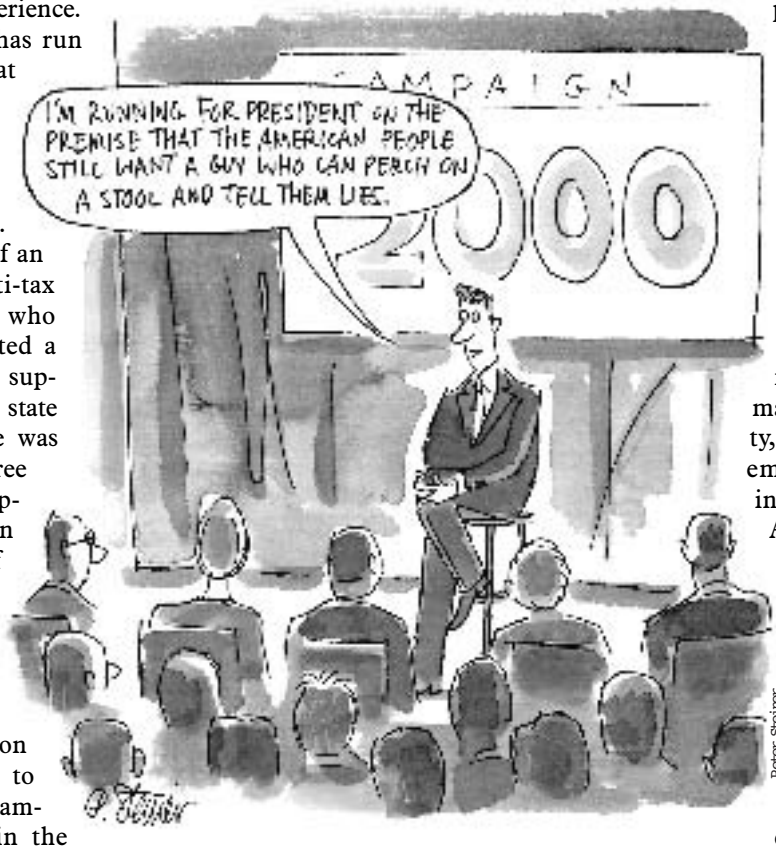
Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

against his opponent's negativity—this election is the Wussy Campaign, a contest among pantywaists, girlymen vying with nancy-boys to lead the world's last remaining superpower. Politics ain't beanbag, said Mr. Dooley. It is now.

The exception to this epidemic of wimpery is—if you can imagine—Steve Forbes. It is not easy to feel sorry for a man with $400 million. But watching Forbes squirm while his opponents castigate him for doing what politicians have always done can be a heartrending experience. This year, so far, he has run precisely one ad that might, according to the present delicate sensibilities, be considered unflattering to an opponent. Forbes's ad consists of an interview with an anti-tax activist from Texas, who says Gov. Bush violated a signed pledge not to support an increase in the state sales tax. The pledge was made in 1994, and three years later Bush supported an increase in the sales tax, as part of an overall tax reform.

The ad is true, as far as it goes. It neglects to mention that Bush's reform entailed a net reduction in taxes. And it fails to cite what the Bush campaign has also said in the governor's defense: that the original tax pledge was signed by an autopen operated by a lowly campaign staffer. In any case, Bush and his allies have run at least three different ads damning Forbes for this one ad. "Some presidential candidates are trying to win Iowa by slinging mud," Iowa senator Chuck Grassley tut-tutted in a pro-Bush radio spot.

Mud isn't what it used to be. It is a commonplace—or if it isn't, it should be—to point out that "negative campaigning" is a longstanding tradition in American politics. In the campaign of 1860 Lincoln was routinely depicted as a baboon by unfriendly cartoonists. Political enemies caricatured Grover Cleveland as a fat lecher, when really he was just fat. Andrew Jackson went to his grave believing his wife had been driven to hers by political opponents who questioned her chastity. By any traditional measure, the negative campaigning of today scarcely qualifies as such. Pointing out that an opponent broke a campaign promise is not negative.



Peter Steiner

Recalling an old Senate vote that your opponent would rather forget is not negative. Calling your opponent's wife a slut—that's negative.

Part of the problem, of course, is that America is a much less robust country than it once was, more comfortable and self-satisfied and made uneasy by commotions of any kind. Niceness is now chief among the civic virtues. The tone of political rhetoric has softened along with the electorate, and the intermediaries in the press reflect the change. In its frequent fits of self-flagellation, the press likes to kid itself that it "thrives on conflict." In fact, by ideological inclination, most reporters are goo-goos in the classic, League of Women Voters mold. "Partisan" is their favorite epithet. When one candidate makes unfavorable mention of an opponent's record, however mildly, the news story will jump with verbs like "slam" and "attack" and nouns like "blast" and metaphors like "slash and burn."

It is possible that politicians themselves have absorbed this prissy sensibility—possible but unlikely. The only good news here is that the candidates, when they denounce negative campaigning, are being completely dishonest. They're professionals, after all, and the best of them are masters at faking the very things that the modern mass campaign makes impossible: sincerity, humor, spontaneity, emotion—"authenticity," in the current catchphrase. A disdain for the negative is the latest catechistic piety, mouthed for the moment and easily discarded in the long term. As professionals they surely know that politics is conflict—or as Alan Keyes put it in the Grand Rapids debate, after the Bush-McCain handshake: "Some people want to pretend that we don't have an adversarial political system. But we do. . . . If you're going to run on your record, [your opponents] get to speak about your record. And it's going to be their interpretation of your record, not your own. That is not negative advertising. That is sharing with people your views, and they're not going to get it any other way."

If Keyes keeps talking like that, people are going to say he's nuts—not that they'll mean it as a negative thing. ♦

"Independent" Expenditures?

How come all the independent ad campaigns are targeting Bush's opponents? **BY MATTHEW REES**

AT FIRST GLANCE, the Republican Leadership Council and the National Right to Life Committee have little in common. The RLC was formed in 1997 by a group of wealthy pro-choice Republicans who feared the GOP was being increasingly defined, in the words of their executive director, "by the actions of an intolerant vocal minority." That's code for outfits like the National Right to Life Committee, the country's largest and most influential anti-abortion organization. Both groups have been active in the Republican presidential primaries, airing radio and television ads zinging their opponents. The surprise is that, while usually at loggerheads with each other, they share a common goal: electing George W. Bush president.

That Bush has succeeded in maneuvering between his party's Scylla and Charybdis is one reason he's the GOP's prohibitive front-runner. But both the RLC and the NRLC have paid a price for their pro-Bush efforts. Steve Forbes, John McCain, and their advisers have lashed out at these groups with a harshness otherwise absent from the Republican campaign.

The bad blood first erupted in mid-November, when the RLC shelled out $100,000 to flood the airwaves in Iowa and New Hampshire with a 30-second anti-Forbes television ad. It featured a woman speaking into the camera, saying, "When Steve Forbes ran for president last time, I kind of liked him. But then he spent all his money tearing down his opponents." The ad went on to bemoan the likelihood that Forbes would air similar ads this year, and closed with the woman saying, "Someone needs to tell Steve Forbes that if he doesn't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all."

This was clever: a negative ad criticizing Forbes for running negative ads, even though he had yet to air any. The Forbes campaign pounced, charging that the spots "flirt dangerously with the laws governing our federal election process" and that the RLC is simply "an attack surrogate for the benefit of Governor Bush."

Claiming that 28 out of the top 35 RLC supporters back Bush, the Forbes campaign demanded the RLC pull the ads. When it didn't, Forbes began airing his own ads trashing the RLC as a "liberal" front for Bush. (The RLC promptly fired back with radio ads accusing Forbes of "twisting the facts" and noting that he once gave $10,000 to the group.) Forbes also filed a complaint with the Federal Election Commission, seeking an injunction that would force the ads to be withdrawn. A ruling may take years.

After all this buildup, the anti-Bush ad Forbes began airing a few weeks ago had little bite. But that didn't stop the RLC from returning fire with another $100,000 buy in Iowa and New Hampshire. "Steve Forbes has a history of unfairly attacking fellow Republicans," declares the RLC ad, alleging that his critique of Bush's record on taxes "distorts the truth."

And that set off more complaints from the Forbes campaign: The RLC is a "liberal pro-abortion . . . front group" being used by Bush "to make unethical personal attacks on Steve Forbes." In a comical twist, Bill Dal Col, the Forbes campaign manager, invoked Bush's service on his father's 1988 primary campaign, implying W. was responsible for the "very negative 'Senator Straddle'" ad that knocked Bob Dole out of the contest.

The Forbes campaign has every reason to be upset about the RLC, whose ads have been almost as dishonest as those Forbes ran against Dole four years ago. If the group really were dedicated to curbing intra-Republican squabbles, it would have criticized Bush's recent ad against McCain.

But Forbes has not shown that the RLC broke the law by, say, coordinating with the Bush campaign. Yes, the group is dominated by moderate Bush backers (Christine Todd Whitman, George Pataki, etc.). And it's clear they adore him because he looks like a winner, he opposes litmus tests, and, in the words of one executive committee member, "he won't embarrass them when they announce at their dinner parties that they're supporting him." But even Georgette Mosbacher, an RLC member and a national co-chair of the McCain campaign, denies the group is just a stooge for Bush. "That's ridiculous," she told me.

McCain has wisely ignored the Forbes/RLC scrum. Meanwhile, he and his aides have been waging their own battle against the National Right to Life Committee and the Grover Norquist-led Americans for Tax Reform. These groups have been hitting McCain on a number of fronts. It's not clear which side is scoring more effective blows—all are being sullied—but the beneficiary is Bush.

For most of his career in Congress, McCain has been viewed as a reliable pro-life vote, though not a crusader. He had reasonably friendly relations with pro-life groups and a few years ago spoke at a Christian Coalition convention held in Phoenix.

Everything changed, however, once he proposed radical campaign-finance reform in 1995. That's because a number of groups, including National Right to Life, believe McCain's bill would cripple their ability to engage in issue advocacy, which they believe helps elect pro-lifers to Congress. Thus, in the NRLC ratings of members of Congress, a vote for a campaign finance bill like McCain's is scored as a pro-abortion vote.

McCain's stance on campaign reform was destined to cause him

Frames from the Americans for Tax Reform ads

trouble in the Republican presidential primaries, but his problems with the NRLC have only grown over the past six months. During an August 19 interview with editors from the *San Francisco Chronicle*, he said that even in the long term, he "would not support the repeal of *Roe* v. *Wade*." He then had to issue two "clarifications" before he found acceptable pro-life language. And in a November 23 interview with Don Imus, he derided people who vote solely on the basis of a candidate's abortion stance.

More recently, in a CNN interview aired January 15, McCain mentioned Warren Rudman, a former New Hampshire senator, as a possible attorney general in his administration. Invoking Rudman—whose Senate memoir warned the GOP not to align itself with the "Christian right," full as it is of "antiabortion zealots, . . . homophobes, bigots, and latter-day Elmer Gantrys"—has only bred further distrust among pro-life activists.

The National Right to Life Committee and its affiliates have responded by airing radio ads against McCain in the two states where he must do well: New Hampshire and South Carolina. The ads have pasted him on everything from campaign reform to his joke about Alzheimer's. "If you want a strongly pro-life president," conclude the ads, "don't support John McCain." The $100,000 of ads purchased by Norquist's Americans for Tax Reform are no less subtle. They charge that McCain's top priority is "nationalized campaign laws that muzzle conservative voices."

The McCain campaign is not amused. It has lobbed nasty charges at Norquist and even more at NRLC. One McCain adviser said of the group, "It's quite something when you go from defending the unborn to policing political correctness." Mike Dennehy, a senior McCain aide in New Hampshire, was even more scathing, telling the *Concord Monitor* that NRLC was running the ads "because they know he [McCain] will enact campaign finance reform and they will lose their six-figure salaries." When NRLC's ads began running in South Carolina, McCain's campaign there characterized the organization as a "Washington-based special interest group" that had used "soft money" to pay for its advertising (a false charge, as it turns out). And McCain himself roasted NRLC for "attacking me recently and opposing a soft money ban," which he says is "doing double harm to the pro-life movement."

Behind closed doors, McCain aides ascribe other motives to NRLC, calling it "Austin East" and a "satellite office" of the Bush campaign. The sentiment is not confined to the McCain campaign. A top aide to another GOP presidential candidate, asked whether the NRLC had become a de facto arm of the Bush campaign, replied, "I don't know why you say de facto. It's official."

That's an exaggeration, but it's not completely off the mark. For while Bush's abortion-related rhetoric has been squishy on judges, platform language, a running mate, and overturning *Roe*, the NRLC is nonetheless

comfortable with him and his record. The group's officials first met him in 1987, when he was working on his father's campaign. It was clear to them that his opposition to abortion was part of who he was. Darla St. Martin, a senior NRLC official, has met with him regularly ever since and says, "There's never been any equivocation in his position."

Pro-lifers cite Bush's participation in getting a parental-notification bill through the Texas legislature last year as proof of his commitment to their cause. They also point to the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League, which reported recently that Texas and Michigan had enacted more anti-abortion measures in 1999 than any other state in a single year. NARAL has even aired a number of television ads in New Hampshire excoriating Bush, while ignoring every other Republican candidate.

In targeting Bush, NARAL has made the same simple calculation as both the National Right to Life Committee and the Republican Leadership Council: Bush is the favorite to become the Republican nominee, and it would be foolish to make the perfect the enemy of good. Translation: Gary Bauer, Steve Forbes, Orrin Hatch, and Alan Keyes all have stronger pro-life positions than Bush, but he'll be the one who gets the nod if NRLC endorses a candidate during the primaries. (The RLC is unlikely to endorse for legal reasons, but its sympathies are not in doubt.)

The real question is whether Bush can carry off this tightrope walk through the rest of the primaries and, if he becomes the nominee, the general election. A test came January 20 in Iowa, when he was asked what he thought of the *Roe* decision, and he called it a "reach that overstepped the constitutional bounds." That didn't satisfy Bauer or NARAL, but neither the Republican Leadership Council nor the National Right to Life Committee took offense.

This success in navigating an issue as dicey as abortion, say Bush's aides, proves he can win in November. They might be right. ♦

In Defense of Special Interests

Campaign finance reform is not just unnecessary; it's anti-constitutional.

BY HARRY V. JAFFA

IN THE PRESENT political silly season, no subject has generated more heat and less light than that of campaign financing. John McCain has practically made it the center of his drive for the presidency, and Al Gore and Bill Bradley have been close behind. The only public official who has consistently brought intelligence to bear upon the question is senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, who is not running for president. He has said, repeatedly and truly, that all the efforts to outlaw "soft money" violate the First Amendment. He might have added that all the existing campaign finance laws are unconstitutional, and would have been held to be such, if the Supreme Court had known its business.

Consider that, under current law, as interpreted by the Court, no limit may be placed on the amount of a candidate's own money that he may spend on his own—but not anyone else's—candidacy. Hence Ross Perot or Steve Forbes is permitted to spend

Harry V. Jaffa is a distinguished fellow at the Claremont Institute in Claremont, California.

$100,000,000 on himself—but he cannot give more than $1,000 to a gifted but impecunious younger politician, better able than himself to articulate his policies. Suppose that there is someone out there with the soul of Abraham Lincoln, but as poor as Lincoln was at the outset of his career. Suppose some wealthy patron saw his own convictions better advanced by this younger man. Something very like this launched the careers of Calvin Coolidge, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan. Surely, we do not want to exclude the very rich from presidential politics, but neither do we want them to constitute a unique political class.

Any limit on political contributions is constitutionally suspect. The reason lies in the First Amendment, which prohibits "abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or of the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for redress of grievances." The Supreme Court has held, reasonably, that the right to advance one's political opinions by the expenditure of one's own money is indissolubly linked to the right to advance them by one's personal speech. Why this right may be limited to $1,000 is never explained.

But the rights of speech, press, assembly, and petition do not stand in isolation from each other. They obviously form part of the process by which "we the people" choose those who are to hold office under our authority. It is essential for the integrity of that process that those who hold office do not write laws telling the rest of us how to exercise our rights in deciding who next shall fill those offices. To the extent that a government bureaucracy decides the allocation of resources of political speech, to that extent is the electoral process a reflection of the opinions of the government bureaucracy, and not of the people. In a democracy, the people choose the government; the government ought to have no role in choosing itself.

Yet it is notorious that every campaign finance law that has ever been passed has made it more difficult for challengers to unseat incumbents. The $1,000 limit is obviously designed to safeguard the advantages of incumbency. Their offices make incumbents familiar to voters, as well as providing means of ingratiating themselves, which their challengers must overcome. Incumbents of both major parties, as a political class, have conspired (as in McCain-Feingold) to make the hue and cry against "special interests" a pretext for protecting the existing power structure.

What about those infamous "special interests"? Do not people who invest in candidates and parties expect a return on their investments? Do not lobbyists spend untold millions shaping the laws in their clients' interest? These questions are perfectly appropriate. What is amazing is that today no one seems aware that they were the subject of the most profound consideration by those who framed, and those who ratified, the Constitution.

In the famous tenth Federalist, James Madison framed the problem of dealing with "factions," a word which was a virtual synonym for what we call special interests. According to Madison, however, faction is an inevitable by-product of liberty, and to try to cure the evils of faction by abolishing liberty would be a "remedy . . . worse than the disease. . . . Liberty is to faction, what air is to fire. . . . But it could not be a less folly to abolish liberty, which is essential to political life, . . . than it would be to wish the annihilation of air." "The latent causes of faction," writes Madison, "are sown in the nature of man."

> But the most common and durable source of factions has been the various and unequal distribution of property. Those who hold, and those who are without property, have ever formed distinct interests in society. Those who are creditors, and those who are debtors, fall under a like discrimination. A landed interest, a manufacturing interest, a mercantile interest, a monied interest, with many lesser interests, grow up of necessity in civilized nations, and divide them into different classes, actuated by different sentiments and views. The regulation of these various and interfering interests forms the principal task of modern legislation, and involves the spirit of party and faction in the necessary and ordinary operations of government.

Let us note that "the spirit of party

and faction" is involved in "the necessary and ordinary operation of government." Not the suppression of that spirit, but its emancipation, is what the Father of the Constitution promises. How did this comport with good government? In the extended, federal republic of the United States, the very size of the country guarantees a number and variety of special interests so great that no one, or few combined, can form a majority. This was certainly true in 1787, and it is much more true today. It is this number and variety that ensures a republican statesman the freedom to seek that combination of interests that serves the public interest and advances the public good. The interests that form the ruling coalition will each have to moderate its demands in order to be part of the coalition. Statesmanship consists in promoting this moderation to the point that the special interests in fact serve the public good.

The most notable example in American history of a campaign against special interests is Andrew Jackson's war against the second Bank of the United States. Jackson's speeches describe in lurid terms a vast conspiracy of bankers against the common people. Yet the practical result of the destruction of the bank was the transfer of the financial capital of the country from Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, to Wall Street, New York. This of course was the intention of Jackson's closest adviser, Martin Van Buren of New York. Then and thereafter, campaigns against special interests have, more often than not, been camouflage for other special interests more shady and less defensible than those they oppose.

Many years ago there was a sign in Grand Central Terminal in New York that said, "Beware of Pickpockets." As the sign caught the eye of passers-by, they instinctively put their hands on their wallets, to the great advantage of the pickpockets. Think of campaign finance reform legislation as another "Beware of Pickpockets" sign. ♦

The Rise and Fall of a Gangsta Coach

Jimmy Johnson debased football, college and professional. BY GEOFFREY NORMAN

JIMMY JOHNSON RESIGNED as head coach of the Miami Dolphins on Sunday, January 16, the day after the Jacksonville Jaguars beat his team like a rented mule, as they say in football circles. The final score was 62-7 and it wasn't that close. This was the second consecutive year in which the Dolphins were humiliated in the playoffs. Last year, the Denver Broncos painted a 38-3 whipping on them, and Johnson resigned after that game, too. But he changed his mind within 24 hours or so. This time, he told reporters, "it is final and forever."

"I've had my time in the sun," Johnson said, "my time in the spotlight. Now I want to spend time with my family."

Johnson's fall was treated almost elegiacally by the networks, some of which carried the press conference live, including Johnson's swallowed sobs and emotional hugs with the team owner. You would have thought, if you knew no history, that this was a case of a man stepping down after long, arduous, and honorable service. And you almost expected someone to start reading from Housman or Yeats.

In truth, Johnson had been at Miami all of four years. This was his fourth head coaching job. The others he held for five years each. Two of those positions were in the college ranks; two with the pros. One of Johnson's college teams, the University of Miami, won a national championship. The Dallas Cowboys won back-to-back Super Bowls while he was head coach there.

The Johnson legacy (a word that seems to get a lot of play these days) will not, however, focus on his rootlessness or his ability to win championships. As the mists of sentimentality surrounding his departure dry up, and Johnson's career is viewed clearly, he will be properly remembered as football's first gangsta coach.

It has been a long time since anyone believed in the business about football building character. This was never true in the pros, and if it ever was in the college game, Steven Spielberg could make a soft focus movie about those times, with Tom Hanks

Geoffrey Norman, a writer in Vermont, is the author of Alabama Showdown: The Football Rivalry Between Auburn and Alabama.

playing a coach. Coaches, especially, understand that their obligation is to win games, and they do whatever it takes and hope they don't get caught. If a player can help him win, a coach is willing to overlook a few character flaws.

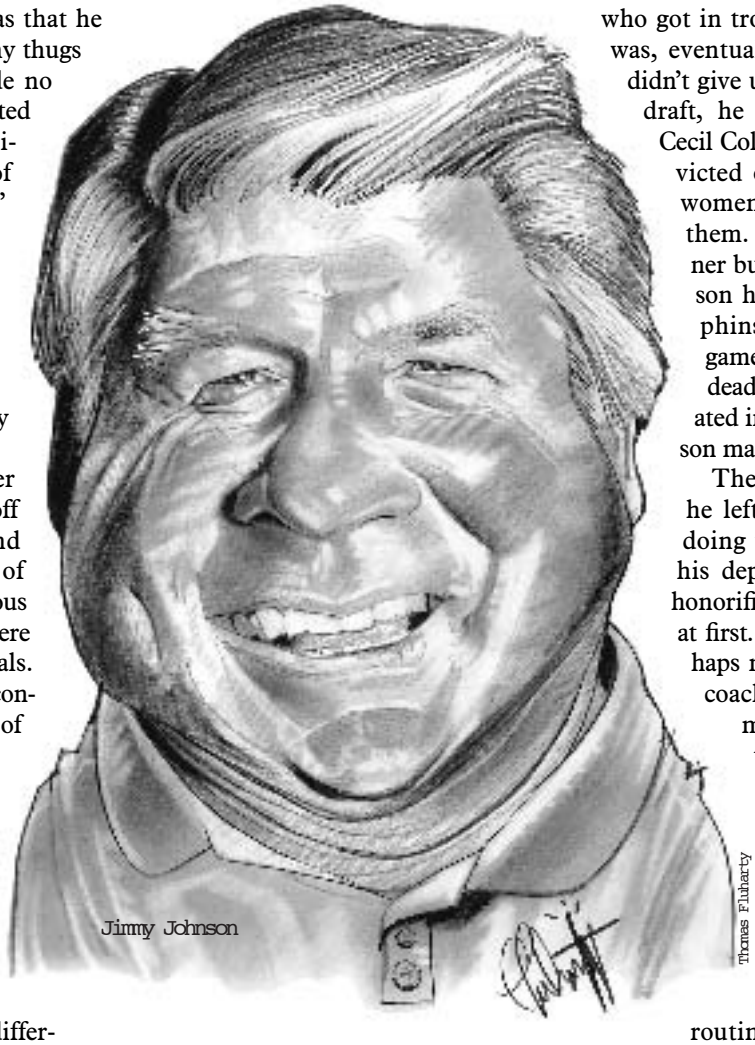
What made Johnson different, made him a pioneer when he was rolling up a big record with the Miami Hurricanes in the '80s, was that he put together a team of many thugs and some felons and made no apologies. He avidly recruited the hard cases. The Hurricanes liked to think of themselves as "outlaws," and they once showed up for a bowl game, with the national championship at stake, dressed in combat fatigues to symbolize, one supposes, the fact that they were "on a mission." They lost the game.

But the rot went deeper than the tasteless clothes off the field or taunting and strutting on it. Several of Johnson's players had serious run-ins with the law and were involved in various scandals. The football program was considered by many to be out of control. However, the year after the combat fatigue incident, the team had another chance to win the national championship and, this time, delivered. After one more year, Johnson left Miami and the college game, with its fussy, if indifferently enforced, standards and went to the pros. The Dallas Cowboys were not required to attend classes or graduate. They were paid above the table, and handsomely, to win.

They were pros.

But it quickly became evident that Johnson preferred the same kind of players in the pros that had worked for him in college. Johnson won a Super Bowl in his fourth year at Dallas. But his players were frequently in trouble with the law and often suspended for violations of the league's drug policies. After his second Super Bowl, he left the team in a dispute with the owner, Jerry Jones. They were unable to share the glory. Johnson did television for a couple of years until the call came from Miami.

He promised the city, and his new owner, a Super Bowl. Promised to develop a running game to complement the passing of quarterback Dan Marino, the team's aging star. Inevitably, he brought in his kind of players.



These included Lawrence Phillips, a running back best known for dragging his girlfriend down a flight of stairs while he was a player at the University of Nebraska. Phillips was suspended for a few games and given the usual classes in "anger management," which, typically, he seems to have flunked. After he was cut by the pro team that drafted him—good runner but too hard to handle—he made his way with almost biblical inevitability to Miami. Johnson seemed to feel he could get players like Phillips to perform for him and what they did with their free time was their own business. And why not? It had worked before.

But it didn't work with Phillips, who got in trouble with the law and was, eventually, cut. Still, Johnson didn't give up. In last year's college draft, he took a player named Cecil Collins who had been convicted of twice breaking into women's rooms and fondling them. Collins was a fair runner but by the end of the season he was in jail. The Dolphins still had no ground game and Marino's arm was dead. The team was humiliated in the playoffs and Johnson made his emotional exit.

The surprise was not that he left—he had a history of doing that—but the mood of his departure. The tears and honorifics seemed out of place, at first. But, on reflection, perhaps not. Johnson, like other coaching legends, left his mark. Because of him, the game will never be the same. The gangsta act has become an accepted part of football, less controversial than instant replay. Fans expect taunting and strutting and trash-talking. Players routinely get into trouble with the law for a variety of offenses, including knocking their girlfriends around. This season, a member of the Carolina Panthers did manage to raise eyebrows by (allegedly) killing his pregnant girlfriend.

So in the end, maybe this was another take on the old melancholy tale. Jimmy Johnson looked around and realized that the other guys were signing actual killers. He was no longer an innovator. The game had passed him by. ♦

The Modest Biographer

Jervis Anderson, 1932-2000. **BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN**

Anne Hall

I OPENED THE *New York Times* the other day to discover that Jervis Anderson, "New Yorker Writer and Biographer of [Bayard] Rustin, is Dead at 67." I realized, with a stab of hopeless sadness, that we hadn't spoken for nearly three years—a long time for someone I liked as much as I liked Jervis. "Joe," he would say when he called, his part-English, part-Jamaican accent able somehow to extract two syllables out of my first name, "Jervis Anderson," adding his second name, as if I knew—or had even heard of—another person named Jervis.

His calls always pleased me, though they came too seldom. Often they would begin being about baseball, about which he was a knowledgeable fan, and then go on to other, larger things. Sports was one of many interests we had in common. He had grown up playing cricket, about which he also knew a vast deal and on which he wrote a brilliant essay, "Cricket and C.L.R. James," for the *American Scholar*, one of the few things that succeeded in making that highly mysterious game intelligible to Americans, or at least to this American. He also knew boxing, in both its glory and its gory aspects, and he wrote well about it, too.

Jervis had a generous smile and an explosive laugh, which it was always a pleasure to evoke. I don't think I knew anyone who had less meanness or side. Through the worst period of black-white relations in America, he never, in my presence, even hinted that, as a black man who had doubtless suffered his share of prejudice, he existed in a state of moral superiority. He was what my friend Edward Shils called "a sweet character."

Not without his mysteries, Jervis was, to use an old-fashioned word, personable without being in the least personal. In all our meetings and conversations, he told me almost nothing about his private life. Once he adverted to an early marriage, long ago ended and with no children. About his life in Jamaica, he rarely spoke. We never discussed anything about the arrangements necessary to everyday existence: apartments, food, clothes, money.

Although he wrote mostly about black subjects—producing biographies of A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin, *New Yorker* profiles of Derek Walcott and Ralph Ellison—Jervis read much more widely than his writings might suggest. He read as a writer reads, with an intense interest in the little secrets of how it is done. He read vast quantities of novels and stories. So far as I know, he never attempted to write fiction, but, nearly 20 years ago, he mentioned that he would love to write about his boyhood in the Caribbean, and I gather he had begun to do so before his death.

Jervis was an immensely patient worker. Before writing his biographies, he put in years of reading, legwork, interviewing, holding back on actual composition until he was fully prepared. I don't know if he wrote about black subjects because they most closely interested him—he also wrote a fine book on the Harlem Renaissance—or because, as a black writer, he felt called upon to do so.

What I do know is that Jervis seemed to need subjects he could admire, even though he first appeared on my own intellectual map with a quietly devastating attack in *Commentary*—written in 1968, when it took courage to write such a piece—on Eldridge Cleaver, then a radical who justified violence on racial grounds. Subjects worthy of his admiration did not come cheap. He may have sensed the world running out of them.

Jervis was almost too nice a man to be a writer. Neither strong criticism nor self-assertion came easily to him. The putdown was not a form he practiced. He was deeply respectful, but in a most discerning way. His admiration for William Shawn, under whose editorship he was first invited to write for the *New Yorker*, was complete, and he never referred to him, in my hearing, other than as "Mr. Shawn."

Now that he is dead, what impresses me most about Jervis, apart from the seriousness with which he practiced his craft, was his loneliness. Not

Joseph Epstein is a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

that he himself ever suggested he was lonely. Still, as a West Indian black in America, he had to have suffered some of the prejudice against blacks without the compensatory feeling of full solidarity with American blacks. As an intellectual, he was essentially an appreciator, an isolated position among people—journalists, artists, intellectuals—happiest on the attack. Greatly good-natured though he was, I'm not sure he was able to extend the gift of intimacy to many people.

Jervis lived and died alone. His neighbors, the *New York Times* obituarist noted, only suspected something was wrong when his newspapers and mail began to pile up. The delayed knowledge of his death speaks more profoundly to his isolation than anything else could. I hope he had some awareness of how attractive a man he was. Montaigne writes: "There is no sweet solace for the loss of our friends other than that which is given us by the knowledge that there was nothing we forgot to tell them." I, alas, forgot to tell Jervis that he was a gent, the real thing, and a member of that best of all minority groups, the good guys. ♦

Lies Our Students Tell Us

A false assault accusation at UMass Amherst is part of a trend. BY NAOMI SCHAEFER

AT THE BEGINNING of Christmas break, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst was reeling from a string of rapes perpetrated, possibly by the same man, in November. The police presence on campus grew as the university expanded its campus escort services, installed additional outdoor emergency phones, and distributed 15,000 hand-held shriek alarms which send out a high-pitched deafening noise in case of attack. And, naturally, there were rallies, including a parade of "rape victims" made up as though they had just been assaulted.

As it turns out, they weren't the only ones playing the victim. Last month, the fourth woman who reported having been assaulted in November admitted to police that she had fabricated her story. She (the police will not release her name) had told authorities that on the afternoon of November 16 at a public location in the middle of campus, a man had grabbed her from behind, slit her face with a knife, and run off. In a strangely melodramatic touch, this was supposed to have happened while, only a stone's throw away, 500 students were participating in a rally to combat violence against women. The episode is made all the more disturbing by the fact that the young lady cut her own face.

Hampshire County first assistant district attorney David Angier has decided not to pursue a complaint against her. The relevant statute, he explains, was enacted to punish false accusations and behavior that "willfully disrupts law enforcement." The woman in question did not name a perpetrator, but her conduct does seem to have expanded an already extensive criminal investigation. According to Barbara Pitoniak, a spokeswoman for UMass Amherst, $21,000 was spent on overtime for police and campus security in the 19 days after the first attack.

Angier also cites a second element of Massachusetts law that he says prevents him from filing a charge: the requirement that the confession of a crime (filing a false report, in this case) be "corroborated with independent evidence." He dismisses without explanation the idea that it might be difficult to locate evidence proving her story was false. In fact, Angier says that he is not even sure that her report was false.

"If you look at the final ends of law enforcement, it is to see that the UMass students are safe, that women are safe from rape," Angier says, although the woman in this case never reported having been raped. He is particularly concerned about women on college campuses, who "are probably the most removed from someone they can talk to," although the UMass website lists 13 different "places to go for support and a safe place to talk about what is happening on campus." At bottom, the prosecutor's theory seems to be that if anyone is prosecuted for filing a false report, then victims of real attacks will be less likely to report them.

Angier's worry about "the chilling effect on women coming forward" is shared by many others on campus. Carol Wallace, director of the Everywoman's Center at UMass,

Naomi Schaefer is assistant editor of Commentary.

told the *Boston Globe*: "One of the myths about sexual assault in particular is that women do make false reports." Needless to say, prosecuting a woman for making a false report might lend credibility to such myths.

While no one at UMass or in the DA's office has said so, one reason not to pursue a complaint against this woman might be her psychological well-being; she did, after all, slit her own face with a knife. In fact, that would be the most plausible explanation for why charges weren't brought, except that her false report is only the most recent in a series of incidents on college campuses around the country in which someone has lied about an attack (physical or verbal), a threat, or an act of vandalism in order to "make a statement."

Last October, Jennifer Prissel, a senior at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota, told police that two men had attacked her in a parking lot, while shouting anti-gay slurs. Since she made her report only two weeks after the murder of University of Wyoming student Matthew Shepard, the campus response was overwhelming. Almost $12,000 was raised in reward money for information about the attackers. Nearly two months later, Ms. Prissel admitted that she had made up the whole thing. "Gay students were horrified by Ms. Prissel's account," according to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, "but thrilled with the public response." One junior at the school explained, "It was a giant step forward to bringing the community around to respecting gay students."

While the *Chronicle* cautioned that this "flurry of fabrications doesn't necessarily suggest a trend," the article contained an interesting inventory of such false reports. At Duke University, for instance, a black doll was found hanging from a noose in a tree on campus outside an inn where the Black Student Alliance was meeting. A few days later, after much had been made by the university administration about this "hate crime," two black students admitted having hung the doll themselves. Still, some at Duke defended the act, claiming it highlighted the problem of race relations on campus. After a white student at Guilford College in North Carolina falsely claimed to have been assaulted by someone who wrote the words "nigger lover" on her chest, the president of the school spoke glowingly of "the important conversations" that had resulted from the made-up report. "We should carry them forward regardless of the reality of the initiating events," he remarked.

The lesson is clear. Students can gain attention for their particular political agendas "regardless of the reality" of events on campus. Because these fibbers have a ready supply of supporters searching for any opportunity to galvanize the campus against racism, sexism, homophobia, or what-have-you, they will more likely end up local heroes than subject to prosecution by district attorneys, let alone punishment by college administrations.

The UMass case is, however, more than just another incident in a larger trend. It marks the new lengths to which students are willing to go to make a point. In this case, a student was willing to tamper with an ongoing investigation into actual cases of assault to further highlight the particular issue of violence against women. Worse, she succeeded, because it's not only college students who are so politicized that they see virtue in such made-up attacks, but college administrators as well. And so long as such attention-grabbing stunts are rewarded rather than punished, there will be no end to them, even as they draw attention away from actual threats to people's well-being and safety. ♦

When Politics Was Everything

Ella Wolfe, 1896-2000. BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

On Saturday, January 8, Ella Goldberg Wolfe died in Palo Alto, California. She was 103. Given her age and infirmities, the news was not a shock. Yet her passing is much more than obituary fodder. To scholars of 20th-century communism, and to a few ex-Communists, her death is a landmark, for Ella Wolfe was the last prominent survivor of the generation that made Bolshevism a global, rather than a Russian, phenomenon. With her death, the line of living witness ends.

She was born a Jew, near Kherson in Ukraine, and was brought to New York City as an immigrant. At 14, she met her great love, a Socialist activist named Bertram Wolfe. Four years later came the First World War, which dramatized the social ills the radical Left had decried in a way no speech or poem could. Then when Ella was 21, from Moscow there came news of the Lenin-Trotsky coup.

The way forward seemed clear. Bert Wolfe had become a leading member of the Left Wing faction of the U.S. Socialist party, which in 1919 helped found the American Communist organization. He and Ella—by then his wife—were no mere activists handing out leaflets on street corners. They became world travelers, penetrating the sacred precincts of the Kremlin as leading functionaries of the new Communist International, or Comintern, then heading down to Mexico, where many believed the peasant revolution of Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata would take a Bolshevik direction. Bert Wolfe, by now a veteran of the American Communist underground, became a secret commander of the slender cadre of Mexican Communists.

Ella Wolfe

Hoover Institution

But neither were the Wolfes ideological bureaucrats. In Mexico City, between meetings of Comintern cells, they became intimates of the artistic circle headed by Diego Rivera—of whom Bertram Wolfe remains the best biographer—and adorned by his nymphet lover, Frida Kahlo. The Rivera and Wolfe salons intersected with that of the photographer Edward Weston and his paramour, Italian-American actress and photographer Tina Modotti, from San Francisco. Indeed, it all had a rather Californian flavor, easygoing and life-loving, at the beginning.

But the days of Communist bohemianism were numbered. As the 1920s drew to an end, ugly realities intruded. After Lenin's death in 1924, the Comintern became a theater for strident quarrels among his heirs, notably Leon Trotsky, Joseph Stalin, and Nikolay Bukharin. The so-called Right Wing of American communism, headed by Wolfe and Jay Lovestone, another Jewish radical from New York, temporarily triumphed in the American party.

Lovestone and Wolfe embraced a theory that has struck numerous historians as supremely common-sensical. Known as American Exceptionalism, it held that a prosperous United States where factory workers owned their own homes and cars could not be won for communism by the grim, conspiratorial methods employed in tsarist Russia or Eastern Europe. Thus, American communism had to work out its own program and methods.

Stalin and his minions, however, understood something that Lovestone and Wolfe did not: The Stalinist Comintern had no interest in organizing the mass of American workers.

Stephen Schwartz lives in Sarajevo. His Kosovo: Background to a War *will be published in Britain next month.*

Rather, it sought pliable agents to serve as spies and terrorists, and such individuals were plentiful in all the rich countries of the world.

They were misfits, alienated pseudo-intellectuals and semi-criminal nihilists, for whom arguments over ideals and doctrine were abstract exercises not tethered to practical reality. With such recruits available, the Comintern's Muscovite bosses tired of quibbling with Lovestone and Wolfe and booted them out of official Communist ranks, although not before the two Americans had personally told Stalin what they thought of him. They were lucky to make it back to Manhattan alive.

For most of the 1930s, while a new generation of ignorant and ambitious young people flocked to the Comintern, the Wolfes and Lovestone wandered in a kind of limbo. They constituted a small sect—the Communist Party (Opposition) of America—that made some noise in its time, involving itself in a few major union struggles, then disappeared. Stalin's open betrayal of the Republic during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39 and the Bukharin purge trial in 1938 were moments of truth. By the onset of World War II, Bert and Ella Wolfe had reluctantly begun to leave communism behind.

They turned to a mainly private life, although Bert continued writing and produced his classic *Three Who Made a Revolution* in 1948. Eventually, they were invited to the Hoover Institution at Stanford, where they again became stars.

Bert Wolfe died in 1977. I came to know Ella at Hoover in 1982, at the time of my own regrettably late break with communism. I was researching the Spanish Civil War, and she was a fount of inspiration. She remembered everything and everybody and was unfailingly generous. She became a friend, mentor, and confidante.

Bert did not live to see the election of Ronald Reagan and the collapse of Soviet communism, but Ella did. Also during the 1980s, she began a third career, as the outstanding English-speaking authority on Frida Kahlo. The Mexican painter had become a global icon of feminism, and Ella was the main source for much of the "scholarship" that accompanied her cult.

Ella found the feminist canonization of Kahlo more than a little exasperating, especially as museum gift shops came to be cluttered with Frida Kahlo diaries, cocktail napkins, coffee mugs, baseball caps, T-shirts, and so on. Once, when I stupidly asked her to meet with a young friend of mine interested in the subject, she replied, "Not you, too?"

I and some others who do not miss communism at all will miss Ella Wolfe enormously. ♦

ON TO MARS

America has been lost in space. It's time to find our nerve again.

BY CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

If you were to say to a physicist in 1899 that in 1999, a hundred years later . . . bombs of unimaginable power would threaten the species; . . . that millions of people would take to the air every hour in aircraft capable of taking off and landing without human touch; . . . that humankind would travel to the moon, and then lose interest . . . the physicist would almost certainly pronounce you mad.

—Michael Crichton

What manner of creature are we? It took 100,000 years for humans to get inches off the ground. Then, astonishingly, it took only 66 to get from Kitty Hawk to the moon. And then, still more astonishingly, we lost interest, spending the remaining 30 years of the 20th century going around in circles in low earth orbit, i.e., going nowhere.

Last July, the unmanned Lunar Prospector probe was sent to find out whether the moon contains water. It was a remarkable venture, but even more remarkable was the fact that Prospector was the first NASA spacecraft, manned or unmanned, to land on the moon since the last Apollo astronaut departed in 1972. Twenty-seven years without even a glance back.

We remember the late 15th and 16th centuries as the Age of Exploration. The second half of the 20th was at one point known as the Space Age. What happened? For the first 20 years we saw space as a testing ground, an arena for splendid, strenuous exertion. We were in a race with the Soviets for space supremacy, and mobilized for it as for war. President Kennedy committed all of our resources: men, materiel, money, and spirit. And he was bold. When he promised to land a man on the moon before the decade was out, there were only eight and a half years left. At the time, no American had even orbited the earth.

The Apollo program was a triumph. But the public quickly grew bored. The interview with the moon-bound astronauts aboard *Apollo 13* was not even broadcast, for lack of an audience. It was only when the flight turned into a harrowing drama of survival that an audience assembled. By *Apollo 17*, it was all over. The final three moonshots were canceled for lack of interest.

Looking to reinvent itself, NASA came up with the idea of a space shuttle ferrying men and machines between earth and an orbiting space station. It was a fine idea except for one thing: There was no space station. *Skylab* had been launched in May 1973, then manned for 171 days. But no effort was made to keep its orbit from decaying. It fell to earth and burned. We were left with an enormously expensive shuttle—to nowhere.

The shuttle has had its successes—the views of earth it brought back, the repairs to the Hubble space telescope it enabled. But it has been a dead end scientifically and deadening spiritually. There is today a palpable ennui with space. When did we last get excited? When a 77-year-old man climbed into the shuttle in November 1998 for a return flight. That was the most excitement the shuttle program had engendered in years—the first time in a long time that a launch and the preparations and even the preflight press conference had received live coverage. Televisions were hauled into classrooms so kids could watch.

But watch what? The fact is that we were watching John Glenn reprise a flight he'd made 36 years earlier. It is as if the Wright Brothers had returned to Kitty Hawk in

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Charles Krauthammer is a syndicated columnist for the Washington Post*, an essayist for* Time*, and a contributing editor to* THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

Digital Illustration by Hugh Syme

1939 to skim the sand once again, and the replay was treated as some great advance in aviation.

The most disturbing part of the Glenn phenomenon was the efflorescence of space nostalgia—at a time when space exploration is still in its infancy. We have not really gone anywhere yet, and we are already looking back with sweet self-satisfaction.

The other flutter of excitement generated by the shuttle program occurred a few years earlier when Shannon Lucid received the Congressional Space Medal of Honor for a long-duration flight in low earth orbit. A sign of the times. She is surely brave and spunky, but the lavish attention her feat garnered says much about the diminished state of our space program. Endurance records are fine. But the Congressional Space Medal of Honor? It used to be given to the likes of Alan Shepard and John Glenn, who had the insane courage to park themselves atop an unstable, spanking-new, largely untested eight-story bomb not knowing whether it would blow up under them. Now we give it for spending six months in an orbiting phone booth with a couple of guys named Yuri.

II

What happened? Where is the national will to explore? We are stuck along some quiet historical sidetrack. The fascination today is with communication, calculation, miniaturization, all in the service of multiplying human interconnectedness. Outer space has ceded pride of place to the inner space of the Internet. In fact, space's greatest claim on our interest and resources currently rests on the fact that satellites allow us to page each other and confirm that 9:30 meeting about the new Tostitos ad campaign.

The excitement surrounding Shannon Lucid's six months of sponge baths and Russian food aboard *Mir* is a reflection of the quiet domesticity of this inward-turning time. Perhaps it is the exhaustion after 60 years of world war, cold and hot, stretching right up to the early 1990s. The *Seinfeld* era is not an era for Odyssean adventures. Now is a time for home and hearth—the glowing computer screen that allows endless intercourse with our fellow humans.

Another reason for the diminishing drive for planetary exploration is, perversely, the fruits of the moon landing itself—and in particular that famous photograph of earth taken by the Apollo astronauts during the first human circumnavigation of another celestial body.

"Earthrise" had an important effect on human consciousness. It gave us our first view of earth as it is seen from God's perspective: warm, safe, serene, blessed. It created a kind of preemptive nostalgia for earth, at precisely the moment when earthlings were finally acquiring the ability to leave it.

It is no surprise that "Earthrise" should have become such a cultural icon, particularly for the environmental Left. It offered the cosmic equivalent of the call to "Come home, America" issued just four years after the picture was taken.

That photo and the ethos it promoted—global, sedentary, inward-looking—were the metaphysical complement to the political arguments made at the time, and ever since, for turning our gaze from space back to earth. These are the familiar arguments about social priorities: Why are we spending all this money on space, when there is poverty and disease and suffering at home?

It is a maddening question because, while often offered in good faith, it entirely misses the point. Poverty and disease will always be with us. We have spent, by most estimates, some $5 trillion trying to abolish poverty in the United States alone. Government is simply not very good at solving social problems. But it can be extremely good at solving technical problems. The Manhattan Project is, of course, the classic case. As are the various technological advances forged in war, from radar to computers.

Concerted national mobilization for a specific scientific objective can have great success. This is in sharp contrast to national mobilization for social objectives, which almost invariably ends in disappointment, waste, and unintended consequences (such as the dependency and deviancy spawned by the massive welfare programs and entitlements of the sixties and the seventies—the Left's preferred destination for the resources supposedly squandered on space).

But more exasperating than the poor social science and the misapprehension about the real capacities of government is the tone-deafness of the earth-firsters to the wonder and glory of space, and to the unique opportunity offered this generation. How can one live at the turn of the 21st century, when the planets are for the first time within our grasp, and not be moved by the grandeur of the enterprise?

NASA administrators like to talk about science and spinoffs to justify the space program. Well, the study of bone decalcification in near-earth weightlessness is fine, but it is hardly the motor force behind President Kennedy's ringing declaration, "We choose to go to the Moon." That is not why we, as a people and as a species, ventured into the cosmos in the first place.

Teflon and pagers are nice, too, and perhaps effective politically in selling space. But they are hardly the point.

We are going into space for the same reason George Mallory climbed Everest: Because it is there. For the adventure, for the romance, for the sheer temerity of venturing into the void.

And yet, amid the national psychic letdown that followed the moon landings and is still with us today, that kind of talk seems archaic, anachronistic. So what do we do? We radically contract our horizons. We spend three decades tumbling about in near-earth orbit. We become expert in zero-G nausea and other fascinations. And when we do venture out into the glorious void, we do it on the very cheap, to accommodate the diminished national will and the pinched national resources allocated for exploration.

The reason NASA administrator Daniel Goldin adopted the "faster, better, cheaper" approach is that he was forced to. He was rightly afraid that when you send a $1 billion probe loaded with experiments and hardware and it fails (as happened to the Mars Observer in 1993), you risk losing your entire congressional backing—and your entire program. He had little choice but to adopt a strategy of sending cheaper but more vulnerable probes in order to lessen the stakes riding on each launch. Probes like the Mars Polar Lander.

III

When the Mars Polar Lander disappeared last month, the country went into a snit. The public felt let down, cheated of the exotic entertainment NASA was supposed to deliver. The press was peeved, deprived of a nice big story with lovely pictures. Jay Leno, the nation's leading political indicator, was merciless. ("If you're stuck for something to get NASA for Christmas, you can't go wrong with a subscription to *Popular Mechanics*. . . . But they're not giving up. NASA said today they're gonna continue to look for other forms of intelligent life in the universe. And when they find it, they're gonna hire him.") And Congress preened, displaying concern, pulling its chin and promising hearings on the failure of the last three Mars missions. This will be a bit of Kabuki theater in which clueless politicians, whose greatest mathematical feat is calculating last week's fund-raising take, will pinion earnest scientists about why they could not land a go-cart on the South Pole of a body 400 million miles away on a part of the planet we had never explored.

In other words, we are in for a spell of national bellyaching and finger-pointing which will inevitably culminate in the crucifixion of a couple of NASA administrators, a few symbolic budget cuts, and a feeling of self-satisfaction all around.

The biggest scandal of the Mars exploration projects is not that a few have failed, but the way the nation has reacted to those failures. A people couched and ready, expectant and entitled, armed with a remote control yet denied Martian pictures to go with their *Today* show coffee, will be avenged.

Who is to blame for the Mars disasters? Not the scientists, but the people who will soon be putting them on trial.

Landing on another planet is very hard. And landing on its South Pole, terra incognita for us, is even harder. As one researcher put it, this *is* rocket science. "Look at the history of landers on Mars," professor Howard McCurdy of American University told the *Washington Post*. "Of twelve attempts, three have made it. The Soviets lost all six of theirs. . . . Mars really eats spacecraft."

Something this hard requires not just technology—which we have—but will, which we don't. And national will is expressed in funding. Since the glory days of Apollo, space exploration has progressively been starved. Today, funding for NASA is one fifth what it was in 1965, less than 0.8 percent of the federal budget.

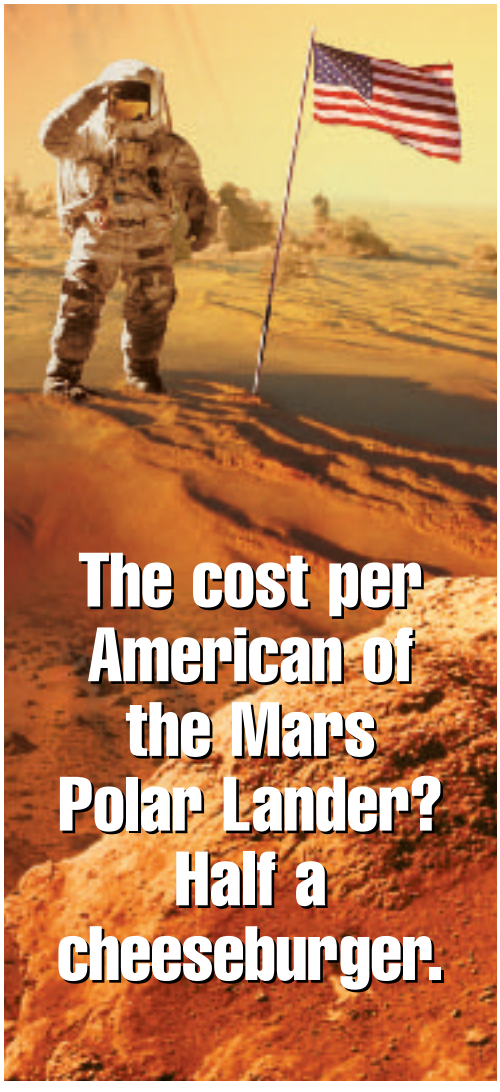
And not only has the overall NASA budget declined, but so has the fraction allocated to both manned and unmanned exploration of the moon and the planets. The

budget has been eaten by the space shuttle and the low-earth-orbit space station being built two decades late to finally provide a destination for the wandering shuttle.

Then there is what NASA calls "mission to planet earth," a program devoted to studying such terrestrial concerns as ozone, land use, climate variability, and such. A nice idea. But it used to be NASA's mission to lift us above ozone and land and climate to reach for something higher. The whole idea of space exploration was to find out what is out *there*.

The cost of the Mars Polar Lander was $165 million. In an $8 trillion economy, that is a laughable sum. *Waterworld* cost more. The new Bellagio hotel in Vegas could buy eight Polar Landers with $80 million left over for a bit of gambling. To put it in terms of competing space outlays, $165 million is less than half the cost of a shuttle launch. For the price of a single shuttle mission (launch, flight time, landing, and overhead) we could have sent two Mars Polar Landers and gotten $70 million back in change.

Planetary exploration is so hamstrung financially that the Polar Lander—which NASA last week officially declared dead—sent no telemetry during its final descent onto the planet. That was to save money. We'll never know what went wrong. Adding a black box, something to send simple signals to tell us what happened, would have cost $5 million. Five million! That doesn't buy one minute of air time on the Super Bowl.



The hard fact is that the kind of cheap, fast spacecraft NASA has been forced to build does reduce the loss in case of failure. But it increases the chance of failure. You cannot build in the kind of backup systems that go into the larger craft we sent exploring in the past. The Viking missions that 25 years ago touched down on Mars and gave us those extraordinary first pictures of its surface, and the Voyager spacecraft that gave us magnificent flybys of the entire solar system, typically cost 10 to 20 times more than the new "faster, better, cheaper" projects.

It is a travesty that the very same Congress that has squeezed funding for these programs will now be conducting the inquisition to find out why this shoestring operation could not produce another spectacular success. But we can't just blame the politicians. This is a democracy. They are responding to their constituency. Their constituency is disappointed that it received no entertainment from the Mars Polar Lander, for which the average American contributed the equivalent of half a cheeseburger. If we had had the will to devote a whole cheeseburger to a Mars lander, it could have been equipped with redundant systems, and might have succeeded.

IV

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves. What then to do? If we are going to save resources in acknowledgment of the diminished national will to explore, we should begin by shutting the maw that is swallowing up so much of the space budget: the shuttle and the space station. It is not as if we have nowhere to go but endlessly around earth. Recent discoveries have given us new ways and new reasons for establishing a human presence on the moon and on Mars.

Until a few years ago, it could have been argued that a moon base was impractical, and human Mars exploration even more so. But there is evidence that there may be water on the moon (in the form of ice, of course). And water, there as here, is the key to everything. It could provide both life support and fuel. Similarly, the fact that there is ice on Mars has led to a revolution in thinking about how we can travel there and back. Instead of carrying huge stores of fuel, which would make the launch vehicle enormously expensive and cumbersome, we could send unmanned spacecraft ahead. They would land on Mars and turn the water into life support and fuel. (If you split water, you get hydrogen and oxygen,

precisely the gases that you need for life and for propulsion.) Astronauts could travel fairly light, arriving at a place already prepared with life-sustaining water, oxygen, and hydrogen for the flight back.

The moon and Mars are beckoning. So why are we spending so much of our resources building a tinker-toy space station? In part because, a quarter-century late, we still need something to justify the shuttle. Yet the space station's purpose has shrunk to almost nothing. No one takes seriously its claims to be a platform for real science. And the original idea—hatched in the 1950s—that it would be a way station to the moon and Mars, was overtaken in the sixties when we found more efficient ways to fully escape earth's gravitational well.

The space station's main purpose now appears to be . . . fostering international cooperation. It became too expensive for the United States to do alone, and so we decided to share the cost and control. It provides a convenient back door for American funding of the bankrupt Russian space program. We send Russia the money to build its space station modules. This is supposed to promote friendship and keep Russian rocket scientists from moving to Baghdad.

The cost to the United States? Twenty-one billion dollars, enough to support 127 Polar Landers. Instead of squandering $21 billion on a weightless United Nations (don't we have one of these already?), we should be directing our resources at the next logical step: a moon base. It would be a magnificent platform for science, for observation of the universe, and for industry. It would also be good training for Mars. And it would begin the ultimate adventure: the colonization of other worlds.

In 1991, the Stafford Commission recommended the establishment of permanent human outposts on the moon and on Mars by the early decades of this century. Rather than frittering away billions on the space station, we should be going right now to the moon—where we've been, where we know how to go, and where we might very well discover life-sustaining materials. And from there, on to the planets.

In the end, we will surely go. But how long will it take? Five hundred years from now—a time as distant from us as is Columbus—a party of settlers on excursion to Mars's South Pole will stumble across some strange wreckage, just as today we stumble across the wreckage of long-forgotten ships caught in Arctic ice. They'll wonder what manner of creature it was that sent it. What will we have told them? That after millennia of gazing at the heavens, we took one step into the void, then turned and, for the longest time, retreated to home and hearth? Or that we retained our nerve and hunger for horizons, and embraced our destiny? ♦

All photos: Chatto & Windus.

Light As Ayer

The illogical life of a logical positivist

By Joseph Epstein

Philosophy makes people selfish and hard-hearted. The scholar given up entirely to his books, has no tears for the misfortunes of others. . . . In his world, Reality does not exist; and the man in search of Truth, who is willing to sacrifice everything in order to obtain it, lives constantly surrounded by chimeras.

—Honoré de Balzac

Sir Alfred J. Ayer (1910-1989), as A.R. Lacey's *A Dictionary of Philosophy* listed him, was the man who "introduced logistical positivism to Britain in 1936, and has since defended an empiricist outlook, writing mainly on perception and meaning, as well as on various historical issues." But as Ayer himself acknowledged, and his friends affirmed, there seem to have been two Ayers, A.J. and Freddie.

Joseph Epstein is a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard.

A.J., the philosopher, was the man who, at twenty-six, published *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936), which put into philosophical play the severe strictures of the Vienna Circle against metaphysics and everything else that did not lend itself to scientific verifiability. Its young author was for a time thought extremely clever by both Wittgenstein and Einstein, and considered generally as the inheritor and continuater of the great tradition of empiricism in English philosophy running from Hume through Locke through Mill through Russell.

A.J. Ayer
A Life
by Ben Rogers
Chatto & Windus, 402 pp., £20

A.J. Ayer was the man who, toward the end of his life, claimed that the pursuit of truth was his main goal. "From the beginning of his life to the end," writes Ben Rogers in his excellent new biography of Ayer (*A.J. Ayer: A Life*), "he believed in an absolute ethic of reason, of truth: Winning people to your point of view was important, but getting the philosophy right was more important still."

Freddie Ayer, on the other hand, was a man who knew how to dance the samba. A much-married man—his marriages numbered four, two to the same woman—he had children both in and out of wedlock, cuckolded and was himself cuckolded. (Rogers reports that the philosopher Stuart Hampshire had a child with Ayer's first wife, Renée, while Ayer was still married to her.) He was mad for sport, a big fan of the Tottenham Hotspur football team, and himself a cricketeer of style and ability. A radio and television performer, he was a regular on a very popular English radio show called *The Brains Trust*. His specialty was taking the atheist side in debates on the existence of God. In the 1940s, he reviewed movies for the *Nation*. Sheila Graham, the last lady friend of F. Scott Fitzgerald, was the mother of Ayer's daughter, who learned Ayer was her father only when she was forty-six. That was Freddie.

Ayer with Renée. Opposite: with Elizabeth von Hofmannsthal and Jocelyn Rickards.

An only child, born in 1910, Alfred Jules Ayer descended from Dutch-Jewish merchants on his mother's side, Swiss-Calvinist bankers and professors on his father's. His father was a man of a certain cleverness—he was for a time secretary to Alfred Rothschild, of the banking Rothschilds—but evidently little gravity. His mother was soft, insecure, neurotic. Family sentiment was all but non-existent in Ayer, both as a boy and later, but the key figure in his early life was his mother's father, Dorus Citröen, wealthy and cultivated, a Jewish anti-Zionist and a strong believer in intermarriage, who forbade his three daughters to marry Jews. He encouraged Ayer to model his life on that of Disraeli.

The young Ayer had the oddity and the dandyishness of Disraeli, if little else. Without any Jewish training, cultural piety, or belief, Ayer was nonetheless always taken as Jewish. The map of Israel was written on his face. He was thought, along with Isaiah Berlin and Solly Zuckerman, in Stuart Hampshire's phrase, "one of Oxford's three brilliant Jews." Peter Vansittart, in his memoir *In the Fifties*, recalls Evelyn Waugh, with characteristic tact, entering a party and inquiring, "Which of the Yids is Freddie Ayer?" Ayer himself, after a life of impressive accomplishments, told Anthony Grayling, his last graduate student, that he still felt that "one day someone is going to point a finger at me: 'You are a fraud. You got into Eton and to Christ Church, you were an officer in the Welsh Guards, you became Wykeham Professor at Oxford and you secured a knighthood. But underneath you are just a dirty little Jew-boy.'"

Not that Ayer's being taken as Jewish greatly slowed his progress in England, a society unique in the history of the world in judging—at least for a few centuries—merit in young men largely on their ability to achieve mastery in manipulating two dead languages. Intellectually precocious as he was, schoolboy scholarship provided no serious hurdle to Ayer, and he took all the jumps in easy stride, winning scholarships to the best schools.

At Eton, he finished first in classics and second overall. He was also considered cheeky, overly pleased with his own cleverness, too aggressive. That he went about trying to make converts to atheism couldn't have helped much. At university, he took a seminar on Thomas Aquinas with Father Martin d'Arcy who later called Ayer "the most dangerous man at Oxford." Rather an impressive thing to be called, really, when one is not yet twenty-one.

Philosophy first became a subject of serious interest for Ayer at Eton, where he discovered Bertrand Russell's *Sceptical Essays*, which swept him away. (Ayer's grandfather wanted him to become a barrister, and one winces at the prospect of the terror he could have evoked in that role.) Ben Rogers reports that he took a sentence from the book's first essay—"It is undesirable to believe a proposition when there is no ground whatever for supposing it true"—as a motto throughout his own philosophical career. The book also supplied the eighteen-year-old Ayer with an introduction to modern philosophy, its strengths and weaknesses; and Russell's own program, to put philosophy on a firmer, more scientific footing, soon became Ayer's.

In the twentieth century, philosophy has attracted those brightest of students who have a taste for, and ability to range freely within, abstraction, but without a necessarily strong aptitude for science. For a complex of reasons, philosophy has been demoted from its former standing as queen of the sciences to something approximating the physics of the humanities. While there is no doubting Ayer's philosophical spirit—his dedicated pursuit of truth as he understood it—there is also reason to believe that for him, who was so good at all games, philosophy also functioned as a game of sorts, the best game in town perhaps, but still a game.

There are no Bobby Fischers, let alone Mozarts, in philosophy—no, that is to say, prodigies—but once he took up philosophy, Ayer immediately came to play it at a very high level. A paragon of precocity, he was given a lectureship at Oxford before he graduated; such were his powers of concentration, he could read and write while being driven in the sidecar of a motorcycle. He must have had a towering IQ but, alas, with little in the way of subtlety of intelligence of the kind that goes to understanding human character and motivation. When Ayer and Isaiah Berlin sat for a coveted fellowship to All Souls College, only Berlin,

with the more finely textured mind of the two, won it (the first Jew in the history of All Souls to do so).

The iconoclasm that appears to have been part of the young Freddie Ayer's nature elided nicely into the work of A.J. Ayer, the philosopher. This iconoclasm took the philosophical form of extreme rationalism. "Everything," he remarked, "needs its own proof." At Oxford, Gilbert Ryle, one of his tutors, noted that he was "an extremely penetrating and unsentimental thinker." The "unsentimental" referred to his coldness; respect never entered into Ayer's relations with his academic elders. If anything, he was rather fond of causing them to squirm. As a young don at Christ Church College, for example, Ayer delivered himself of a lecture to a banquet of old boys on how the Christianity of Ruskin, one of the college's most distinguished former members, twisted Ruskin's thought and, while at it, turned him into a left-winger. Ayer had a taste for this sort of thing—for lighting firecrackers in intellectual nursing homes.

Ayer's was the Oxford generation that came after that of Evelyn Waugh, Cyril Connolly, Harold Acton, Brian Howard, & Co., the children of the sun, in Martin Green's phrase. His was the generation of the early thirties, high on the list of whose luminaries were Isaiah Berlin, Stuart Hampshire, and Goronwy Rees. It was Rees who later blew the whistle on the spies Burgess and McLean and of whom, such was his charm, Hampshire said that "he could never be tedious enough for his own good." All came under the influence of Maurice Bowra, the classics don who was fifteen years older and whose clique, of which Ayer became a member, was known as "the immoral front." Ben Rogers puts it with nice precision when he writes of Ayer's generation at Oxford that it "was worldly, fun-loving and experimental" yet its "privileges were still Victorian." It had, in short, the best of both worlds.

Ayer's grandfather gave him an allowance that permitted him to live in the expansive style that he easily grafted onto his somewhat rebarbative personality. The book on Freddie Ayer

was that he was mannered, affected, precious, snobbish. He was all these things while also feeling insecure, out of place, an outsider. Isaiah Berlin recalls Ayer referring to himself in the third person. Two brilliant young Jews from well-off families, Berlin and Ayer were always being compared. Berlin attempted—successfully—to capture Oxford by learning and ingratiating charm, while Ayer attempted—less successfully—to capture it by sheer intellectual aggression.

The two men, who should have been friends, never quite were. Ayer was hedonist and confident, Berlin prudish and diffident; Ayer the cold atheist, Berlin deeply respectful of a Judaism in which it is not altogether certain he believed. Ayer, in the first of his two autobiographies, thought his own mind more incisive than Berlin's, but his range narrower. Berlin thought well of Ayer's intellectual gifts, but in the end felt he did not put them to good use: "He was the best writer of philosophical prose since Hume, better even than Russell, but he never had an original idea in his life. He was like a mechanic, he fiddled with things and tried to fix them."

The decisive event in Ayer's professional life was his trip, in 1933, to Vienna, where he was invited to attend

the meetings of the now famous Vienna Circle. Made up of twenty scientists (many of them theoretical physicists) and philosophers—including such luminaries as Moritz Schlick and Rudolf Carnap, Otto Neurath and Kurt Gödel—the Vienna Circle, which met every week or so at the University of Vienna, was a reaction to the false omniscience of German philosophy, which not only claimed to be in possession of the answers to all the great metaphysical questions, but thought

that it could also explain all branches of science without really bothering to have learned them.

This is vastly to simplify, but the gravamen of the Vienna Circle was that nothing was true that could not be submitted to scientific proof. Straightaway this excluded all discussion of metaphysics and human nature. Truth or falsity wasn't, for logical positivists of the Vienna Circle, of the least interest. What couldn't be verified was meaningless. "All philosophical questions," as Ayer reported from Vienna to Isaiah Berlin in Oxford, "are purely linguistical."

The twenty-three-year-old Ayer hadn't much German, and thus couldn't contribute to the meetings of the Vienna Circle, but he was able to take away what he needed. Not the least of what he took was a certain cachet from having attended them. (The only other outsider invited to the meetings was W.V. Quine, the then-youthful Harvard philosopher.) Soon after his return to England, Ayer would become known, as Rogers puts it, as logical positivism's "apostle to England."

Every idea, Nietzsche somewhere says, has its autobiography, which may or may not be true, but what seems less arguable is that it is in intellectual biography that one can hope to learn why certain thinkers were attracted to specific ideas. Why would the young Ayer have been so inflamed by those ideas that have gone by the name of logical positivism—ideas that seem, on the face of it, to cut him off from so many of the interesting questions of the subject in which he would expend most of his life's intellectual energy?

Part of the attraction of logical positivism for Ayer must have resided in its philosophically avant-garde status. As such it was a club with which to beat many of the philosophy dons at the Oxford of his day, who tended to be distinctly rear guard. Ayer's college at Oxford, Christ Church, more aristocratic and religious than most Oxford colleges, also had higher than the usual number of anti-Semites; one of them, when a studentship was arranged for Albert Einstein, referred to him as "some German Jew." The principal figures in philosophy were neo-Hegelians or realists, labels that qualified them, philosophically, as fuddy-duddys of the first order.

Along with logical positivism's intrinsic attractions, it provided the added pleasure of blasting all the old wisdom. For logical positivism, ethics wasn't a serious question; God wasn't even discussable. Critique of language was logical positivism's speciality. Philosophy, as Gilbert Ryle was to say, was "talk about talk." In the attack upon traditional philosophy, Ayer's *Lan-*

guage, Truth and Logic was his biggest firecracker of all—a double cherry bomb and roman candle combined. "The really defining feature of the book," as Ben Rogers notes, "is not so much its attack on metaphysics as a more far-reaching rejection of philosophical authority in both knowledge and morals."

The liberating effect of the book when it was first published in 1936 reverberated down the decades. (It is a book that continues to be widely used in undergraduate philosophy courses.) Some of this effect can be felt even today in reading *Language, Truth and Logic*. The quick, short sentences, all burnished clarity with scarcely any brambly qualification appearing in subordinate clauses, burst like a spray of perfectly aligned machine-gun bullets upon the target of traditional philosophy.

Colin McGinn recalls the excitement of reading this book as a boy of nineteen and feeling that he was "being inducted into a cult of pellucid evasion. It felt so liberating to declare everything that most troubled me to be nothing but nonsense." McGinn would have second, very different thoughts, which he recently expressed in a review of Rogers's biography in the *Times Literary Supplement*: "But I would now say that not only did Ayer never have an original idea in his life, he also never had a good idea, his own or anyone else's."

With the publication of *Language, Truth and Logic* when its author was only twenty-six, A.J. Ayer was well on his way to establishing his philosophical reputation. Freddie Ayer, meanwhile, was on his way to making a fine muddle of his life.

The chief agency of this muddle was sex, of which the young philosopher couldn't seem to get enough. (Sex to the generation who came into their majority in the 1930s seems to have replaced alcohol as the opiate of artists and intellectuals.) In later years, Ayer would describe himself, amusingly and not at all imprecisely, as "a notorious heterosexual."

"Vanity," Ayer told Ved Mehta, when he was interviewing him for *Fly and The Fly-Bottle*, his 1963 book on English philosophy. "Yes, vanity is the sine qua non of philosophers." Ayer returned to this theme in a 1989 interview with Ted Honderich. "I'm vain," he remarked, "but I'm not conceited. . . . A vain man is one who's proud to display his medals. I am vain. A conceited man is one who thinks he deserves more medals than he's got. I'm not conceited." A nice distinction, but not a sufficiently comprehensive one to cover Ayer's own case. He was also vain in the Johnsonian sense, for in Ben Rogers's account, if Ayer came to believe that in his own life vanity dominated, he also concluded that in the end vanity was all there was.

Asked late in life by an interviewer what he thought the chief defect of

Above: with Dee in 1964 and upon their remarriage in 1989. Opposite: with Vanessa Lawson, c. 1980.

Language, Truth and Logic, Ayer replied: "Well, I suppose that the most important defect is that all of it was false." Rogers also quotes Ayer telling a journalist: "It seems that I have spent my entire time trying to make life more rational and that it was all a wasted effort." Colin McGinn bangs in the nail of agreement: "He [Ayer] is now very little read within analytical philosophy—his chosen field—and his ideas play almost no role in contemporary debates. Compared to W.V. Quine and P.F. Strawson, say, let alone Russell and Wittgenstein, he is a negligible figure on the philosophical scene."

Poets, through tradition beginning at least as long ago as the Romantics, are allowed to behave badly, even madly. Philosophers may behave madly—see Nietzsche—but not badly. Socrates put the final kibosh on that when he agreed to die for his ideas, thus establishing the link between a philosopher's life and his ideas. Heidegger is unlikely ever to break free of the strong taint his active Nazism has placed on his ideas. Even allowing a certain leeway for foolish politics—one thinks here of Bertrand Russell, whose wacky late-life leftism does not disqualify his standing as one of the great figures in twentieth-century philosophy—one nonetheless tends to judge, at least in part, the quality of a philosopher's ideas by the life he has led.

Ayer does not score high here. His philosophy, built on the notion of the primacy of sensory experience, left him bereft of any solid grounding in reality. His biographer suggests that "it could be argued against it that Ayer's empiricism and epicureanism were two sides of the same coin." Colin McGinn goes much further, claiming that Ayer's philosophy, in which sensations "are the fundamental reality," left him entrapped in his own subjectivity, solipsistic and sensation-mongering, with no regard for the past and less for the future.

Try to imagine living such a philosophy and you might get a sense of what it was to be A.J. Ayer: "a series of tenuously related sensations surrounded on all sides by an abyss of emptiness."

Ayer was not charmless. Many people who met him thought him stylish, elegant, intellectually dashing. "Every remark he made," one of his last students recalled, "sounded a chord of originality, sincerity and brilliance combined." His success with women came from a unique method of seduction for an Englishman of his day—*he actually listened to them*. Far from being a ruthless Don Juan, he tended to submit himself to women, to act the supplicant, pleading his case and often winning. Many of these women, long after their affairs with him were over, remained his friends. But there can be little doubt that Freddie Ayer was on a program, as his friend Philip Toynbee acknowledged, of strict hedonism, which in practice meant that he had little regard for the effects of his conduct beyond the immediate pleasure it brought.

Neither an immoralist, nor even an amoralist, Ayer believed morality was possible without religion, a belief held by most people in a secular age. His own politics, fairly standard leftism, were highly moralistic.

First set in motion by the Spanish Civil War, they carried all the usual mistakes of faulty observation that seem inevitably to follow from that position: The chief insight he seems to have brought back from a brief visit to the Soviet Union in 1954, for example, was that it seemed to him strikingly like Victorian England. The appropriate punctuation mark to cap the obtuseness of that observation doesn't exist. He was—no great surprise here—strongly against the war in Vietnam.

An effective teacher, himself stimulated by disagreement, he cultivated and brought along the brightest of his students, and did what he could to see them well-placed in academic jobs. He built a powerful philosophy department at University College London.

As a thinker, he seems to have been best on the attack. "If you write good prose," he told an interviewer in 1989, "you can't succumb to the sort of [intellectual] nonsense we get from Germany and from France." Although he was early sympathetic to existentialism, he was very sharp at piercing the pretensions and muddle of the existentialists, and his attacks on Sartre stung sufficiently to cause Sartre to say: *Ayer est un con*. That remark, considering the source, is worth more than most literary prizes.

Still, there was something undeniably insubstantial, something light, about Ayer. His philosophy turns out to be less complicated than his domestic life. He had four children and more stepchildren than one can keep count of; and he went from being a decent to an indifferent to a nonexistent father. As a husband, he only occasionally lapsed into fidelity. Viewed quantitatively, he did quite well in this line. Models and aristocrats were among his lovers; so were the wives of friends, including that of E.E. Cummings. Well into his sixties, Ayer was married and had two love affairs going; his last love affair was with a woman forty years younger than he. His view of philandery seems to have been roughly that of the more tolerant referees of the National Basketball Association: no harm, no foul. Switching sports quickly here, one of his wives remarked: "Some men played golf, Freddie played women." It all might seem more amusing had not various of his children been left stranded on the fairway.

"The thing about Freddie," one friend reported, "was that you saw his vices immediately, and spent the rest of your life discovering his virtues." This, though, was a minority view. Most people found him wanting, especially in the realm of feeling. Introspection was another of his deficiencies; he seems to have been quite without any. Nor did he have any compunction in determining whose interests came first. The playwright John Osborne, never a man given to soft judgments, called Ayer "possibly the most selfish, superficial, and obtuse man I have ever met." Frederick Raphael, reviewing one of Ayer's two disappointing—because largely bereft of insight—volumes of autobiography, wrote: "A systematic prejudice against speculation has created, it seems, a Narcissus incapable of seeing himself, and hence others."

In 1988, the year before his actual death, Ayer choked on a bit of smoked salmon, passed out, and his heart stopped for fully four minutes. When, with the help of medical assistance, he regained consciousness, he reported having a so-called near-death experience—a red light supposedly responsible for the governing of the universe shone, something resembling the River Styx appeared, and other trimmings were included—that found its way into the *National Enquirer*. He told an interviewer for the *Tatler* that the experience made him a bit more "wobbly" on the question of the existence of an afterlife. Although this did not in any way qualify his lifelong atheism, it apparently made him, for the first time in his life, responsive to nature. "Freddie has got so much nicer," his wife said, "since he died."

But Ayer's settled views, long since solidified, underwent no fundamental change. He believed, in his biographer's words, that "philosophy was quite incapable of offering an authoritative answer to the question 'How should I live?'" His own philosophy appears to have provided him with no clues whatsoever, except perhaps to live in and for the moment. In his valedictory talk as the Wykeham Professor of Philosophy at Oxford, his own summary of the achievements of twentieth-century philosophy held only that "the answers are not much clearer, but the questions are." In the history of twentieth-century philosophy, he is likely to go down as less a major philosopher than as one of the subject's leading technicians.

One thinks of the contrast with Bertrand Russell, whose own skeptical rationalism, for all its shortcomings, nevertheless put him in touch with the tragic sense of life. "Often I feel that religion, like the sun," Russell wrote in his autobiography, "has extinguished the stars of less brilliancy but not less beauty, which shine upon us out of the darkness of a godless universe. The splendor of human life, I feel sure, is greater to those who are not dazzled by the divine radiance; and human comradeship seems to grow more intimate and more tender from the sense that we are all exiles on an inhospitable shore." Such perception was unavailable to Ayer, who, despite his piercing intelligence, seems to have gone through life blindfolded. Dream of nothing in your philosophy and you not only miss out on the chance of heaven but on so much of what goes on on earth, too. ♦

Toobin, Too Bad

The charmed career in journalism of an inferior legal analyst. **BY DAVID TELL**

In January 1987, fresh out of Harvard Law School, Jeffrey Toobin hired up as the junior-most attorney on the staff of independent counsel Lawrence Walsh's Iran-Contra investigation. He spent more than two years there, concentrating—so Walsh imagined—on a campaign to bring felony charges against assistant secretary of state Elliott Abrams. Then, in May 1989, Toobin quit. And took his actual "work product" with him: a two-thousand-plus page archive of the investigation's internal operations, including twenty-two spiral notebooks in which Toobin had been recording snarky observations about the personalities and private conversations of his unsuspecting colleagues. All this stuff quickly became the draft of *Opening Arguments*, a book Toobin's Viking Press publicity agents promised would deliver "previously undisclosed revelations."

A Vast Conspiracy
The Real Story of the Sex Scandal That Nearly Brought Down a President
by Jeffrey Toobin
Random House, 422 pp., $25.95

There was a delay. Enraged by the betrayal involved, Walsh invoked the confidentiality agreement his erstwhile employee had signed and began a painstaking review of the *Opening Arguments* manuscript, ostensibly for the purpose of excising still-sensitive grand jury information. Impatient, Toobin sued Walsh and won a preliminary right to publish—on the basis of a federal trial judge's otherwise inconvenient finding that the book was harmless to the government: It did *not*, in fact, contain anything of substance about Iran-Contra that hadn't already appeared in the newspapers. Unembarrassed, Toobin and Viking slyly re-advertised their volume of office gossip as a First Amendment "landmark" and shipped it to bookstores—without waiting for a scheduled appellate review of the matter. One month later, in March 1991, three highly irritated federal judges of the Second Circuit summarily dismissed Toobin's lawsuit, vacated his lower-court victory, and upbraided him for his "dubious behavior." But they could do nothing to retrieve Walsh's "secrets." *Opening Arguments* sold respectably well.

Thus was born *New Yorker* staff writer and ABC "legal analyst" Jeffrey Toobin's curiously charmed career in American journalism. Which continues now, in much the same fashion, with a new book on the Paula Jones and Monica Lewinsky affairs.

A Vast Conspiracy borrows its title, of course, from Hillary Clinton's remark that her husband's multiple scandals could be ascribed entirely to the machinations of his political opponents and were therefore best ignored. Toobin is a man of the sophisticated upper-middle-media class; he would prefer not to be directly associated with such a "Manichaean outlook." So he has taken two precautionary measures. First, he has adopted the standard demurrers: "The president brought many of his problems on himself"; Clinton's conduct was "reprehensible." And next, with a slight bit more ambition, Toobin has recast the First Lady's ontology of politics in the soothingly bipartisan light of a Systemwide Breakdown. The *real* conspiracy behind the president's misfortunes, he explains, has been "a conspiracy within the legal system to take over the political system of the United States." By which phrase he means to describe official Washington's twenty-five-year post-Watergate degeneration into a series of ideologically motivated, subpoena-powered witch hunts. "Thanks largely to Democrats," who hurled the original stone.

Had he thought it through in greater depth—Toobin develops the idea over just five breezy paragraphs of the book's prologue—he might have chosen a different theory with which to distinguish himself from the president's most pervid defenders. The theory he did choose is little more than Mrs. Clinton's Manichaeanism in a novelty-shop nose-and-mustache disguise. For if the president's problem is really a systemic problem, and the systemic problem is tissue-thin criminal charges leveled by factional enemies . . . well, then the president's problem is tissue-thin criminal charges leveled by *his* factional enemies. And we are right back where Mrs. Clinton started, aren't we? A vast, right-wing conspiracy.

In his discussion of what now seem merely the peripheries of Clinton scandology, Toobin hardly even attempts to avoid this self-set trap. Whitewater was only a failed land deal in long-ago Arkansas, he says. The White House travel office was only a "so-called" scandal in which integrity-minded West Wing staff, "alerted to possible improprieties in that office, . . . moved swiftly to replace the career officials who worked there." It is "dubious at best" that any crime was committed during the White House's wholesale requisition of confidential FBI files on retired Republican political appointees. And "scarcely anyone could even articulate any criminal offense the president might have committed" while his party

David Tell is opinion editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

was flouting the campaign finance laws in 1996. *A Vast Conspiracy* gives no more than a sketchy sentence or two of consideration to the evidentiary foundation for any one of these controversies before dismissing them all as means by which "extremists of the political right . . . tried to use the legal system to undo elections . . . that put Bill Clinton in the White House."

And what of the book's main subject: the process by which Paula Jones became Monica Lewinsky became Kenneth Starr became the first impeachment of an elected president in American history? Here, Toobin is careful to jape at any number of obvious cult-of-Clinton targets. He derides Sidney Blumenthal as a "pretentious" and "unnerving" man who "saw the world in a broad sweep of ideological conflict between the Clintons and what he invariably called 'the right wing.'" Toobin's charge against Blumenthal is undeniably just. And yet Toobin makes dishonest use of it. It is a red herring dragged across *A Vast Conspiracy*'s pages in the vain hope that it might somehow conceal the scent of something fishier still: the author himself.

Seeing Blumenthal and raising him a hundred, Toobin writes that the Jones lawsuit and its Lewinsky investigation monster-baby existed "only because of the efforts of Clinton's right-wing political enemies." Independent counsel Starr "had long ago signed on with many of the people who wanted Bill Clinton destroyed." Yes, the president was a "humiliated middle-aged husband who lied when he was caught having an affair with a young woman from the office." But "it was far from clear that his conduct did fit the technical meaning of perjury," the least of the crimes alleged against him. And there was consequently "no need to make a federal case out of it," much less to mount an impeachment proceeding. Clinton's adultery and dishonesty had "no bearing on his record as a public man." His had been a "pretty good" presidency and Clinton was "by comparison, the good guy" in the struggle over disposition of that presidency. The bad guys, on the other hand, whom Toobin almost invariably calls the "right wing," were "willing to trample all standards of fairness—not to mention the Constitution—in their effort to drive him from office."

All this is wrong. And that is not the worst that can be said about it. Toobin could have written just as blockheadedly one-sided a book—and *still* have rescued himself from total fatuousness. If, that is, he had produced some meaningful discovery or advanced some novel line of argument along the way. He hasn't. In every important sense, *A Vast Conspiracy* is simply an in-my-own-words rehash of what was already the most obsessively chronicled and closely scrutinized event in recent times. Where proper summary judgment of that event is concerned, Toobin adds not a single piece of material evidence to the available record. He offers not a single fresh interpretation of that record. Confronted with a years-long strain of metastatic and rarefied litigation, ABC's "legal analyst" finds hardly any need to analyze relevant legal precedent. About both the law and the facts, he commits a handful of truly groaner-scale mistakes and attempts an unseemly number of slippery evasions. But even with that, Toobin is lazy. They were other people's mistakes and evasions first. He has merely borrowed them.

Toobin attacks Newsweek's Michael Isikoff for "tawdry voyeurism"—but neglects to mention that he once asked Isikoff to co-author his book.

A Vast Conspiracy is a familiar song much better sung before—by Robert Bennett and David Kendall in court, by Barney Frank and Jerrold Nadler in the House, by Charles Ruff in the well of the Senate, and by Joe Conason and (even) Geraldo Rivera in the media. So the question arises: How exactly could anyone be persuaded to buy this book?

Toobin and his publisher have settled on an answer. Random House is bragging that its author has acquired and reported a crucial passel of "secret documents" no one has seen before. It's a marketing hook perfectly calculated to appeal to the television talk shows that have lately been hosting Toobin's book tour. And every last one of the square-jawed men and perky blonde women who star on such programs have obediently endorsed the claim—with Toobin's mock-humble, nodding assent.

Except the claim is a laughable fraud, much the way *Opening Arguments* turned out not to contain any "previously undisclosed revelations" about Iran-Contra. Everything of substantive significance in *A Vast Conspiracy*'s purportedly "secret documents" (Random House posted seven of them on the Internet two weeks ago) has been well known for months or even years. It's just that some of those documents include fairly explicit and personal sexual details that no other journalist, believe it or not, has yet felt obliged or willing to reprint. Toobin has no such scruples. He throws it all in. Along with a great lot of similar dirt he's picked up here and there. Most of which is completely unsourced and uncorroborated. All of which is unnecessary and irresponsible.

So here one reads Paula Jones's legendary affidavit concerning the First Phallus of the United States—not just the part about the president's allegedly "distinguishing" port-side list, but also the "secret" paragraph in which Jones recounts her impression of the referenced appendage's precise length and width. A man who lives on Social Security payments for a mental disability tells Toobin that Jones slept with fifteen different guys before she was seventeen. God knows whether it's true or not; Toobin passes it on. Scooping the entire world, *A Vast Conspiracy* reports that Monica Lewinsky, after her *Vanity Fair* fashion-spread shoot, had a casual romp with the photographer's assistant. Maybe.

There is more of this bilge. (Toobin is a "superlative journalist known for the skillfulness of his investigating," *A Vast Conspiracy*'s dust-jacket copy reminds us.) There is so much more bilge, in fact, that ABC's Ted Koppel—toward the end of an otherwise shameless half-hour of logrolling on *Nightline*—was recently moved to question his network's "legal analyst" about it. How come you've "dumped" all this "really seamy stuff" on us, Koppel wondered? "How is the nation served by it?" The normally smiley and unflappable Toobin seemed flustered by his colleague's predictable challenge, and managed only to stammer something about how "you can't tell the story" without "getting into the grimy details." And also how, sure, he hoped the filthy bits would help "promote the book."

Which half-honest answer brings us finally to *A Vast Conspiracy*'s greatest piece of cynicism. Not something the author has "exposed" to boost his sales. Rather, something he has altogether invented in order to rationalize the book in the first place.

The real-life Michael Isikoff is a doubly awkward figure for Jeffrey Toobin. Isikoff is a reporter, first for the *Washington Post* and later for *Newsweek*, who *did* manage to "tell the story" of Paula Jones and Monica Lewinsky, earlier and more authoritatively than Toobin, and with far fewer "grimy details." Isikoff is also the one central actor in that story who could never be explained away as a wide-eyed, right-wing kook—but who nonetheless reached highly unflattering conclusions about Bill Clinton's behavior. The real-life Michael Isikoff, in other words, is a standing rebuke to Toobin and his book.

So this actual Isikoff makes no appearance in *A Vast Conspiracy*. Instead, Toobin has created a character he calls "Isikoff," an anti-matter Isikoff, a stalking horse for his own worst sins, a creature of almost subhuman depravity. Toobin calls this Isikoff *Newsweek*'s "in-house expert on Clinton's sex life," a purveyor of "tawdry voyeurism," the "dean" of American "sexual investigative reporting," someone who had been "hoping for years to catch Clinton in an adulterous affair." What's more, Toobin clucks, Isikoff was all along unethically "stoking the story" so that he might "profit from it" in a later book deal—while never disclosing that plan to his sources or readers.

Needless to say, both charges are almost freakishly hypocritical and false. Isikoff isn't the man who reported that the president's penis might have a circumference "the approximate size of a quarter." Toobin is. Isikoff only reported things he knew to be true. And—unlike, say, Toobin's unwitting "sources" in Lawrence Walsh's office—everyone Isikoff talked to in the course of his research knew precisely what was going to happen. Isikoff was going to print what they told him. There was nothing unethical about it.

On January 14, *Newsweek*'s Washington bureau chief, Ann McDaniel, did the professionally necessary and honorable thing. She dispatched a stern letter to Ann Godoff, Toobin's editor at Random House. In that letter, McDaniel protested Toobin's "egregiously unfair" and "malicious" depiction of Michael Isikoff. And she also reminded Godoff about a peculiar historical incident: "Toobin invited Mike to work with him on a book shortly after the scandal broke, but Isikoff declined." Imagine that. Right at the moment of greatest triumph for "sexual investigative reporting," Toobin was eager to collaborate with its "dean."

It would have made for a very different and better book. *A Vast Conspiracy* is awful. And, alas, it is a bestseller. After all these years, Jeffrey Toobin is still a dubious man leading a charmed career. ♦

No Shades of Gray

Randall Robinson and David Horowitz pen polemics on race in America. BY FRED BARNES

Last August, David Horowitz wrote a column for the online magazine *Salon* that attacked the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's decision to sue gun manufacturers. The basis for the suit was the disparate impact of gun violence on black males fifteen to twenty-four years old, who are roughly five times more likely to be shot than white males in the same age cohort. "Am I alone in thinking this a pathetic, absurd, and almost hilarious demonstration of political desperation by the civil rights establishment?" Horowitz wrote. "What next? Will Irish Americans sue whiskey distillers, or Jews the gas company?" And he suggested the NAACP is living in a fantasy world "in which African Americans are no longer responsible for anything negative they do, even to themselves."

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

Jack White, a black columnist for *Time*, took umbrage. He called Horowitz, a former radical leftist, one-time editor of *Ramparts*, and ex-pal of the Black Panthers, a "real live bigot." White said he'd been mellowing on racial matters, but the Horowitz piece made him feel militant again. "It reminded me that blatant bigotry is alive and well, even on one of the Internet's otherwise most humane and sophisticated websites."

Horowitz, in turn, did not take White's fusillade lying down. He responded with a long, passionate letter to *Time* editor Walter Isaacson calling White's charge "a hateful racial lie." He spelled out his record of working for equal rights for blacks, insisting he'd "never written or spoken a word—or committed an act—that any reasonable person could call 'bigoted.'" Then, he concluded by asking *Time* to run his entire letter as an article and accompany it with an apology for making him a

"victim of racial injustice." *Time* didn't, but Horowitz got a measure of justice anyway. Months later, the magazine reviewed *Hating Whitey*, likening Horowitz to Whittaker Chambers and his detractors to Alger Hiss. "For a cautionary perspective in an argument like this, it pays to remember that Hiss was guilty and Chambers was right," *Time* reviewer Lance Morrow wrote.

This episode reveals a lot about Horowitz and a bit about *Hating Whitey*, too. Horowitz, who now runs the Los Angeles-based Center for the Study of Popular Culture and publishes *Heterodoxy* magazine, is willing to go after liberal and leftist targets—the civil rights establishment, college and university faculties, Communist sympathizers, to name three—that other conservatives just as soon ignore. And it is this fearlessness, plus a unique understanding of how the organized Left operates, that has made him an enormously important figure among American conservatives. These two qualities shine through in *Hating Whitey*, a collection of essays and *Salon* columns.

No one picks apart the pretensions of the civil rights crowd quite the way Horowitz does. He lauds the first civil rights era, led by Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., and pillories the second, led by Jesse Jackson, Kweisi Mfume, and Al Sharpton. He accuses Sharpton in particular of "moral abdication," notably for refusing to condemn anti-white racism while blaming whites for every pathology and problem that confronts America's blacks. Post-King, black leaders have concocted a vision of America that is not only wrong but also paranoid, he writes. The result is "a squandering of the moral legacy" of the first civil rights era and its goal of expunging racial discrimination, and its replacement by a new civil rights agenda with a vast system of racial preferences as its top priority.

Horowitz is merciless in skewering the "radical myth" of "institutional racism," which holds that even when actual acts of racial bias are absent, "any statistical disparity of black representation anywhere in the culture is proof of white malevolence and of the necessity of racial preference remedies." In other words, racism exists, oppressing blacks, even when it doesn't. But Asian-Americans, many of them less culturally attuned to America than blacks and speaking a foreign language, prove the falsity of this, Horowitz says. They face the same structural obstacles as blacks and manage to succeed economically and academically.

"The belief in the power of 'institutional racism' allows civil rights leaders to denounce America as a 'racist' society, when it is the only society on earth—black, white, brown, or yellow—whose defining public creed is *anti*-racist, a society to which black refugees from black-ruled nations regularly flee in search of refuge and freedom," Horowitz writes. And "institutional racism" is also a dodge, giving black leaders an excuse to "avoid the encounter with real problems *within* their own communities, which are neither caused by whites nor soluble by the actions of whites, but which cry out for attention."

The Debt
What America Owes to Blacks
by Randall Robinson
Dutton, 288 pp., $23.95

Hating Whitey
And Other Progressive Causes
by David Horowitz
Spence, 300 pp., $24.95

Horowitz is every bit as rigorous and ruthless in savaging leftist academics and radicals with Communist pasts who now pose as social thinkers (Betty Friedan, for example). Horowitz's parents were Communist party members, and he remembers his own leftist days painfully. Decoded Soviet communications have revealed, he says, that "there were spies among us, and cold-blooded agents for a tainted cause. And all of us, it could no longer be denied, had treason in our hearts in the name of a future that would never come."

I'm not sure if Horowitz has ever met Randall Robinson. *The Debt*, Robinson's pitch for reparations for American blacks and for the entire continent of Africa, was published shortly after *Hating Whitey* appeared. In another context, however, Horowitz observes that "if you have to invoke a distant past to justify a present grievance, the case for the grievance is already undermined." And this—blaming nearly all the current ills of the black community on slavery—is exactly what Robinson does. "Solutions to our racial problems are possible, but only if our society can be brought to face up to the massive crime of slavery and all that it has wrought," he writes.

He's not talking about a one-shot deal either, but a payback extending over several generations. "Let there be no doubt, it will require great resources and decades of national fortitude to resolve economic and social disparities so long in the making," Robinson writes. The case he makes is a simple one: Slavery was the worst human rights abuse in history, and blacks are still being victimized by it. He cites precedents for reparations, including Germany's assigned debt to the Allies after World War I, Germany's payments to individual Jews and Israel after World War II, and the U.S. government's compensation of Japanese-Americans quarantined during World War II. But reparations a century and half later? He's weak on this point.

And he's weaker still on reparations for Africa. Robinson is founder and president of an organization called TransAfrica, which successfully pushed for sanctions against white-ruled South Africa. But he is precisely the type of American black leader singled out for criticism by the black writer Keith Richburg of the *Washington Post* in his scintillating book on Africa, *Out of America*. Like Jesse Jackson and others, Robinson rarely has a critical word for the dictators and kleptocrats who rule many African nations. Nor does Robinson mention the complicity of black Africans in the slave trade. He claims that all of Africa's problems stem from one source: white colonialism. It's an argument David Horowitz wouldn't find convincing, and I doubt if many others do either. ♦

AOL, EU to Merge

By Nigel Peregrine in Dulles, Virginia

At a jubilant press conference here, complete with high fives and group hugs, Steve Case of America Online announced that he had completed merger talks with the European Union. The agreement, which was completed well after midnight, following a series of harrowing negotiations, marks the first time that an Internet company has taken over an entire continent. "It's the biggest merger in world history," Case announced, one hand jutting into his vest.

Under the terms of the deal, Case will assume the title Holy Roman Emperor, while the current heads of the European member nations will assume such titles as Duke of Germania, Duke of Gaul, and Viscount of Brabant. The agreement will give Europe instant credibility as an Internet player—something it has lacked—whereas the deal moves Case an important step closer to world domination.

Ironically, Case was cool to the merger idea when the heads of the European nations first suggested it just a few weeks ago. "But once we explained the powers and perks that go with absolute monarchies, he warmed up to the offer quite quickly," noted French president Jacques Chirac. Under the agreement, Mr. Case will be addressed as Stevus Caseus Augustus, and his power will be assumed to flow directly from God.

Many analysts expect a culture clash between the two entities. The employees at AOL are casual techies who like to wear ripped jeans to the office. The Europeans are interested in setting up an imperial monarchy. They had hoped to persuade Mr. Case to move to Rome or Versailles, but in a compromise gesture, Mr. Case offered to build a new imperial palace for his courtiers in Tysons Corner, Virginia, on a parcel of land just across the street from the Fuddruckers restaurant there.

The European leaders said they saw the merger as an opportunity to renounce democratic government and return to the monarchical regimes that had prevailed when Europe was at its greatest. "Since the European Union, we're democratic in name only," observed Tony Blair. "This move gives us a Third Way between democratic freedom and complete serfdom. Also, under this arrangement, I get to march in royal processions in a very attractive ermine robe. Plus Steve is going to be buried in a huge pyramid, so it's multicultural in that respect."