the weekly Standard

MARCH 27, 2000

$3.95

ON THE ROAD
TUCKER CARLSON

LEFT WING

TV's 'West Wing' is the ultimate Hollywood fantasy—the Clinton White House without Clinton

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Contents

March 27, 2000 • Volume 5, Number 27

Articles

NBC

Features

Books & Arts

the weekly Standard

THE WEEKLY STANDARD (ISSN 1083-3013) is published weekly (except the second week in April, the second week in July, the last week in August, and the first week in January) by News America Incorporated, 1211 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10036. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to THE WEEKLY STANDARD, P.O. Box 96127, Washington, DC 20077-7767. For subscription customer service in the United States, call 1-800-274-7293. For new subscription orders, please call 1-800-283-2014. Subscribers: Please send new subscription orders to THE WEEKLY STANDARD, P.O. Box 96153, Washington, DC 20090-6153; changes of address to THE WEEKLY STANDARD, P.O. Box 96127, Washington, DC 20077-7767. Please include your latest magazine mailing label. Allow 3 to 5 weeks for arrival of first copy and address changes. Yearly subscriptions, $78.00. Canadian/foreign orders require additional postage and must be paid in full prior to commencement of service. Canadian/foreign subscribers may call 1-303-776-3605 for subscription inquiries. Visa/MasterCard payment accepted. Cover price, $3.95. Back issues, $3.95 (includes postage and handling). Send manuscripts and letters to the editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD, 1150 17th Street, N.W., Suite 505, Washington, DC 20036-4617. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. THE WEEKLY STANDARD Advertising Sales Office in Washington, DC, is 1-202-293-4900. Advertising Production: Call Ian Slatter 1-202-496-3354.

BPA INTERNATIONAL

www.weeklystandard.com

A Nation of Whiners

There was a jaw-dropping report last week on NBC News about a new disease called—brace yourselves—"sudden wealth syndrome." The Scrapbook's first impression was that some sitcom writer had penetrated the news division. Here's the transcript:

> Tom Brokaw, anchor: It is no secret, of course, that this economy has generated enormous new wealth in America. Sudden wealth that changes lives dramatically. But having it all can generate some unexpected problems that send many of the newly rich running for the therapist.
>
> Jim Avila, reporting: It's an unusual virus with unusual symptoms. The hot zone, California's Silicon Valley where experts say 60 new millionaires are created every day. Symptoms, too much money, too much loneliness. After treating many patients, psychologists have a name for it: sudden wealth syndrome and a center to study it.
>
> Joan DiFuria [of The Money, Meaning and Choices Institute]: An array of symptoms may be that they're embarrassed, guilty, ashamed. Sometimes in denial with their money.
>
> Avila: A sense of isolation, imbalance, brought on by sudden riches and nothing meaningful to do.
>
> David Seuss: I remember thinking, "Gee, I wish I could have a meeting now, but there's no one at home to have a meeting with."
>
> Avila: CEO David Seuss says he suffered through it, making millions at his computer software company in the '80s, selling [the company], and swearing never to be the boss again. Too much pressure. But ten years later he's back, running Northern Light, an Internet search engine, unable to join the idle rich.
>
> Seuss: It's not being a leader was the thing that I missed the most.

It turns out, as usual, that truth is stranger than an invented story. NBC's report was one of several dozen in the last year prominently featuring the "discoverers" of sudden wealth syndrome and coiners of its catchy name, DiFuria and fellow Bay Area psychotherapist Stephen Goldbart. Besides what one assumes to be their thriving practice treating nouveau-riche victims, Goldbart and DiFuria help cure the rich by teaching them to give away money at their Money, Meaning and Choices Institute.

That's the great thing about America. As fast as you can acquire a fortune, there will be clever people to help you dissipate it. Like Seuss, by the way, The Scrapbook finds itself unable to join the idle rich. Not because of sudden wealth syndrome, but as a longtime sufferer of its dreaded and more prevalent variant, persistent middle-class-itis. ♦

So Sorry

When secretary of state Madeleine Albright apologized to Iran last week for America's part in aiding a 1953 Iranian coup, she was merely echoing a popular theme of President Clinton and his administration. It's the gratuitous, usually wrongheaded apology that deals with some alleged sin of a previous administration.

Clinton himself is the master. Early in his administration, he apologized for having raised taxes too much. This was one of the rare times he found himself at fault. But, of course, he never, ever apologizes for having done anything seriously wrong. Perish the thought. In 1998, while visiting Africa, he went on an apology binge. "Perhaps the biggest sin America ever committed about Africa was the sin of neglect and ignorance," he declared. And he said this only after apologizing for the slave trade and for having aided anti-Communist African nations during the Cold War.

Last year, he apologized for America's having backed a military regime in Guatemala. Then, later last year, he apologized for American support for a military government in Greece. All of which set the stage for Albright's apologia. She said the overthrow in 1953 of prime minister Mohammed Mossadegh "was clearly a setback for Iran's political development." Wrong: It was a setback for the Soviet Union and communism. Albright also apologized for U.S. support for the shah, who "brutally repressed political dissent." Actually, the shah mostly repressed violent Islamic extremism.

Oh, well, maybe the time will come when Clinton and company apologize for something they did that was really bad, like appeasing China, trying to cozy up to Fidel Castro, selling the White House, demonizing Ken Starr, trashing any woman who got caught in a sexual engagement with Clinton, or just plain lying all the time. But don't get your hopes up. ♦

A Slower Boat to China

Reports that the trade-at-any-price business lobby is going to succeed in bulldozing China's permanent trade status through Congress may have been exaggerated. For one thing, China's own behavior is simply too egregious to hide

under the business roundtable. In addition to threatening war with Taiwan every few days, the Beijing regime is so paranoid that it recently jailed a woman in the restive province of Eastern Turkestan for the "crime" of mailing newspaper clippings to her husband in America (i.e., "revealing state secrets").

Last week, the Congressional Policy Advisory Board, a group that meets under the auspices of the House Republican Policy Committee, concluded that China's threats to Taiwan "have created a serious threat to peace and security in East Asia." In addition to criticizing the Clinton administration's "inadequate, confusing, and in some instances counterproductive" responses, the board recommended "prompt Senate approval of the Taiwan Security Enhancement Act" so that U.S. policy would be "unambiguous."

What is remarkable about this recommendation is that it comes from a mainstream group of Republican wise men, such as American Enterprise Institute president Christopher DeMuth; Heritage Foundation president Edwin Feulner; former U.N. ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick; Peter Rodman, a national security aide under President Bush; and former secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld.

Meanwhile, in a speech to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, House majority whip Tom DeLay described China as the "leading national security issue of our time" and drew an analogy between appeasing the Chinese over Taiwan and appeasing the Nazis at Munich. Further, he argued for an end to the "diplomatic fiction" of the longtime "one China" policy and support for democratic Taiwan. And DeLay—often skeptical of increased defense spending—recognized that American defense posture in the region should be heightened.

At a time when most in Congress, under extraordinary pressure from big business to turn a blind eye to Beijing's threats to the peace, are failing to speak up on China policy, the Advisory Board and DeLay set a standard that others on Capitol Hill might profitably imitate. The Senate, in particular, should move promptly to follow the House in passing the Taiwan Security Enhancement Act. Whatever then happens with permanent normal trade relations for Beijing, an important congressional message will have been sent: America will not sacrifice international security to commercial interests. ♦

Carrying Coals to Newcastle Award

"Animal rights activists are urging college students this week to guzzle beer to save cows from the 'cruelty' of being milked." (*Washington Times*, March 13.) ♦

E-mail The Scrapbook

The Scrapbook is now reachable 24/7. To paraphrase Alice Roosevelt Longworth, if you don't have anything nice to say, e-mail it to Scrapbook@weeklystandard.com. ♦

Casual

Heavy Lifting

If there's one breed I can't stomach, it's those who appropriate credit for the accomplishments of others. Not because it's immoral—though it is. But because I can appreciate how hard-fought accomplishment comes, as one who conceived the Human Genome Project, endured five-and-a-half years in the Hanoi Hilton, and shot a man in Reno—just to watch him die.

Or maybe that was Johnny Cash. In any case, I recently found my own credit had been appropriated. Two weeks ago, an alert reader notified me that she'd enjoyed a recent piece of mine when she'd read it in The Weekly Standard, and again later when she'd read it under the byline of Brian Goldenfeld in a small-circulation L.A. weekly called the *Heritage Southwest Jewish Press*.

Though for security reasons I often favor noms de plume ("Frank McCourt" when I shovel blarney about my impoverished Irish childhood), "Brian Goldenfeld" is not one of them. It seems I had been plagiarized. Not just pick-pocketed for a few ideas—my pieces tend not to have many. Instead, Brian stole all 2,100 words, right down to the headline and first-person anecdotes. Perched atop my piece was Brian's swollen, goateed mug, smiling the wan smile of a man trying to sneak out of a 7-Eleven with a Little Debbie snack-cake tucked into his waistband.

While I've never looked kindly on plagiarists, I certainly understand their motivation. Anyone who's paid to put words together knows how agonizing it is when they won't come. In those instances, some of us do push-ups or ingest unhealthy quantities of caffeine. Others peruse periodicals, then swipe whatever's useful. To each his own. But I've always been surprised that plagiarism doesn't occur more often. As Byron said, "There is nothing new under the sun," which he proved by pilfering the line from King Solomon.

Still, when plagiarism happens to you—when you see your precious babies kidnapped after spending, oh, 30 minutes, slugging them out—you're easily moved to outrage. I called the editor of the *Heritage Southwest Jewish Press*, Dan Brin, on a Friday, four days after my reader had alerted him of the theft. In that span, Brin not only had failed to notify me, but had put an issue of his paper to bed without running a correction. When I reached him, I could hear him flop-sweating into the phone. "You're mad," he noted in between sniveling apologies, perhaps not realizing that if I'd been interested in the kind of collaborative effort where I do all the work and someone else takes all the credit, I'd have gotten into television.

Darren Gygi

Though Dan wasn't complicit in the lift, he did seem to have a fibbing problem. He told me he'd just found out about the plagiarism Thursday, later admitting it was Monday. He said Brian was a sporadic freelancer, later admitting he was a contributing writer. He said he couldn't afford to reimburse me for my work (unfortunately, he stuck to that one). He also attempted to drum up sympathy for Brian, saying he was a 300-lb. man with a disability who lived at home with his mother.

After some spadework, I finally tracked Brian down at his brother's place, which turned out not to be his brother's place. It was Brian's place, though Brian initially pretended to be his brother, which his father told me he doesn't have.

The 33-year-old legal aide apologized and said he'd suffered writer's block, understandable when one is trying to describe an event one never actually attended. I was intent on checking Brian's answers against Dan's. "Brian," I said, "I have to ask you some weird questions. Do you live with your mother?" "No," he said. "Do you have a disability?" "No," he replied. "Brian," I asked, "are you a 300-lb. man?" "Yes," he answered, "But I'm on a diet. How'd you know? Did you see my picture?" "Yes," I retorted, "if you'll remember, it was attached to my story."

A political-journalism junkie, Brian had a question of his own. "Do you know David Broder?" he asked. After some shop talk (Brian's ultimate ambition is to "be Marlin Fitzwater"), Brian thanked me for not suing him, but said if I did, his medical excuse was all worked out. It seems he suffers from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, which makes him chronically lie to people. From experience, I'd say he's telling the truth.

Still uncompensated, I fed the item to the *Washington Post*, and it ran the next day, though not to my satisfaction. Perhaps I'm the butt of some cosmic copy-editing joke. But now, *Post* readers believe that one of the most blatant instances of plagiarism in recent memory occurred when Brian Goldenfeld stole the work of "Mark" Labash. As I recently pronounced at a cocktail party in a blisteringly original formulation, "Glory is fleeting, but obscurity is forever." Actually, Napoleon said it first—but so what? Let him sue me.

Matt Labash

Debating Destruction

I HAVE BEEN DISAPPOINTED by the willingness of William Kristol and David Brooks to carry the hod for Sen. McCain ("The Politics of Creative Destruction," March 13). They seem to be enamored of the concept of reform and national purpose that McCain portends. McCain, we are told, genuinely wants to reform our political system and reconnect us to the concept of civic virtue by uniting us "to serve a cause greater than our self-interest." To me it seems like the triumph of desire over reality.

If McCain were really concerned about the problem of interests, he would not be talking almost entirely about "big tobacco" and the moneyed interests—groups most listeners associate almost exclusively with the Republican party. Would it be so hard for McCain to rail directly against the power of the teachers' and labor unions, the trial lawyers' association, and radical environmentalist groups that seek to limit property rights, as well as tobacco and business groups? Of course not, but if he did, the mainstream press might not have been so sycophantic.

As to the issue of whether McCain's campaign represents a chance for a philosophical renewal of the Republican party, on this point, McCain seems to be all talk and no substance, especially when compared to Gov. Bush. What exactly is this "cause greater than my self-interest" that McCain is calling me to realize? As near as I can tell, it is simply voting for McCain. I vote for him, and he magically slays the monster interests. This does not seem very participatory to me. My civic virtue has been boiled down to a single vote or perhaps a series of votes, a prospect I don't find terribly ennobling. Where is the challenge? Where in the McCain plan am I seriously challenged to be a better human being or citizen?

The philosophy behind George W. Bush's compassionate conservative message, on the other hand, has a long pedigree. It harks back to the Catholic principle of subsidiarity outlined by Pope Leo—namely, that we should attempt to solve our most pressing social problems with the resources closest to the problem: Begin with the family, then move to the church, civic associations, the town, and upward. If this lineage is too sectarian, one could also trace the idea back to Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, where he suggests that a large part of America's ability to resist the worst tendencies of the democratic age (radical egalitarianism and individualism) can be found in the strength of her civic associations and local governments.

Bush calls on Americans to become engaged in their communities through faith-based programs. His tax cut enables Americans to improve their paltry rate of donation to charity (reported as 2.1 percent of income in a recent WEEKLY STANDARD article). In short,

the Bush campaign supplies a challenge to Americans to serve a cause greater than themselves in a way McCain's campaign does not.

The American public is reeling from the devastation wrought on its character by the current administration and the tragedies in Littleton, Paducah, Jonesboro, and now Flint. We need a leader who will rally us to build the bonds of community that have slowly dissipated. Attacking interests in Washington is feel-good politics; it fails to address the real problems that threaten Americans. We need a leader who will not only look after U.S. interests abroad, but who will call us to be better citizens than we are. Neither Al Gore nor John McCain has offered a mechanism for fulfilling that role of the president; George W. Bush has.

My support for Gov. Bush is not based on a desire to support a noble lost cause, as Brooks suggests in a recent *Newsweek* article. I support the governor because he has the most coherent plan to restore the party to its most cherished ideals: that our freedoms are based on the equal dignity of man, and that government should encourage, not supplant, the institutions that allow man to best realize that dignity. Bush's truly is the most noble cause. In this spirit I would urge Kristol and Brooks to rethink their support for McCain and join Bush in his restoration of the Republican party.

DENNIS LOGUE JR.
Charlottesville, VA

WILLIAM KRISTOL AND David Brooks are on the run. Their candidate crashed because anyone with a modicum of good sense and skepticism could see Sen. McCain for the arrogant, sanctimonious gasbag that he is. Only a few Beltway conservative highbrows took his bait in a most public way, and are now thoroughly discredited. And now we are treated to another of Kristol and Brooks's efforts to explain why the Republican party needs to refashion itself every few years with an ever-shifting, kaleidoscopic parade of interests—how they must get liberal to keep fresh and groovy. What is this nonsense?

The GOP lost ground in recent years because of a crafty Bill Clinton and a miserable candidate in Bob Dole. These setbacks say nothing about the shift in public mood. The great myth in political and media circles is that the public has definite views on matters. Factor out the 1 percent of Americans who pay enough attention to policy to express a meaningful position, and you are left with an ignorant electorate at the mercy of the sexiest leader of the moment. This notion that the old Republican issues like tax cuts won't work anymore is garbage. Any issue can work at any time, given the proper pitch from the right salesman.

This "creative destruction" idea sounds like it came from the mouth of a college freshman who sits in some cafe

wearing a beret and reading Turgenev and Bakunin. Are Kristol and Brooks saying we should just smash up the party to see how the cookie crumbles? Thankfully the rank and file saw through this McCain farce and rose up to quash it.

DAVID K. KREITMAN
Miami Beach, FL

IN "THE POLITICS OF Creative Destruction," William Kristol and David Brooks assert that the Republican party can be renovated and expanded through a "moral crusade" framed as a "patriotic rather than a religious movement." Leaving aside the flaws in John McCain that contributed to the collapse of his campaign, as a general proposition, Kristol and Brooks's proposal is misconceived. Their argument is self-contradictory, they misunderstand the problem facing the GOP, and their solution would only destroy the party.

The Republican party unquestionably must adapt or die, and the tension between social and economic conservatives is a potentially fatal genetic trait. But Kristol and Brooks do not explain how their proposed movement would differ fundamentally from the anti-Communist coalition of the '60s, '70s, and '80s that needs to be replaced. That coalition was a patriotic movement, in which conservatives put aside their differences to pursue a moral crusade against communism. The authors seem to want to recreate that coalition, presumably with some new common cause to hold it together. But is that really a new paradigm, or the same kind of status-quo thinking of which they accuse the party faithful? And what would be the basis for a "moral crusade" or a "patriotic movement"? Without communism as a threat, economic conservatives see little need for a moral crusade. And how do you awaken patriotism in an established, wealthy, and self-indulgent society with no external economic or military threats on the horizon? Kristol and Brooks have no wine to pour into the old bottles.

Furthermore, the authors assume that the party can sanitize itself by "jettison[ing]" a few prominent religious conservatives. This betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the psychology of social conservatives, who are the pariahs of today's politics. Their views on abortion, homosexuality, relations between the sexes, school prayer, child-rearing, and most of the other issues that define them are anathema in what used to be called polite society. All they really want is to be free to raise their children and live their lives much as their parents did. This is no bad thing, but in a crass, amoral culture, it is increasingly difficult to do. When they attempt to protect themselves from assault by their own society, they are labeled uncompromising, narrow-minded, reactionary bigots.

Because these labels are unfair, similar attacks on religious conservative leaders are considered equally unfair. So it is no surprise when even those social conservatives who do not necessarily agree with the more outspoken members of the movement close ranks, as they did in the recent primaries. An attack on any member of the group is an attack on all. Besides, they know that drumming Pat Robertson out of the party will reduce neither the condescension of the liberal media, nor the fear and disdain felt by so many economic conservatives and independents.

Yes, the GOP has a big problem. Its most committed constituency is a large minority within the nation whose views on key issues are deeply held, but are not shared by the larger society. But any attempt to jettison social conservatives, minimize their role, or deny them the respect they deserve for their loyalty and service to the party as a whole can only lead to the destruction of the Republican party, or its relegation to permanent minority status. Yes, the party must appeal to moderates and independents to avoid the same fate. But if economic conservatives and others opposed to the statist and anti-rational politics of the left wish to prevail, they must develop a proper respect and appreciation for what motivates social conservatives. Economic conservatives and like-minded independents cannot out-vote the left's coalition of favor-seekers.

We need candidates who can help the two camps understand each other and work together. Economic conservatives and independents should be able to support policies that address some of the social conservatives' concerns and consequently reduce the tension surrounding social issues. School choice is one specific example. A more general case would be agreeing to limit federal involvement in many other social issues, allowing them to be resolved at the state and local level, and respecting ensuing local variations. This is only a makeshift solution, but present circumstances do not allow for more. After all, the chief appeal of the Perot-McCain reform agenda has been the emphasis on procedural rather than substantive reform. Once you start talking about substance, what looked like solid middle ground suddenly becomes quicksand.

Moral crusades and patriotic movements in today's cultural climate? Would that it were possible, but the time is not ripe. We live not in the strong-minded America of Teddy Roosevelt, but in the self-indulgent America that was disgusted with Bill Clinton yet refused to pass judgment on him.

MATTHEW C. AMES
Fairfax, VA

IN "THE POLITICS OF Creative Destruction," William Kristol and David Brooks argue that the McCain coalition may be the future of the Republican party. If they are correct, then the GOP will be superfluous, a sort of Democratic party lite, a clone of the Democratic Leadership Council.

One-party state, anyone?

GLENN SHELLER
Pickerington, OH

• • •

THE WEEKLY STANDARD
welcomes letters to the editor.
Letters will be edited for length and clarity and must include the writer's name, address, and phone number.
All letters should be addressed:
Correspondence Editor
THE WEEKLY STANDARD
1150 17th St., NW, Suite 505
Washington, DC 20036.

You may also fax letters: (202) 293-4901
or e-mail: Editor@Weeklystandard.com.

the weekly Standard

Gore's Scandals

At some point in this year's presidential campaign, American voters may well be invited to consider a curious, four-minute snippet of videotape, narrated in Chinese and recorded April 29, 1996, in Los Angeles's Hacienda Heights. It opens with a high school marching band straight out of *The Music Man*, that Broadway classic about a fictional small-town scam artist. Then, seconds later, as the tape rolls and the band's welcome serenade continues, a real-life, big-town flim-flammer appears, waving and smiling. You can read his lips while the trombones blare. *Hello*, says this man. *Thank you*.

Yes, indeed: Thank you very much. The man in the video is Vice President Al Gore, a garland of flowers around his neck, acknowledging applause from a yellow-clad crowd of Buddhist nuns and monks. Who, by the end of the following day, though many of them are foreign nationals with hardly a penny to their names, will have written checks for nearly $100,000 to the Democratic National Committee. The nuns and monks will also have had these DNC "contributions" instantly reimbursed by their Hsi Lai Temple superiors. Who will have completed the secret transaction using a mixture of overseas funds and U.S. charitable donations. All of which will involve multiple violations of federal election law and the Internal Revenue Service code. Which violations will together constitute a felony: a criminal conspiracy to defraud the Federal Election Commission.

Anyhow, back to the video, subsequently released as promotional material by the temple's parent organization in Taiwan. Up the Hsi Lai steps walks Al Gore. Into a luncheon meeting hall he proceeds, where he takes a seat at the head table while the temple's "venerable master," Hsing Yun, addresses the faithful. Hsing Yun oversees a nearly half-billion-dollar global Buddhist empire. And Hsing Yun, he has elsewhere explained, likes to "spread the dharma" of Buddhist good cheer by giving lots of cash to American politicians. One of whom is next up on the tape. We see Al Gore speaking to the room. We see Gore exchanging gifts with the venerable master. We see Gore making his way out of the temple, bowing to his hosts, upright palms mashed together in Buddhist prayer the whole way. And then the tape is done, and . . .

Hold on a second. Hit the rewind button. Who's that sitting next to the vice president at lunch—there, immediately to Gore's left, the fellow with the mutton-chop sideburns? Why, it's Ted Sioeng, that's who. Sioeng is a citizen of Belize. He is also super rich, controlling a multinational stew of family-owned businesses, including several U.S. shell corporations and at least one "legitimate" enterprise: manufacture and distribution, under rights granted by Communist party officials in Beijing, of Red Pagoda Mountain cigarettes, China's state-owned brand.

Here at the Hsi Lai Temple event, Sioeng is just an honored guest. He's gotten in free. But there's a reason for that. Sioeng is a friend of the vice president, you see. They met at a White House breakfast back in February 1996, the morning after Sioeng bought his way into a DNC presidential dinner for $100,000. That contribution check was written by Sioeng's daughter, Jessica, a legal resident of California. But Jessica's bank account had less than $10,000 in it at the time. So the check had to be covered, a few days later, by a giant wire transfer from Hong Kong. The contribution from "Jessica" was illegal, in other words. As was most of the total $400,000 Sioeng and his family would give to the Democratic party for that year's election.

And yet the DNC has never returned the money. And the Clinton Justice Department has never shown much interest in investigating it.

For more than three years now, the White House and its fund-raisers have steadfastly denied knowing, in 1996, that they were harvesting millions of dirty dollars like this. In particular, Vice President Gore has steadfastly denied contemporaneous knowledge that there was anything fishy about his Hsi Lai Temple fund-raiser. Or even that it *was* a fund-raiser. Gore was first introduced to Venerable Master Hsing Yun in 1989, during a trip he made to Taiwan in exchange for an explicit promise, from the now-notorious John Huang and Maria Hsia, that they would generate campaign contributions for his 1990 Senate race. Already by April 1996, donations laundered by Hsia through Hsing Yun's Los Angeles monks and nuns had several times been funneled to the DNC—and had once helped grease a White House meeting between Gore's staff and an intelligence operative from the People's Republic of China. The Hsi Lai Temple was a well-known and frequent site for Democratic party fund-raisers. And everyone on Gore's staff—and at the DNC—seems to have known, before-

hand, that his own temple appearance would be yet another such cash-drenched affair. But the vice president himself had no idea. Not an inkling. So he says.

Now, you can't see any money change hands in the four minutes of videotape that survives from April 29, 1996. Neither can you so much as hear mention of money. Because you can't hear anything at all, really: just the marching band at the beginning, some eerie flute music at the end, and the anodyne Chinese narration throughout. Which vacuous sound track is itself highly suspicious, as it happens. King & I Productions, the Los Angeles film crew retained by the Hsi Lai Temple for Gore's visit, recorded a full hour and a half of video and audio at the event: all the luncheon remarks, including the introduction Rep. Bob Matsui gave to the vice president. During which, according to witnesses who testified before Sen. Fred Thompson's campaign finance investigation, Matsui bragged about how much money was being raised that day—and also announced that it was "okay to give contributions at the Hsi Lai Temple." While Al Gore looked on.

The video and audio footage of Matsui's little talk would prove Al Gore a baldfaced liar about his knowledge of a baldfaced crime, in other words. But that video and audio footage seems no longer to exist. Temple officials seem to have shipped it to Taiwan, where it has allegedly "disappeared." And the Clinton Justice Department seems not to be looking for it. Justice abruptly shut down its Los Angeles U.S. Attorney's field investigation of the Hsi Lai Temple shortly after the controversy broke—just days before the 1996 election. Reassigned to Washington, that investigation has languished ever since. The FBI seems never to have interviewed Bob Matsui. About the temple fund-raiser, at least, the FBI seems never to have interviewed Al Gore.

Is there a familiar pattern here? There is. Consider the sequential responses of the vice president and his allies to questions about Gore's infamous 1995-96 fund-raising phone calls from the White House. In March 1997, when news of those calls was first published, they were widely assumed to violate a federal ban on campaign solicitations in government offices. Gore, however, insisted that "no controlling legal authority" had forbidden his telephone work. And Attorney General Janet Reno declined to investigate, on the novel ground that federal workplace law barred only requests for donations to specific candidates and campaigns. What Gore had done—ask for nonspecific "soft money" to fund a general television campaign by the DNC—was perfectly okay, Reno announced.

Then, a few months later, it turned out that Gore's phone calls had generated not just soft money but quite a lot of "hard" money, too, precisely the kind of solicitations that even Reno's initial theory would have foreclosed. At a key White House meeting Gore attended in November 1995, a plan to have him make phone calls for such hard money had been discussed, and there were extant memos—addressed to him—that proved it. This time, Gore denied, to the FBI, ever having read the memos or remembering the meeting's conversation: He *thought* he was later dialing for soft dollars only, whether or not it was actually true. And Janet Reno believed him. The vice president had no intent to break the law, so he hadn't broken it, she decided. The Justice Department would not request appointment of an independent counsel.

Finally, in the summer of 1998, there surfaced handwritten notes taken by one of Gore's aides at the November 1995 White House planning session. The notes made clear that hard-money contributions had explicitly been discussed in connection with the DNC's television ad campaign, and that Gore had volunteered to make the necessary phone calls. What's more, there were photographs of the meeting in which the vice president could clearly be seen peering intently at the memos he'd previously claimed never to have seen. Had Gore made false statements about all this to the FBI? Once again, Janet Reno sent the Bureau to question him. Once again, Gore proclaimed a total memory lapse about the relevant meeting and memos; maybe he had left the room to urinate when the subject of hard money came up, he offered.

And, once again, Janet Reno believed Al Gore. End of investigation.

But not end of story. For the story—of Gore's phone calls and Hsi Lai Temple escapade—has a moral. And the moral is this: Al Gore is Bill Clinton all over. Confronted by a political threat, just as Clinton perceived one in the Paula Jones and Monica Lewinsky matters, Gore, like Clinton, is a man who feels *entitled* to cheat the law. And then, when he is caught cheating the law, Gore, just like Clinton, feels entitled to cheat the law some more—by lying about what he's done. And by enlisting a hapless Justice Department in the dishonesty. "The public needed to be informed as to why this pending Republican agenda was not good for the country," Gore told the FBI, thus rationalizing the DNC television ads his phone calls and Buddhist nuns helped make possible. What could be wrong with that?

Everything, actually. Al Gore's sense of extralegal entitlement is a dangerous thing in a would-be president. His opponent in the forthcoming campaign, George W. Bush, may well try to make this case. There is no guarantee Bush will succeed. Eight years into the Clinton administration, the country's concern for the integrity of its laws—at least as they apply to politics and politicians—has never seemed weaker. "Everybody does it," Americans now routinely tell themselves, whistling past democracy's graveyard.

But they are wrong about that. And there will be honor in any attempt to change their minds, even if the attempt is a practical failure. George W. Bush *should* speak out, early and often, about the true import of Al Gore's grotesque campaign fund-raising scandals.

—David Tell, for the Editors

Kosovo's a Mess

And Milosevic is the problem. BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

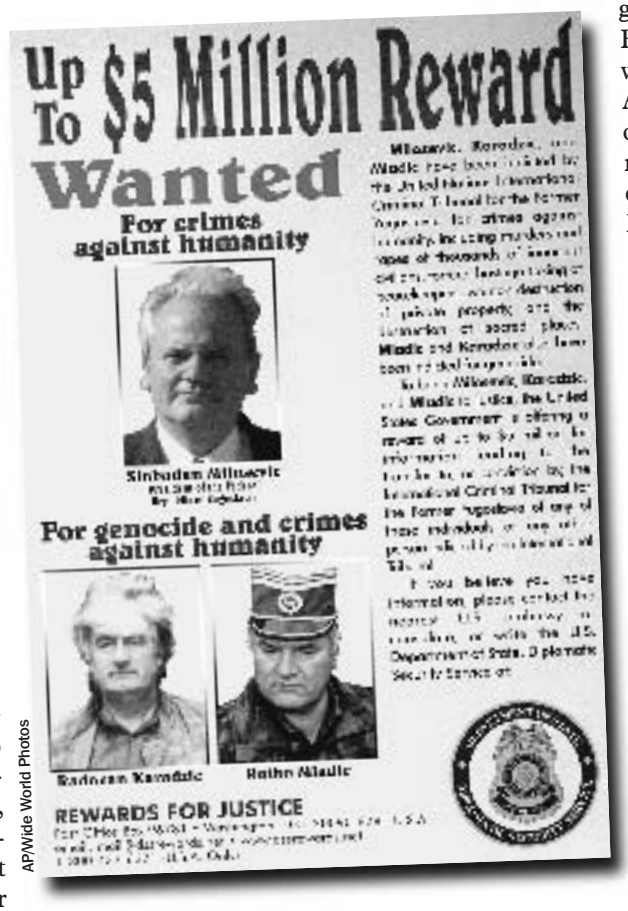
Djakovica, Kosovo

THE ONCE-LOVELY CITY of Djakovica, in western Kosovo, a major interreligious center for centuries, played host last week to State Department spokesman James Rubin. Predictably, he called on local Albanians to forgive their Serb neighbors and former oppressors for the suffering visited on them before last year's NATO intervention in Kosovo.

But here, the wounds are still fresh. The Hadum mosque, built in 1594, in front of which Rubin delivered his remarks, was partly burned and the top of its minaret shot off by Serb forces. Its library, which dates from 1733, and the local archives of the Kosovo Islamic Community were destroyed. Human losses in the area were worse.

It is easy for Rubin to drop by and preach forgiveness, but far more difficult for people on the ground to achieve reconciliation. Exactly a year after the war to halt the rape of Kosovo began, the province is unraveling. NATO forces occupy it, and "the international community" administers it, but it knows neither stability nor security from the continuing machinations of Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic.

In the northern industrial city of Mitrovica, a persistent Serb-Albanian confrontation has produced a dangerous split between the French and American wings of the peacekeeping forces, known as KFOR. When the war ended last summer, Serb militants seized the northern half of Mitrovica, isolating a handful of Albanian residents in a few apartment buildings, and barred Albanians from crossing the bridge over the Ibar river from the predominantly Albanian southern half. Ever since, rioting, arson, shootings, bombings, and stonings have plagued the city.



AP/Wide World Photos

The State Department's new approach to Balkans policy

In a particularly repulsive act of ethnic cleansing, the Serbs expelled Albanian medical personnel and patients from Mitrovica's main hospital, in the northern zone. The hospital has sunk into an unsanitary and generally wretched condition, even while its doctors, employees of the Milosevic government, are reportedly paid twice the salary of their colleagues in Belgrade.

The main Kosovo university campus is also in northern Mitrovica, and Albanian students fumed at the Serb blockade, which prevented them from going back to classes. Last October 16, thousands of Albanian students and others demonstrated at the bridge, demanding to cross. Violence broke out, and French troops and police repeatedly fired stun grenades into the crowd. Four French peacekeepers were wounded, as were some 22 Albanians including a 12-year-old boy; another 100 Albanians required treatment for their eyes. It was the first of several large-scale clashes.

The very day of that first big demonstration, the chief U.N. administrator in Kosovo, the Frenchman Bernard Kouchner, was celebrating the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the charity he had co-founded, Doctors Without Borders. Western cynics who think Nobel prizes are used to glorify failing or controversial humanitarian projects suggested the prize was meant to divert attention from the weak performance of Kouchner's Kosovo mission.

Kouchner himself was more circumspect. The Mitrovica demonstration showed what big challenges confronted him and his colleagues, he said; even after calm had returned to Mitrovica, the situation was difficult and "symbolic." Ethnic reconciliation, he conceded, in one of the great understatements of all time, remained out of reach. His ambiguous solution: coexistence.

Whether coexistence meant accepting separate Serb and Albanian zones in Mitrovica or attempting to reestablish a mixed town was left unaddressed, until shocking news hit the American media in mid-February: French troops had withdrawn from

Stephen Schwartz's Kosovo: Background to a War *will be published in Britain this month.*

the scene rather than assist American police attempting to rescue Albanians from a deadly Serb pogrom, in which several families were attacked in their homes.

In the region, the disagreements among the peacekeepers are public knowledge. The Albanians regard the French as the Serb extremists' best friends, and the Serbs acknowledge as much. The Serb opposition weekly *NIN* reported smugly on February 24 that some members of KFOR and the U.N. police occasionally let the Serbs have their way in confrontations with Albanians.

High-level Americans, notably NATO commander Wesley Clark and U.S. ambassador Richard Holbrooke, see the bloody events in Mitrovica as caused principally by Milosevic's agents infiltrating from Serbia. But Paris insisted the Albanians were equally at fault.

The most recent and in some respects most outrageous instance of French peacekeepers' refusing to cooperate with the rest of KFOR came in early March. After a street battle between Serbs and Albanians injured 40 people, including 16 French soldiers, French forces inexplicably refused to permit U.N. police to investigate. John Adams, a Briton serving as deputy regional commander for the U.N. police, claimed the French had barred his officers from the crime scene after dark; at this writing, few of the injured have been interviewed. After airing his complaints to the media, Adams was relieved of his duties.

Meanwhile, the French promised to build a second bridge across the Ibar river to allow Albanians stranded in southern Mitrovica to gain access to their apartments. But the Serb militants in northern Mitrovica do not want Albanians living among them. In the logic of Milosevic and his dupes, if Albanians are permitted to live in Serb-dominated neighborhoods, they will soon expel the Serbs. Oliver Ivanovic, the engineer and karate aficionado who speaks for the Serbs, rejects multiethnicity in northern Mitrovica.

Andras Riedlmayer / Kosovo Cultural Heritage Survey—Harvard University

The Hadum mosque and remains of the 16th-century library of Hadum Suleiman Efendi

Ivanovic heads the Serb National Council of Northern Mitrovica, which he has flatly refused to allow to merge with the broader Serb National Council. This group, the Serb lobby in the rest of Kosovo, is led by a layman and two Orthodox church leaders, Archbishop Artemije Radosavljevic and Father Sava Janjic (see "The Cybermonk of Kosovo," THE WEEKLY STANDARD, December 13, 1999).

There are two obvious reasons for Ivanovic's hard line. First, Archbishop Artemije favors allowing Albanians to return to their homes in northern Mitrovica; second, Ivanovic is Milosevic's man, and it is in Milosevic's interest to keep the pot boiling. Ivanovic's refusal to cooperate with the Kosovo-wide council brings with it a refusal to join the Kosovo Temporary Administrative Council set up by Kouchner. For Ivanovic, the goal is to keep Kosovo in Serbia; for Artemije, it is to keep Serbs in Kosovo.

The two agendas are not the same. Ivanovic and his master in Belgrade treat the Kosovo Serbs as bargaining chips; Artemije seeks to protect their dignity, humanity, and civil rights. The archbishop and Father Sava stressed this in meetings with secretary of state Madeleine Albright in Washington on February 25.

One reason Milosevic wants to hold on to northern Kosovo is the presence of a large mineral-industry complex near Mitrovica. But in addition, Milosevic is under pressure,

from within and without. Inside Serbia, increasing lawlessness, epitomized by the assassination of indicted war criminal Zeljko Arkan Raznatovic, threatens his rule. An orderly transfer of power in neighboring Croatia following the death of autocratic president Franjo Tudjman has fed the dissatisfaction of Serbs, who are sick of sacrificing their standard of living, their reputation in the world, and their day-to-day sanity to advance Milosevic's obsessions.

Thus, Milosevic has adopted a three-pronged strategy of destabilization on his southern border. Mitrovica represents the center play. To the southwest, in Montenegro, he is threatening to overthrow the de facto independent government of Milo Djukanovic, who enjoys enough support from his people that a Milosevic coup there is unlikely to succeed. East of Kosovo, in the south Serbian district of Presevo, Milosevic has stepped up repression against the Albanian majority, stimulating the emergence of a new Albanian extremist force, the Liberation Army of Presevo, Medvedja, and Bujanovac, known by its Albanian initials as UCPMB.

Common wisdom among foreigners holds that the UCPMB must be the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in a new guise. But there is powerful evidence to the contrary. The rank and file of the KLA and their former commander, Agim Ceku, instead have been transformed into the Kosovo Protection Corps, which seems to have adopted a posture of assiduous obedience to Kouchner and NATO commanding general Klaus Reinhardt. After all, unlike most public workers in Kosovo, the Kosovo Protection Corps gets paid, and on time.

Indeed, for ordinary people in Kosovo, Albanians as well as Serbs, who only want to rebuild their lives, a far bigger problem than ethnic touchiness is the incompetence of Kouchner's administration. There is no regular system for paying workers, or even for cashing a paycheck. Food is plentiful and cheap, but there is no telephone service in large sections of the province, and electric power goes

out for days at a time. Civilian flights into Pristina's airport are routinely suspended by the U.N. mission. Bus service, on which most people depend, is also irregular. In one particularly ill-considered move, Kouchner decided to raise money for his cash-poor budget by levying a fee on trucks bringing commodities into Kosovo. The ensuing protest by hundreds of truck drivers blocked the main northern route into Kosovo from Montenegro for weeks.

Daily chaos continues to afflict ordinary Kosovars. Although the Americans remain popular among the Albanians, numerous Albanians are disillusioned with the failure of the broader international community to restore a minimally normal existence, and they object to the political heavy-handedness of the former KLA.

The main problem is, as ever, Milosevic. The Albanian media report that a curfew has been imposed in the Presevo-Medvedja-Bujanovac area of Serbia, and some 10,000 refugees already have fled into Kosovo. Medvedja has supposedly been cleansed of its Albanian majority.

Off the record, American officials in the Balkans keep asking whether there is a solution in Mitrovica, or in Kosovo at large. The U.S. State Department recently took the somewhat laughable step of issuing a wanted poster (in English, not Serbian, let it be noted) depicting Milosevic and his Bosnian henchmen Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic. It offered a $5 million reward to anybody with unspecified information about the Butcher of Belgrade.

Well, information about Milosevic's whereabouts is pretty common in the Balkans. If the United States and NATO really want to pacify Mitrovica, keep Montenegro out of trouble, and prevent a new bloodbath in southern Serbia, the solution is obvious: Deal with Milosevic the way President George Bush dealt with Panamanian dictator Manuel Antonio Noriega. On March 11, Carla del Ponte, chief war crimes prosecutor for the former Yugoslavia, called for Milosevic's arrest. About time. ♦

Disabling Our Prisons

How federal law and the Justice Department have become a convict's best friend. **BY ROGER CLEGG**

IS THERE A SINGLE PRISON in the United States that hasn't been harassed by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)? Probably not. Ever since the Supreme Court decided its first ADA case, *Pennsylvania Department of Corrections* v. *Yeskey*, in June 1998, inmate complaints inspired by the act have exploded.

It isn't hard to see why. In *Yeskey* the Court ruled 9-0 that the ADA does cover prisons and that inmates are permitted to sue if they believe their disabilities have not been "reasonably accommodated." But figuring out which disabilities apply is a problem: The ADA defines "disability" very broadly—so broadly that most of the more than one million people now confined in state prisons alone can fashion a plausible claim to "disabled" status and, consequently, to victimization by discrimination.

Just for starters, about 80 percent of state prison inmates are estimated to have past drug and alcohol dependencies. A New York federal court held that disability law would be violated if an inmate was denied parole because of his history of alcoholism, and federal regulations make it generally illegal to discriminate on the basis of prior, chronic substance abuse.

Then there is AIDS. The Supreme Court has also held that being HIV-positive is a disability—and "HIV infection rates in prison exceed the general population by as much as five or six to one," according to the *Encyclopedia of American Prisons*.

And finally there is . . . practically everything else. More than 10 percent of federal and state inmates have learning disorders. Another 4.2 percent suffer mental retardation. Another 7.2 percent are psychotic. And another 12 percent have some separate, lesser psychological malady. Another researcher found that one fourth of all adult males in prison have attention-deficit hyperactivity disorders.

The ADA is an open invitation to any or all of these inmates to sue their wardens. And since "jail-house lawyers" are notoriously litigious—prisoners, after all, have lots of time on their hands and some familiarity with the legal system—a great number of inmates are accepting that invitation every year.

Many prisoner complaints are dubious, to put it mildly. The inmate in *Yeskey*, for example, was unhappy that he had been rejected for participation in Pennsylvania's motivational boot camp program because of his medical history of hypertension. The last place a guy with high blood pressure belongs is in a boot camp program, one might think. But no matter: Inmate Yeskey got his day in court.

And—no more surprising, but just as disappointing—the Clinton Justice Department is likely to back him up.

For years now, the disability rights section of the department's civil rights division has aggressively advanced an expansive interpretation of where, how, and when the ADA applies to the criminal justice system. The department has long argued that the ADA covers even initial police contacts with suspects, for example. And Justice has issued a "notice of possible or actual violations" when mentally ill arrestees are jailed instead of taken to a hospital or health facility.

Yet this stuff is mere peanuts. It's

Roger Clegg is general counsel of the Center for Equal Opportunity in Washington, D.C.

only after plausibly "disabled" arrestees are charged, convicted, and sent to prison that Clinton administration policy has its greatest—and most disruptive—effect.

Even before the *Yeskey* case, the Justice Department was using the ADA to pressure state prisons to modify security procedures so that, for example, disabled wives might visit their inmate husbands. The binding precedent won by Mr. Yeskey has strengthened the department's hand, and it has more than once seen fit to press its expansive interpretation of the ADA in court. With prisons, though, the Justice Department needn't go that far to get its way. The threat of a lawsuit is more than enough to persuade state prison officials to buckle—and alter their practices, otherwise modern and humane though they might be, wholly beyond recognition.

Probably hundreds and maybe even thousands of times each year, you see, state prison inmates contact the Justice Department, complaining that their "disabilities" are not being "reasonably accommodated." A small sample of recent such communications gives the typical flavor:

- ¶ One inmate said he needed a special "eggcrate mattress."
- ¶ Another prisoner complained of exposure to "environmental pollutants."
- ¶ Inmates in wheelchairs have demanded more time to eat lunch.
- ¶ One prisoner complained when guards "reduced his daily allotment of undergarments from five to one."
- ¶ An inmate has challenged the denial of conjugal visits from his HIV-positive partner.
- ¶ A prisoner has protested being "prohibited from work assignments in prison mechanical maintenance shop because he has epilepsy."
- ¶ One inmate has grounded an ADA complaint on his rejection by a boot camp program—because he has no hands.

Each of these ADA "allegations" sounds exotic or outright frivolous. But every one—and dozens more just like them—has earned a response from Washington: a Justice Department form letter, addressed to the relevant prison official, that seems designed to intimidate him into acceding to his prisoner's wishes. "This letter is to officially notify you that a complaint has been filed with the Department of Justice . . . against [you], alleging violations of [the ADA]," a typical missive reads. "We have determined that the complaint is complete and timely . . . and would like to discuss this matter further with you or a designated staff member, in the near future." Sometimes the point is made explicit: "We are also authorized to take appropriate action, including filing an appropriate action in U.S. district court, to enforce [the ADA] if voluntary compliance is not achieved."

The "accommodations" sought by disabled inmates will inevitably drain money away from other valuable programs; budgets are finite.

These letters are signed "Attorney, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section." They are generally not reviewed by any senior Justice official. Quite frequently, in fact, the "attorney" in question isn't a permanent department employee at all, just a hired contractor.

Now, what would you do if you were a prison official and got a letter like this? Right: You'd be reluctant to get into a protracted battle with the deep-pocketed litigators and money-grantors at the Justice Department, and so you'd change your practice—even if you thought it was a perfectly reasonable one. *Armstrong* v. *Davis*, a private class action brought under the ADA against California's prisons, has already cost the state millions of dollars with no end in sight as Judge Claudia Wilken, a Clinton appointee, has begun micromanaging the system. No state official in his right mind wants to be responsible for starting something like *that*. Preemptive capitulation is by far the easiest course.

But it isn't necessarily the humane course. And it's rarely cheap. As the above examples suggest, the "accommodations" sought by disabled inmates might well raise health or security concerns for visitors, guards, other prisoners, or the complainant himself. And making those accommodations will inevitably drain money away from other valuable programs in the same prison; corrections budgets are finite.

Yes, sometimes an accommodation for disabled inmates might be reasonable. But as the ADA is now administered in Washington, that is often not a judgment call left to officials on the ground. Under current federal regulations, state decision-makers must agree to *any* modification sought by a disabled inmate unless they can establish that the change would "fundamentally" alter prison programs or services. Again, under threat of a Justice Department lawsuit, many of them will not even bother to try.

The Supreme Court recently granted review in a case—*Florida Department of Corrections* v. *Dickson*—that probably would have exempted states from paying monetary damages to inmates bringing ADA claims. But *Dickson* was settled at the eleventh hour by the state of Florida. The speculation is that Governor Jeb Bush didn't want to be seen as attacking the statute his father signed into law. In any event, the case would not have eliminated the many other burdens the ADA imposes on our prisons: their metastasizing legal expenses and their constant subjection to judicial and bureaucratic micromanagement. Such desperately needed relief can be delivered only by Congress.

Don't hold your breath for that, though. Less than a month after the *Yeskey* ruling was issued, senators Strom Thurmond and Jesse Helms introduced the State and Local Prison Relief Act, which would remove prisons from coverage by the ADA. The bill has gone nowhere. ♦

Hair-Trigger Politics

They won't admit it, but Clinton and the NRA agree on more than you think. BY ANDREW PEYTON THOMAS

RARELY DOES President Clinton encounter a political actor as demagogic as he is, so you could say he finally met the enemy he deserves in his fight with the National Rifle Association. The NRA fired first last week with a TV ad in which president Charlton Heston called on the president to stop misrepresenting the facts about gun control: "Mr. Clinton, when what you say is wrong, it's a mistake. When you know it's wrong, that's a lie." NRA executive vice president Wayne LaPierre followed up by asserting on *This Week* that Clinton "needs a certain level of violence in this country," and that he's "willing to accept a certain level of killing to further his political agenda and his vice president, too."

The remarks clearly rankled Clinton—particularly Heston's well-delivered jibe, though LaPierre's tasteless rhetoric presented the riper target. Clinton spent the rest of the week quoting LaPierre's hyperbole and pressing into political service the children slain recently in America's schoolhouses, as he advocated greater federal regulation of gun ownership.

Lost in the exchanges was the gravamen of the NRA's original complaint against Clinton: that his administration has a poor record of enforcing existing gun laws. The NRA points to a sharp decline in the number of referrals by the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) for federal gun-law prosecutions. The administration has responded to this criticism by denying it, and at the same time seeking $280 million in additional funding to address it. This money, proposed as part of the president's budget, would go to hire more ATF agents and inspectors and federal prosecutors.

In making its case against the administration, the NRA touts a study of ATF referrals culled from Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC), a database of federal prosecutions. Published in 1999, the TRAC study found that from 1992 to 1998, the number of ATF-referred cases plunged from 9,885 to 5,510—a 44 percent decrease. The study also calculated that the median prison sentence for ATF-referred cases fell from 57 months in 1996 to 46 months in 1998. These trends paralleled significant staff cuts at ATF in the 1990s, including a 14 percent reduction in criminal investigators.

The growing consensus on stricter enforcement of gun laws is far more likely to yield lower rates of crime and violence than vainly requiring crack-addled parents to place trigger locks on their illegal handguns.

The Justice Department has subtly disparaged the Syracuse study while proffering more favorable statistics of its own. A Justice Department spokesperson, while acknowledging, "I've not really looked at the gun study," cautions vaguely: "There's a general problem with a TRAC study because it involves lumping numbers together which don't necessarily have context or meaning." TRAC studies, in fact, are well regarded among criminal justice professionals. More substantively, Justice points out that the number of federal *cases* involving gun-law violations (as opposed to ATF referrals) actually rose 16 percent from 1992 to 1999.

Still, even Justice's own statistics reveal interesting variations within that period. From 1992 to 1997, the number of firearms cases tumbled, from 4,754 to 3,703. In 1998, the numbers rebounded to 4,391. And only in 1999—the year the TRAC study came out and was trumpeted by the NRA—did the number surge to 5,500, a jump which yielded the overall 16-percent increase.

In light of these numbers, the Clinton administration's request for $280 million for additional firearms-law enforcement looks like tacit acceptance of the NRA critique. And indeed, if administered properly, this proposed funding could produce significant gains in crime control.

One recent federal experiment in stricter gun-law enforcement in Richmond, Virginia, has already had a substantial chilling effect on firearms traffickers in the city. Convicted felons in Richmond who are discovered to be in possession of a firearm and in violation of a federal law are referred automatically for federal prosecution. A conviction for violating federal firearms laws carries a minimum sentence of five years without parole in a federal prison out of state—hence the name of the undertaking, Project Exile. The NRA has spent $1 million in advertising on radio, television, and city buses to publicize Project Exile.

Since the program began in 1997, the number of murders in Richmond has been cut by a third. More armed criminals received prison sentences in Virginia in 1998 than in California, New York, and New Jersey com-

Andrew Peyton Thomas is an attorney in Phoenix.

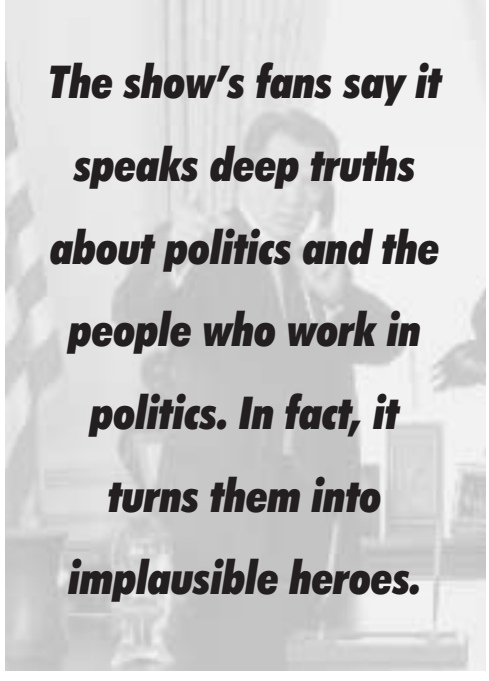
The Liberal Imagination

"The West Wing" is the ultimate Hollywood fantasy—the Clinton White House without Clinton.

By John Podhoretz

Of all those whom Bill Clinton has seduced and abandoned and then seduced and abandoned again—always with the promise of another seduction—the Hollywood elite has been almost as loyal as Monica was, and with about as much to show for it. Now Hollywood has taken its revenge—and a perverse but devastating sort of revenge it is—in the form of this season's prestige television drama, *The West Wing*.

This mildly successful show premiered last fall, but in the past month it has caught fire in the press, with cover stories in major magazines and articles in major newspapers. This is as it should be, because the media are liberal and *The West Wing* is an escapist fantasy for them. Creator and writer Aaron Sorkin has modeled his series on the glamorous early years of the Clinton White House. Nearly every character in *The West Wing* has a real-life parallel from Clinton's first term—Rob Lowe as George Stephanopoulos, Bradley Whitford as Paul Begala, Allison Janney as Dee Dee Myers, Richard Schiff as Gene Sperling, and Moira Kelly as Mandy Grunwald.



But the central character, the president himself, is nothing like the real man. And there's a good reason for that. *The West Wing*, you see, is nothing more or less than political pornography for liberals—made up of equal parts unrequited longing for and rage at Hollywood's not-so-obscure object of desire, William Jefferson Clinton.

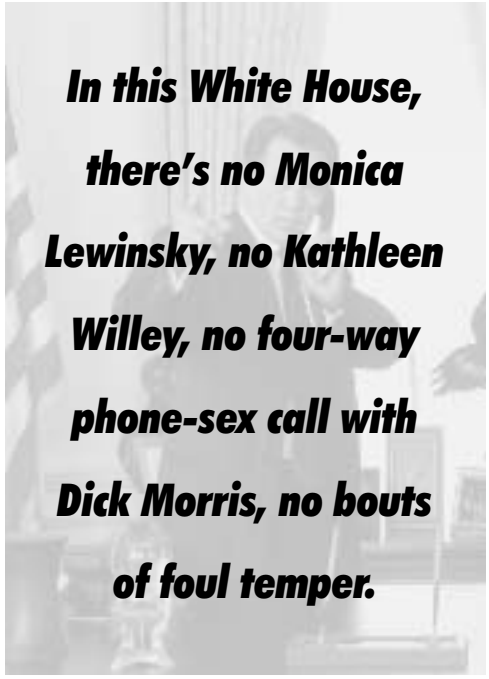
There's been a lot of talk about how meticulous Sorkin and team have been in recreating the charged atmosphere of the White House. But that's a lot of nonsense, given that you never see anybody in *The West Wing* on the telephone or in tedious meetings—which is how real White House aides spend their days and nights. Instead, it's full of endless shots of people walking down corridors, around corners, into offices and out of offices, all of which conveys a sense of terrible urgency. Exactly the same sort of urgency is on display in Sorkin's other show, the sitcom *Sports Night*, which is set in the offices of a cable television program.

The show's fans concede that some of the atmospherics are wrong—for instance, that the glamorous working quarters depicted are far larger than the tiny spaces and narrow hallways of the real West Wing. Still, they say, *The West Wing* succeeds in speaking deep truths about politics and the people who work in politics. Former Clinton administration official Matthew Miller, in a cover story for *Brill's Content* titled "The Real White House," claims that the show "presents a truer, more human picture of the people behind the headlines than most of today's Washington journalists." Mike McCurry, Clinton's ex-press secretary, told Miller he watches *The*

Contributing editor John Podhoretz is a columnist for the New York Post.

West Wing because it treats "those who work in politics . . . as human beings."

Human beings? These characters aren't human beings—they're noble soldiers in a noble cause, and they have been washed clean of every impurity because of it. *The West Wing* makes Miller, McCurry, and others like them into American heroes. Sorkin's staffers are wonderful in almost every possible way—or at least in ways that Hollywood considers wonderful. On the first episode, the George Stephanopoulos character picks up a woman at a bar, goes home with her, and later discovers she is a high-priced call girl. Rather than fleeing in fear for his job and the reputation of his administration, he spends the rest of the season trying to save her. When the press starts to sniff around the call-girl story, the Dee Dee Myers character expresses outrage—not at her colleague's irresponsibility, but at this intrusion into his private life. And when she gives a lecture to the reporter who loves her, he agrees to stifle the story.



Meanwhile, the Paul Begala character gets into a fight on a *Crossfire*-type show with an officious minister from the Christian Coalition—because our Lochinvar is so honest he can't abide the supposed hypocrisy of a minister who opposes abortion and supports the death penalty. (Later, the pastor reveals he is not only an anti-Semite but so ignorant he doesn't know "Thou shalt not kill" is the sixth of the Ten Commandments.)

There are no staff conflicts of any consequence in Sorkin's West Wing, no turf battles between these White House aides. They love each other, admire each other, support each other. No one is hungry for power, perks, or privilege. No one is motivated by ambition, anger, resentment, fear, or the hunger to run other people's lives. There's not even a stock villain or a comic foil with such ambitions and hungers. No, the characters have come to save America and the world.

And if you think they're wonderful, just wait until you meet the president. The occupant of Sorkin's Oval Office is an immensely thoughtful, infinitely wise, deeply caring, thoroughly monogamous, and unambiguously principled Nobel-Prize-winning economist (yes, Nobel-Prize-winning economist) named Josiah Bartlet—an appellation worthy of a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Bartlet means nothing but well. This is not a president whose conduct forces his aides to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars they don't have on personal defense lawyers. There's no Monica Lewinsky, no Kathleen Willey, no four-way phone-sex call with Dick Morris, no bouts of foul temper, no jokes about dating the mummified corpse of a 14-year-old Inca girl. In the Bartlet White House, you're not even allowed to curse. ("This is the White House, Seymour, not the Jersey Turnpike," the chief of staff says to a profane visitor. "Watch your mouth.")

Bartlet makes chili for his staff, and boy, is it good. He plays poker with them. He feels his staffers' pain, each and every one of them. Concerned that his young African-American assistant isn't having enough fun, the president insists that the Paul Begala character take the kid out for a drink in Georgetown. "The man's like a camp counselor," the Begala character protests, but you know he loves the Big Guy.

His advisers do fret about the political consequences of various hot topics—but not Bartlet, who has yet to do a single thing wrong. He is good-humored, but also full of righteous anger. After an anti-abortion group threatens his teenage daughter, he tells the Christian Coalition minister and his lackeys: "You'll denounce the Lambs of God and until you do, get your fat asses out of my office."

When trucking companies and Teamster officials won't compromise on a new contract, he informs them that at 12:01 A.M., "I'm using my powers to nationalize the trucking industry." He gets them to negotiate by saying, "Talk to me for five minutes apiece and we're going to settle this. Remain standing." And doggone it if they don't make a deal.

Bartlet is tough too. After his doctor is killed in a Syrian terrorist attack in Lebanon, he vows to strike back "with the fury of God's own thunder." His anger is so pure that his chief of staff must talk him down into an unsatisfying "proportionate response"—and his willingness to control his righteous anger is yet another mark of his greatness as a man and a president. Bartlet's loving wife tells him he has "a big brain, a good heart, and an ego the size of Montana. . . . You don't have the power to fix everything, but I do like watching you try."

For reasons known only to himself, Sorkin firmly denies that his show has a leftward bent. "I would disagree this is a liberal show," he told *Entertainment Weekly.* Why? Well, Bartlet wanted to bomb Syria, which isn't a very liberal thing to do, and "we know now he's not particularly vocal about gay rights."

Referring to the didactic but speedy debates that take place on the show about such scintillating matters as census sampling and human-rights violations in Indonesia, co-producer John Wells told Matthew Miller, "Nothing goes into the show without a full pro and con." Wells did admit there are no two sides of the issue when it comes to gun control—"I don't think any of us really believes in the other side of the argument very much," he said. But in the end, that's the case with every political debate on *The West Wing*. The liberal argument always, always, always prevails.

If the same had been true inside the Clinton White House in its first term, there wouldn't have been a second term. But that's the pornographic appeal of *The West Wing* to liberals. The unholy fantasy of it!

Bill Clinton must have seemed like a fantasy come true back in 1991, when he and Hollywood began their long and rocky romance. The Arkansas governor wowed the biggest names in Tinseltown with his comprehensive knowledge of popular culture. So what if he called himself a "new Democrat," supported the death penalty, and talked about welfare reform? He surely didn't believe all that right-wing stuff, he was only saying it to win, and Hollywood was hungry for a Democrat in the White House. Showbiz titans raised huge sums of money for him, with Barbra Streisand alone pulling in a cool $1 million; she even sang at his inauguration despite her notorious stage fright.

Remember that inauguration, a meticulously planned three-day function intended to suggest that a newer, younger, hipper, and more culturally aware generation was finally taking charge of America? Streisand serenaded Clinton with "Some Enchanted Evening." Michael Jackson, not yet the subject of pedophilia allegations settled out of court, was surrounded by little boys as he sang "Heal the World." Fleetwood Mac, the 1970s California-pop supergroup, reunited to sing the campaign anthem, "Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow." Easy-listening, boomer-style, was represented by the saxophonist Kenny G (who was said to be Clinton's favorite musician, in case you were wondering whether the pop-culture-crazed president's taste for pop culture is any more elevated than his taste in women).

Bit speaking parts were handed out by the dozens to Goldie Hawn and Sally Field and Geena Davis. Throughout the inaugural festivities, Warren and Annette, Barry Manilow and Macaulay Culkin, Cosby and Nicholson wandered around Washington as though they were the American army liberating Paris.

Yes, it seemed a new era had dawned. (For 12 years the only song performed at Republican functions had been Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the USA.") And though Clinton had run as a moderate, in those heady early days he gave every indication that he was going to govern farther to the left. The Hollywood elite thought it had died and gone to heaven when the first major issue to arise in the Clinton administration was the president's wish to end the ban on gays in the military. None of them had actually been in the armed forces—though most of them had produced or written or starred in or directed movies in which American military men were villains—but they sure knew a lot of gays. Or were gay themselves. And they thought they had a true friend in the White House.

The Lincoln Bedroom, not yet up for sale on a nightly basis, was a home away from home for Clinton's earliest and closest Hollywood intimates—like sitcom producers Linda and Harry Bloodworth-Thomason and actress Markie Post, the star of the Bloodworth-Thomason program *Hearts Afire*. So many celebrities were traipsing through the White House that a starstruck Paul Begala kept a camcorder handy to record their presence. In April 1993, when Clinton was in Vancouver for a summit with Boris Yeltsin, he stayed up late with Sharon Stone and Richard Gere in Richard Dreyfuss's hotel room—and, according to *W* magazine, he "briefed" celebrities "on how they could help him 'rebuild America.'" This, confesses George Stephanopoulos in his memoir, *All Too Human*, "inevitably and justifiably led to clucks in the press for hobnobbing with Hollywood stars at a superpower summit."

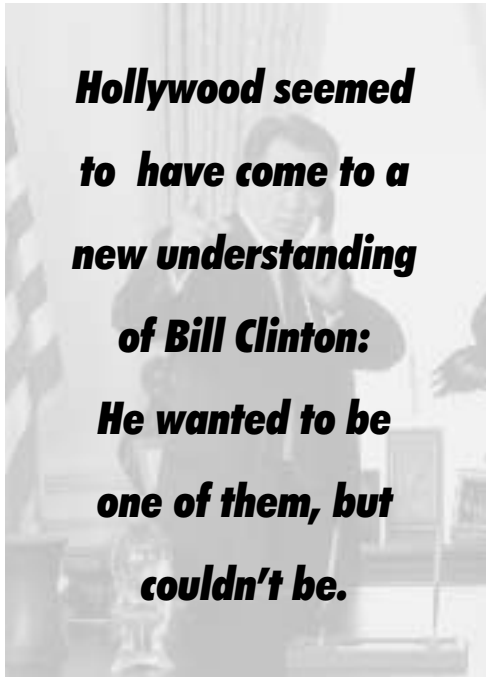
Trouble in paradise! Around the same time as the president's consultation with Sharon Stone, a gaggle of Clinton contributors from Hollywood were invited to the White House to share their ideas on how to promote health care reform with Hillary Clinton's task-force chairman Ira Magaziner and James Carville, among others. There were several emperors of Hollywood around the table in the Roosevelt Room—most prominently TriStar Pictures chief Mike Medavoy and MCA president Sidney Sheinberg.

These were men accustomed to being listened to, sucked up to, having their every idea praised, their every whim satisfied. But it was not to be, because in the middle of the meeting, Carville lost it. He hurled imprecations at them for being rich dilettantes with no sense of the true woes of middle-class folk, using the language of the Jersey

Turnpike. No one had ever said such things to these people—at least not since they were in the mailroom sucking up to the abusive superiors they would soon dethrone.

Carville behaved like "Anthony Perkins playing Fidel Castro on acid," said sitcom producer Gary David Goldberg, who hurled his notes at Carville and shouted, "How dare you speak to us this way?" After all, he and the others had been invited—and had flown to Washington on their own dime! They were a *task force*! Besides which, Goldberg said, his mother had "died because she didn't have adequate health care"! (Goldberg had made $100 million from the syndication sales of his show *Family Ties*.)

The administration put out word that Carville was in the doghouse for his behavior, but the truth was very nearly the opposite. There was a method to Carville's madness, as there always is. The Clinton administration's intimacy with Hollywood had become a political liability for a New Democrat who claimed to be a spokesman for culturally conservative values and not the knee-jerk limousine liberalism of the Hollywood elite. Clinton was close to seeming like a starstruck swain, not the Leader of the Free World, and Carville provided his president the cover to keep his distance. This became especially important after the May 1993 flap on the tarmac of Los Angeles International Airport, when Clinton was said to have held up air traffic for 90 minutes by having his hair cut by coiffeur-to-the-stars Christophe on Air Force One.



Clinton avoided Hollywood for months, until December 1993, when he attended a fund-raiser at the headquarters of Creative Artists Agency, then the most powerful institution in Hollywood. Barbra sang "Can't Help Lovin' That Man" to him. Then, after pocketing $250,000 in soft money, Clinton pulled a Sister Souljah by challenging Hollywood executives to consider the impact their mindlessly violent films and television shows were having on innocent children.

They initially swooned. "He's like a prophet because he speaks completely from the heart," said producer Brian Grazer. Echoed Mark Canton, then head of Columbia Pictures: "I'm going to really take Sunday to put things in perspective." But there was a certain irritation in the room. Screenwriter Gary Ross complained that Hollywood had been unfairly "whacked by the media" in the first months of the Clinton administration. And director Rob Reiner told the *Washington Post*, "I do think it's a little simplistic to say there's a cause and effect between TV and movies and violence."

At the time, Reiner was preparing to film a romantic comedy about a widowed president and his new love, with Aaron Sorkin as his screenwriter. *The American President*, which came out in 1995, features a Clinton-like Michael Douglas whose pragmatic politics have succeeded in getting him high approval ratings—but have made him a cautious and tentative leader. Through the love of environmental lobbyist Annette Bening, Douglas casts aside his centrism. He delivers a speech to a rapt press corps in which he says he will seek legislation to ban the ownership of all guns, proudly declares himself a card-carrying member of the ACLU, and says he will end global warming. The message to Clinton from Reiner, Sorkin, and the Hollywood they represented was unmistakable: *Don't be you. Be this man*.

The problem is that Clinton *was* that man, or as close to it as any president was likely to come, in his first two years in office. And it nearly destroyed him. His advocacy of gays in the military led to an embarrassing defeat at the hands of Colin Powell and Sam Nunn. Rather than offering the middle-class tax cut he had promised during the campaign, he pushed a significant tax increase through Congress. He saw to the passage of the Brady Bill forcing a waiting period before the purchase of a handgun. Most impressively, he advocated nationalizing one-seventh of the U.S. economy with his health care plan.

And in November 1994, the Republican party ran over Clinton and the Democrats with a steamroller.

To save himself and his party, Clinton was forced to move to the right—in part with his aggressive support of the V-chip, a piece of equipment that allows parents to screen television shows they consider harmful for their children. Hollywood hated the V-chip with an anger both self-righteous (threat to free speech) and fearful (would harm ratings, lower profits). But again, Hollywood embraced Clinton. How could it not? What choice did it have? Well, it could have decided not to lift a finger for

him, which is what Silicon Valley decided after Clinton's first term. But Hollywood felt itself under assault from Clinton's enemies. Newt Gingrich was on the prowl—Newt Gingrich, the enemy of all things progressive, the man who said that the revered actor-filmmaker Woody Allen's affair with his teenage stepdaughter "fit the Democratic platform perfectly"! And Bob Dole delivered a much-discussed speech in 1995 condemning the entertainment industry for making movies and television shows of which he disapproved (though he had never seen any of them).

Never mind the V-chip, and forget Hollywood's disappointment with what it took to be Clinton's obstinate refusal to rule the way Rob Reiner would. Clinton raised something like $10 million in hard and soft money in Hollywood in 1996—by far the most lucrative fund-raising he did, if you leave out the Chinese Army.

Hollywood seemed to have come to a new, more sober understanding of Bill Clinton. He wanted to be one of them, but couldn't be, not really, not with the country the way it was. Then came Monica, a scandal that was immensely confusing for the showbiz elite, who work in an industry where sexual harassment is a behavioral norm. *He had sex with an intern? And the problem is . . . what could be the problem with that?* "When it comes to private matters," producer Sean Daniel said at the time, "Hollywood has made its peace with far more scandalous behavior."

It's also an industry where conspiracies are the norm and where the top dogs have achieved greatness by plotting against others. This is one of the reasons why political conspiracy movies are so popular and taken so seriously within the Hollywood community—because they assume everybody else schemes the way they do. Hillary Clinton's charge that the entire business was a right-wing conspiracy made perfect sense to them.

Once again the wolves were at the door—this time led by Kenneth Starr. "Starr should be tried for treason," cried Haim Saban, the creator of *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*, who raised $1.5 million for Clinton in a single night at his house in September 1997. Clinton needed Hollywood and Hollywood delivered. "There's no decline in support," said the octogenarian éminence grise Lew Wasserman. Far from it, in fact. For what Clinton pulled off in the wake of the Lewinsky business was a Washington version of a beloved Hollywood dream-come-true—the critic-proof hit. No matter how bad his press, no matter how many pundits and columnists said he was finished, Clinton's approval ratings just kept on climbing.

Once again, Clinton had proved himself a winner, and Hollywood, as we've said, loves a winner. But after Clinton triumphed over his impeachers—and over the departed Newt Gingrich and the defeated Bob Dole—what was left of his presidency for his most reliable donors and friends? He wasn't going to pursue the agenda Hollywood was so enthusiastic about. Even in the arena of gun control, Clinton's not-so-ringing rhetoric about "closing the critical gun-show loophole" doesn't have the pizzazz of Michael Douglas's plan in *The American President* to ban *all* guns.

In fact, it didn't look like he was going to pursue much of anything except Al Gore's election in the year 2000—and while Hollywood has gotten over Clinton's advocacy of the V-chip, it still hasn't quite forgiven Gore for his wife Tipper's crusade against dirty song lyrics back in the 1980s. That's why the entertainment industry split down the middle in 1999, half for Gore, half for Bill Bradley.

And really, when you come down to it, what *has* Clinton done for Hollywood aside from collecting tens of millions of dollars there? He saved the elite from the neo-Victorian monsters of the Republican party, but precious little else. The Camelot-like "brief shining moment" that began with gays in the military and ended with the haircut on the tarmac must evoke a mix of feelings inside the Hollywood breast—nostalgic reverie for what might have been and bitter disappointment in what was.

Enter Aaron Sorkin. "Sorkin is not cynical," Matthew Miller writes, and "by the seemingly innocuous act of portraying politicians with empathy, *The West Wing* has injected into the culture a subversive competitor to the reigning values of political journalism." But the show has no empathy for real politicians and their lackeys, only for fictional ones and their Knights of the Round Table. Sorkin wants to portray an elevated, spiritually superior White House in *The West Wing*, and too much has happened in the past seven years to make that a possibility with a character like Bill Clinton at the center.

And so Sorkin has taken the story of the Clinton White House and eliminated what he sees as its most troubling aspect. Sorkin has airbrushed Clinton from his own White House as crudely as Stalin airbrushed those he had killed from official Soviet photographs, and in his place has superimposed a paragon of virtue so unsullied by the wear and tear of politics that Parson Weems himself might feel a little abashed.

Republicans tried to impeach Clinton, and failed. The enthusiasm for *The West Wing* among liberals suggests that they have a fate in store for Clinton more horrifying than this legacy-obsessed president could have imagined in the depths of his troubles back in 1998: They are going to spend the rest of their lives erasing him and the support they gave him from their minds—and the nation's. ♦

On the Road

From New Hampshire to California, a diary of the real McCain campaign.

By Tucker Carlson

Franklin, New Hampshire—January 30

It's Super Bowl Sunday and John McCain is sitting on his campaign bus finishing off the second of two hamburgers. McCain has just given a rousing speech to a packed VFW hall, and he's hungry. An aide has arrived with an appliance-sized cardboard box of McDonald's food. As McCain eats, dripping ketchup liberally on his tie, the aide tosses burgers over his head to the outstretched hands of reporters. One of the burgers comes close to beaning George "Bud" Day, a 70-ish retired Air Force colonel who has been traveling with McCain. Around his neck Day wears the Congressional Medal of Honor, which he won for heroism during the years he spent with McCain in a North Vietnamese prison camp. "Where's the booze?" Day growls. Someone gestures to the back of the bus, and Day soon disappears to rejoin a group of fellow former POWs who, by the sound of it, have already located the bar.

"Senator," says a reporter who came on for the first time at the previous stop, "can I ask you a couple of questions?" McCain laughs. "We answer all questions on this bus. And sometimes we lie. Mike Murphy is one of the greatest liars anywhere." McCain points what's left of his hamburger at Murphy. "Aren't you Mike?" Murphy, a 37-year-old political consultant who is both McCain's message guru and his comic foil, nods solemnly. "Murphy has spent his life trying to destroy people's political careers," McCain says. "I'll have yours done on Tuesday," Murphy replies.

The reporter looks a little confused, but goes ahead and asks his question, which is about McCain's strategy for winning the New Hampshire primary. Before McCain can answer, Murphy jumps in with an insult. "The problem with the media," he says, "is you're obsessed with process, with how many left-handed, Independent soccer moms are going to vote." McCain translates: "You're assholes, in other words," he says, chortling and grinning so wide you can see the gold in his molars. About this time, one of the POWs sticks his head into the compartment where McCain is sitting. Sounds of clinking glasses and raspy old-guy laughter follow him from the back of the bus. "We're picking your cabinet back there, John," he says.

It takes only a day or two of this sort of thing for the average political reporter to decide that John McCain is about the coolest guy who ever ran for president. A candidate who offers total access all the time, doesn't seem to use a script, *and* puts on a genuinely amusing show? If you're used to covering campaigns from behind a rope line—and virtually every reporter who doesn't cover McCain full time is—it's almost too good to believe. The Bush campaign complains that McCain's style and personality have caused many reporters to lose their objectivity about him. The Bush campaign is onto something.

There are reporters who call McCain "John," sometimes even to his face and in public. And then there are the employees of major news organizations who, usually at night in the hotel bar, slip into the habit of referring to the McCain campaign as "we"—as in, "I hope we kill Bush."

Nashua, New Hampshire—February 1

Primary day has arrived, and the final distinctions between McCain's mobile primary campaign and your average sophomore road trip to Vegas are breaking down. By 8:00 A.M., the last of the coffee, bottled water, Diet Coke, and candy have disappeared from the bus. All that remains is beer and donuts. McCain is eating the donuts. He's in a sentimental mood. Late polls have shown him likely to beat Bush today, but he doesn't seem particularly jubilant about it. Instead McCain mentions three times how much he will miss rolling through New Hampshire in a bus. He seems to mean it. With McCain you get the feeling that the pleasure is in the process—that he considers the actual election a signal that the fun part is over. "It's been the great experience of my life," he says. "I'm feeling a little wistful."

McCain returns to his hotel suite and spends most of the afternoon chatting with his POW friends. At 7:00 the networks declare him the winner. The room erupts in

Tucker Carlson is a staff writer at The Weekly Standard.

AP/Wide World Photos

cheers. All except McCain, who stands by himself, arms folded in front of him, unsmiling and not saying a word.

After his speech a few hours later, McCain and his wife are hustled into a conference room in the hotel for their first round of post-victory television interviews. Outside, the scene in the lobby looks like the end stages of a particularly rowdy wedding reception. The campaign has hired a couple of heavily tattooed Manhattan nightclub DJs to run the sound and lights. One of them—the guy with five earrings and control of the CD player—recently came off tour with the Foo Fighters and Nine Inch Nails. He's blasting a tune by Fatboy Slim. Hundreds of people are dancing and cheering and yelling.

Inside, where McCain is, the room is dark and still. Cameramen and sound technicians are fiddling with coils of wires on the floor. A photographer, exhausted from days on the road, has taken off his boots and is lying flat on his back asleep surrounded by camera bags. A CNN crew works to dial up the satellite link to *Larry King Live*.

McCain seems oblivious to it all. He has his eyes locked, unblinking, on the blank camera in front of him. His teeth are set, his chin thrust forward in go-ahead-I-dare-you position. Between interviews, he maintains the pose. McCain looks on edge and unhappy, not at all like a man who has just achieved the greatest political triumph of his life. There is no relief on his face.

It's a dramatic change from a week or two before. Back then, before he had seriously considered the possibility that he could become president, McCain seemed determined to run the most amusing and least conventional campaign possible. His style became more free-form by the moment. In the final days before the New Hampshire primary, McCain took to pulling wackos out of the crowd at his town meetings and giving them air time. "Anyone who makes the effort to show up in costume deserves the microphone," McCain explained when a reporter asked what he was doing. At one point he handed the mike to a man dressed like a shark. A few days later he turned the stage over to a guy with a boot on his head and a pair of swim fins glued to his shoulders like epaulets.

For a politician it was risky, almost lunatic behavior—imagine if the shark man had started raving about Satanism, or the pleasures of child pornography. McCain appeared to thrive on it. Now, sitting in the dark waiting for Larry King, he seems burdened, or at least bewildered. Something unexpected has happened to John McCain: He won. He is the dog who caught the car.

It's close to midnight when the staff bus leaves the hotel for the Manchester airport. There's a case of champagne on the floor near the driver, but everyone is drinking beer. The whole thing is so amusingly improbable—the joke that came true. A few minutes later, Mike Murphy scans the AP wire and learns that McCain's lead has grown to 19 points. He chuckles. "What a caper," he says.

The bus finally pulls onto the tarmac and comes to a stop beside an elderly-looking jet with Pan Am markings. Rep. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, who has spent all week stumping for McCain, peers out the window and spots it. He looks slightly concerned. I think I can tell what he's thinking: Didn't Pan Am go out of business years ago? "What kind of plane is that?" he asks Murphy. "It's a Russian copy of a 727," Murphy says. "It was decommissioned from Air Flug in the 70s. The Bulgarian mechanics checked it out and said it runs fine. We're not wasting precious campaign dollars on expensive American-made, quality aircraft. A minivan full of vodka and a sack of potatoes and we got it for the whole week."

Murphy seems to be joking, though over the next month, as the campaign travels from coast to coast and back again and again, the plane does take on a certain Eastern European feel. The flight attendants speak in hard-to-pin-down foreign accents. The paint around the entryway is peeling. The bathrooms are scarred with ciga-

rette burns. The right engine periodically makes loud, unexplained thumping noises. Occasionally, in flight, the plane lists dramatically to one side for no apparent reason. Almost every landing ends with at least three bounces along the runway. As the plane touches down at a private airstrip in rural Ohio one afternoon, a voice comes over the intercom with a disconcerting announcement: "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Indianapolis."

None of this bothers McCain, who has successfully bailed out of four airplanes and knows he's not going to die in one. (Nervous reporters joke that if the plane does start to go down everyone on board will try to hop into his lap.) He spends most of his time in the air asleep. Presidential candidates traditionally sit at the front of the plane, behind a curtain where they can confer privately with their staffs. McCain does very little in private. After each event he reboards the plane like any other commuter, opens and closes a series of overhead bins in search of a place to store his coat, then finds a seat in economy class and sprawls out, head back and mouth open. Before long he is snoring quietly.

Bush's ad is nasty, but what really incenses McCain is the idea of it. Billionaire Texans attacking my integrity? Outrageous.

If it's after four in the afternoon, just about everyone else has a drink. Cocktails are a recurring motif on the McCain campaign. The candidate himself rarely drinks more than a single chilled vodka, and then only in private. Members of his staff are almost always in the bar till closing. (When the bar at the Copley Plaza in Boston finally stopped serving one night, one of the campaign's traveling press secretaries went to his room, emptied the contents of the minibar into a pillow case and returned to keep the festivities going.) At the front of the plane, right outside the cockpit and across from the cigarette-burned lavatory, are coolers of beer and wine, surrounded by baskets of candy bars and plates of cheese cubes. At the back is a bar—not a rack of miniature airplane bottles, but a table laid out with quarts of booze, ice, and mixers. Minutes after takeoff a crowd gathers near the rear galley.

A cable news producer works to wrench the cap off a beer bottle with a cigarette lighter as a group of cameramen sit nearby chatting and drinking horrible airplane champagne out of two-piece plastic cups. John Weaver, McCain's taciturn political director, stands at the bar pouring himself an unusually large drink. In the row next to him is the campaign's advance team, which is busy stuffing confetti guns—thick plastic pipes with CO_2 canisters at the bottom—with orange streamers in preparation for the next rally. They're drinking, too. Cindy McCain, the candidate's wife, approaches, a glass of wine in hand, only to be intercepted by an MTV correspondent who looks about 15. "Could I get a quick interview?" asks the MTV girl. "Sure," says Cindy. Sitting off to the side, watching it all, is Greg Price, the guy who will drive the bus when the plane lands.

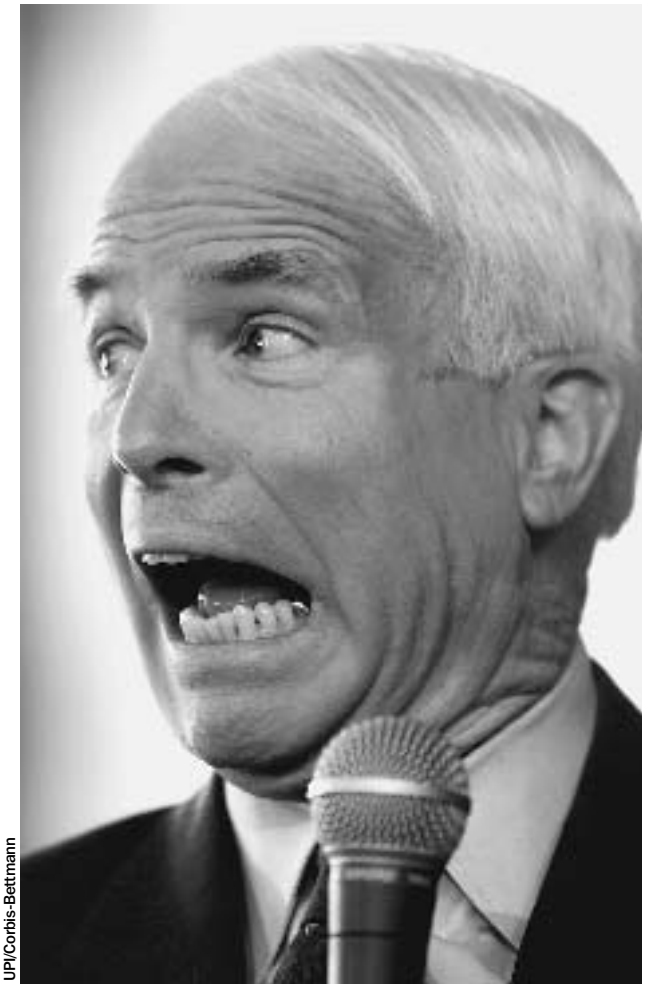
Price has been with McCain since the beginning of the New Hampshire campaign, when he was hired from a charter bus company in Ohio. He is 30, a laid-back, chain-smoking Navy veteran with no previous interest in politics. Price initially expected to be back home within a couple of weeks. That was in August. In December, he returned to Columbus briefly, got married, then left to rejoin McCain two days later. He has seen his wife for a total of 24 hours since. She is seven months pregnant. The New Hampshire primary changed Price's life.

Like a lot of former fighter pilots, John McCain is superstitious. He wears lucky shoes, eats lucky food, makes certain to get out on the correct side of the bed. His pockets are filled with talismans, including a flattened penny, a compass, a feather, and a pouch of sacred stones given to him by an Indian tribe in Arizona. He jokes about all of this, but he's not really kidding. At some point, McCain began to suspect that Price was a lucky bus driver. The campaign's rising poll numbers seemed to bolster this theory; the subsequent 19-point New Hampshire blowout proved it.

In the weeks since, Price has gone everywhere with McCain. Campaigns typically hire new bus drivers in each city. Those who travel stay in inexpensive hotels near the rest of the campaign staff. Price has stayed in McCain's hotel every night, sometimes in a suite. On some trips he has been a passenger rather than a driver. He has come to know McCain's family; on the night of the Arizona and Michigan primaries he sipped cocktails in the candidate's living room in Phoenix. ("You're never going home again," Cindy McCain told him when CNN announced that her husband had won both states.) And despite a long night at the bar in the Dearborn Hyatt, he is at the wheel of the bus at 8:00 A.M. Sunday morning to take McCain over to *Meet the Press*.

DETROIT, MICHIGAN—FEBRUARY 20

McCain lost the South Carolina primary last night, but you'd never know it from the way he's acting. He's in a great mood. As the bus rolls past miles of rubble-strewn vacant lots on the way to the television studio, McCain is laughing and telling story after story—about



UPI/Corbis-Bettmann

the late Rep. Mo Udall, about the Naval Academy, about the time he watched an Indian woman give birth in the corner of a bar in New Mexico. He doesn't seem upset about South Carolina. He hasn't come up with any talking points to explain his loss there. He doesn't appear to be preparing for *Meet the Press* in any way. McCain's aides aren't even sure how long he's going to be on the show this morning. Half an hour? Fifteen minutes? No one seems to know. (The full hour, McCain discovers when he gets to the studio.) It's obvious that no one really cares, least of all McCain.

McCain has never had a reputation as much of a detail guy. He can do a pretty good campaign-finance-reform rap. He can talk forever about the need to open up Reagan National Airport to long-haul flights to the West Coast. He seems to know everything about American Indian tribes in Arizona. Venture far beyond those topics and the fine print gets blurry. As he explained one morning a few weeks ago, there's no reason to get sucked into "Talmudian" debates over policy. "I won't bother you with the details," McCain often says when a member of the audience at one of his speeches asks about a specific piece of legislation. "That's a very good question," he'll respond, and then neglect to answer it.

It's an effective technique on the stump. Most people don't really want to know the details. But it is also a reflection of the candidate's personality. McCain can be kind of reckless. In fact, he enjoys being kind of reckless, and so does his staff.

Not surprisingly, McCain is having a pretty rough time on *Meet the Press*. One of his most prominent supporters in South Carolina, it turns out, is affiliated with a magazine that has been hostile to the organized civil rights movement. Tim Russert is hammering McCain on the subject. McCain looks like he isn't sure what to say. In the next room, McCain's aides are watching the show by remote. John Weaver is eating a piece of melon and chuckling about the campaign's unofficial slogan, "Burn it Down." "It's like Stokely Carmichael," Weaver says. "Power to the people!" He throws his fist into the air. "Burn it down—I love that." A few days later, at the bar on the plane, Weaver comes up with a new slogan: "Eradicate Evil." "We're going to have T-shirts printed," Weaver says. "They're going to have 'E^2' above crossed light sabers."

SAGINAW, MICHIGAN—FEBRUARY 21

McCain seems to be taking his own slogans to heart. At a rally this morning in Traverse City, he spent more time than usual beating up on the Republican party. "My friends," he said gravely, "my party has lost its way. My party has become captive to special interests." In conversations with reporters, he has begun to make disparaging references to the "Christian right," the "extreme right," and the "bunch of idiots" who run Bob Jones University. On the bus from Saginaw to Ypsilanti, he goes all the way, recalling with a smile "that old bumper sticker: The Christian Right is Neither."

Part of this is calculated rhetoric: McCain knows most evangelicals aren't planning to vote for him anyway. Bashing them might bring him more votes from moderates. But part of it is heartfelt. During the race in South Carolina, leaflets were distributed at political events that savaged Cindy McCain for her early-90s addiction to prescription painkillers. McCain blames conservative Christian groups (and to some extent, the Bush campaign) for the flyers, as well as for a series of ugly push polls. For the first time, he talks about his opponents in a way that seems bitter. "They're going around saying Cindy's a drug addict who's not fit to be in the White House," McCain says, his fists clenched. "What am I supposed to do? Come out and make a statement that my wife is not a drug addict?"

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI—MARCH 2

He is still mulling the question a couple of weeks later when the campaign plane touches down in St. Louis. McCain is in town for a few hours to participate by remote in a televised forum with Bush and Alan Keyes. It is the last scheduled debate. McCain knows he must do well. He and half a dozen advisers gather in the conference room of a television station downtown to eat barbecue and prepare. McCain is resigned to appearing tonight with Alan Keyes ("If we tried to keep him out of the debate, he might chain himself to my front door"), but it is clear that the very thought of George W. Bush makes him agitated. McCain is angry at Bush. Very angry.

I happen to be standing next to the coffee maker when McCain walks over to pour his ninth cup of the day. He's thinking about what he needs to do in the debate, and about mistakes he has made in weeks past. "I've got to try not to get down into the weeds tonight," he says, to himself as much as to me. Bush may be a dishonest candidate running a vicious campaign, but in the end . . . McCain looks up from his coffee. "Nobody gives a shit."

It's a good point, and absolutely true. Voters say they dislike attacks ads, but they generally believe them. They may feel sorry for a candidate who is being bashed over the head, but they tend to assume he must have done *something* wrong. And no matter how they feel about the accuracy of an attack, voters almost always perceive complaints about negative campaigning as whining. McCain knows all this. He also knows that the public doesn't believe that his campaign has behaved any more honorably than Bush's—particularly after McCain was caught lying last month about calls his campaign was making to voters in Michigan. Still, he is finding it hard to choke back how he feels. And how he feels is aggrieved.

McCain feels aggrieved fairly often, but for some reason his aides hate to admit it. One morning in New Hampshire, a reporter asked McCain what he would do if his 15-year-old daughter Meghan were raped and became pregnant. Would he allow her to have an abortion? McCain's face reddened as he listened to the question. After a family discussion, he replied slowly, "the final decision would be made by Meghan." Reporters pounced. But isn't that a pro-choice position? No it's not, barked McCain. He looked furious.

Except he wasn't, it was explained later. Moments after McCain got off the bus, Todd Harris, the campaign's traveling press secretary, loped to the back where half a dozen reporters were still sitting, replaying their tapes and checking their notes. Harris had heard that someone, probably a wire-service reporter, was planning to describe McCain's response to the pro-choice question as "angry." Harris was determined to stop the adjective in its tracks. "Who's calling him 'angry'?" he demanded. No one confessed. McCain wasn't angry at all, Harris explained. He was merely "tense."

An hour and a half later, McCain's mood was upgraded. A friend and I were sitting in a diner in downtown Manchester having breakfast when Todd Harris walked up to our booth carrying a statement from McCain on the abortion question. "I misspoke," it began, and went on to explain that if Meghan McCain were to get pregnant, the entire family, not Meghan alone, would decide what to do next. Dutifully retrieving our notebooks, my friend and I took this down. What about McCain's state of mind on the bus this morning? I asked. If he wasn't angry, is it fair to say he was irritated? That's acceptable, said Harris, nodding. "The AP's going with 'irritated.'"

With three minutes to go before air time in St. Louis, McCain is standing in the make-up room with a small group of advisers practicing his final comments. Rick Davis, his campaign manager, is humming "Ode to Joy" and pacing in the corner. McCain is using a thick blue marker to jot down some final revisions on a piece of scrap paper. His arm hooks in the shape of a sickle when he writes. His script is terrible. Looking out across an imaginary audience, McCain tries to recite what he has written. "I am a proud Reagan conservative," he says. "I am . . ." He stumbles, stops, then closes his eyes. For an instant he looks defeated, like he may not be able to continue. "I'm drawing a blank," he says. Mike Murphy leans forward until he is inches from McCain's face. "It's okay," he says softly.

And in seconds, it is. Soothing McCain is a large part of Murphy's job. McCain loves funny stories, and during lulls in the conversation on the bus he often asks Murphy to tell the one about the candidate he worked for who seemed to have Alzheimer's. Or about the campaign ad he claims he once made that accused an opponent of selling liquor to children. As Murphy tells the story, no matter how old it is, McCain breaks into hysterical, chair-pounding, hard-to-breathe laughter. McCain is genuinely amused by Murphy—he calls him "Murphistopheles," "The Swami," or simply "008," James Bond's little-known political consultant brother—but he is also calmed by his presence. A minute later, McCain grabs a final cup of coffee and heads into the studio.

The debate goes fairly smoothly for McCain, despite the obvious disadvantage of appearing by remote. Afterward, as he sits in a chair having his make-up removed, Murphy renders the verdict. "You were better than last time," he says. "You were good." "Do you think so?" asks McCain. It's not a rhetorical question. McCain honestly wants to know. "You were better and he was better," replies Murphy, "so it was sort of a blur."

San Jose, California—March 5

It soon becomes clear that a blur was not good enough. Two days before the California primary, it is obvious to virtually everyone that McCain will not win the nomination. His poll numbers have stopped rising. On the bus McCain seems, by turns, happier and more frustrated than ever. He is probably both. McCain prefers a righteous fight to almost anything, and Bush has given him new reason for outrage. A pair of rich Bush supporters in Texas have paid for an ad that attacks McCain's record on environmental issues. The ad is nasty and misleading, but what really incenses McCain is the idea of it. *Billionaire Texans attacking my integrity? Outrageous.* McCain gets hotter with every campaign stop.

"Tell Governor Bush to tell his cronies in Texas to stop destroying the American political system!" he shouts to a crowd in Ohio the Sunday before the primary. "If they get away with it," McCain tells reporters on the bus in California that night, "then I think it will change the nature of American politics forever. It will destroy it." The following morning, Bush's Texas Cronies have become "Governor Bush's sleazy Texas buddies." By afternoon, McCain is accusing Bush and his supporters of trying "to steal this election." Stopping them, he says, "is a race against time." Finally, on what turns out to be one of the campaign's final bus rides, from LAX to the hotel, McCain's rhetoric reaches the boiling point. "If this is allowed to go unchecked," he says, "there's never going to be another young American who's ever going to vote again, over time."

To McCain, a loss to the massive Bush machine is proof that everything he has been saying is true: The system is rigged to exclude mavericks.

McCain sounded about as angry as a presidential candidate can, or for that matter ever has. Except that in real life, he didn't. McCain is one of those people who have to be seen to be properly understood. On paper he can come off as a red-faced blowhard. In person the effect is far more complicated. McCain can accuse a person of subverting democracy and grin as he says it, all without being phony or disingenuous. He can rant about the evils of the special interests as he cheerfully attempts to eat an éclair with a plastic spoon. I've seen him do it. John McCain is a happy warrior, maybe the only real one in American politics.

Los Angeles, California—March 6

With defeat a day away, McCain is becoming even looser. He no longer seems mad about losing. He seems to feel vindicated. To McCain, a loss to the massive Bush machine is proof that everything he has been saying for the past year is true: That money is the decisive factor in politics. That the system is rigged to exclude outsiders and mavericks. That the Establishment felt so threatened by his honesty that it mobilized to crush him. Most of all, McCain considers his defeat evidence that he ran an honorable campaign—he lost because he would not do anything to win.

In speeches, he continues to swing wildly at Bush. On the bus, his jokes are getting more outrageous. ("We ought to call this The Bullshit Express," he says to Murphy. "Get someone to paint 1-800-BULLSHIT on the side.") Members of his staff are taking pictures of each other, presumably to capture a moment that is about to end. There is no longer much reason to pretend. Or for that matter to be polite about the opponent. Murphy has taken to wearing a pin that says "W stands for Wuss."

Beverly Hills, California—March 7

By quarter to eight on the night of the California primary John McCain's presidential campaign has minutes to live. Tim Russert has just told McCain's guys that the latest round of exit polls from California looks bad. McCain is going to lose. He has already lost New York and Ohio and a couple of other states. The networks haven't called the race yet, but the official pronouncement is imminent. McCain isn't one to drag things out. "All right, Johnny," he says, looking around the Beverly Hilton Hotel suite for John Weaver, the campaign's political director. It is Weaver's job to arrange concession calls to the Bush campaign. Weaver hates doing it, and for the moment he has disappeared.

"Johnny," McCain calls again.

Weaver's voice floats out of an adjoining bedroom. "Do I have to?" he asks. "Yep," says McCain.

A few minutes later, Weaver appears with a cell phone. His mouth is puckered, like he just took a shot of something sour. Bush is on the line. McCain takes the phone without hesitating. Then he leans back in his chair, feet on the coffee table in front of him, chilled vodka in hand, and congratulates the man he has come to despise. "My best to your family," McCain says. The conversation is over in less than 30 seconds.

And that's it—the end of John McCain's run for president. Now it's time to face the reporters waiting in the lobby, and from there on to the concession speech. For a moment the room is silent. A few of McCain's aides look like they might cry. Not McCain. He is buzzing with energy. "Let's go," he says, bouncing out of his chair. "Onward." ♦

Clark Gable, 1935. The Everett Collection.

Audrey Hepburn, 1955. The Everett Collection.

Walt Disney, 1954. UPI / Corbis-Bettmann.

Oscar Night

The glamour, the glitter, and the inferiority complex of Hollywood

By S.T. Karnick

Every spring, like the tulips and the swallows, come the Oscars—with their relentless press coverage, hype, predictions, film clips, huge audiences around the world waiting for the television broadcast of the awards ceremony, and, almost always, a good bit of controversy.

Indeed, there are some controversies that seem by now almost as old as the Oscars themselves. Every spring, critics and audiences demand: Why wasn't that small movie we all loved (this year's fill-in-the-blank is *The Straight Story*) nominated for Best Picture? How could the academy ignore Albert Brooks yet again? And why was Meryl Streep nominated for still another film nobody saw?

These would be valid questions if the awards given by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences were actually meant to identify the best that Hollywood has to offer. But, of course, that's not what the Oscars are for. As Frank Capra once put it, the Academy Awards are the greatest public-relations scheme ever invented. The publicity, the hype, and the grand, gaudy ceremony are not intended to set a standard for the achievements of Hollywood. Quite to the contrary, they typically show an absolute ignorance of—and, with increasing monotony in recent years, a downright hostility to—the entire notion of standards. The Oscars thrive because Hollywood is an industry with an inferiority complex: The people who make movies are just not quite sure enough for comfort that they're really *artists* (for one thing, they make too much money), and so they give one another little statues every year, just to reassure themselves.

The Academy Awards were established in the late 1920s, as Hollywood was under siege by sex scandals, calls for censorship, the onset of the Great Depression, and the expensive and uncertain changeover from silent films to sound. Some good, high-toned publicity would be a godsend, and an annual ceremony honoring the best that Hollywood had to offer would call attention to the many good films for which the industry could justly claim credit.

The ceremony itself was rather small and private for the first decade or so, but the honors were widely publicized and turned out to be effective in drawing attention to Hollywood's ability to produce solid entertainment with some decent ideas and a minimum of culturally poisonous nonsense. The awards often engendered disputes over whether particular winners were actually the best, and the studios worked hard to obtain honors for their most prestigious (and, usually, expensive) films. But in general it was clear that the academy was at least trying to acknowledge the best movies and individual achievements of the previous year.

For the past two decades, however, there simply hasn't been any real threat to Hollywood's survival, as home video and international growth have added gargantuan new markets for the film industry's output. It doesn't really matter whether Hollywood films are great, because the studios, producers, performers, best boys, and agents are going to make money anyway. And since Hollywood is, in point of fact, the best place to make movies today, the most talented

S.T. Karnick is editor in chief of the Hudson Institute's American Outlook *magazine.*

directors and actors from around the globe all come to town. Hollywood has vanquished its competitors and has little need to sing its own praises.

This may be why the academy seldom pretends anymore that the Oscars honor the "best." Its official records refer to Best Picture, Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role, and so on, but the publicity materials and official website simply refer to categories such as Actor in a Leading Role. Even the official rules the academy sends to voters—"72nd Annual Academy Awards® Rules for Distinguished Achievements During 1999"—refrain from using the B-word except for Best Picture, referring instead to awards for performance by an actor, achievement in cinematography, and the like. The honors are listed as "Awards of Merit for Achievements during 1999," and at the ceremony itself, presenters of awards are instructed to use phrases such as "Outstanding Achievement" rather than "Best."

It was in the 1970s that the academy began to look for ways to hand out the awards without implying that the individual achievements so honored are actually superior to those that aren't. Of course, it makes sense not to pretend that the academy members—or anybody else—always get it right. Cary Grant, for example, never won an Academy Award (except an honorary one, toward the end of his life). The same is true of Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks, Ernst Lubitsch, Fred Astaire, Kirk Douglas, Irene Dunne, and many other highly respected film talents. And the studios certainly tried at times to influence votes, though never at a level to undermine the awards' credibility.

Nonetheless, until the early 1980s, the choices were usually plausible, and the Oscar-winning films from earlier years remain quite watchable today. A winning movie had to have a clear and appropriate structure, the performances were expected to express the characters' motivations and emotional condition, and the direction was supposed to point out clearly the matters for which the viewers should watch. There was often debate over which films and individual achievements best exemplified these ideals. But the standards themselves were clear—and that is no longer true, as the academy's skittishness about using the word "Best" makes clear.

Having dropped the fig leaf of objectivity, the academy has publicity left as the only rationale for the awards, thereby exposing the process to the whims of fashion and increasingly blatant manipulation by the studios, often at the insistence of the talent agencies.

This vulnerability is exacerbated by the academy's idiosyncratic process for choosing the recipients. Oscar winners customarily talk about "being honored by one's peers," but that is only partially true. The various branches of the academy do indeed choose the nominees in their appropriate categories (except for a few, such as Best Picture, for which all academy members may choose nominees). But after the nominations are done, all members get to vote for the final awards (again except for a few nobody cares about, such as Best Documentary, for which only those who attend special screenings may vote). Everybody from Steven Spielberg to the guys who do public-relations are the "peers" who select the winners.

Knowing this, studios and producers indulge in cajoling, arm-twisting, and advertising at a level that would have been considered horrifying in the 1930s. Huge "For Your Consideration" advertisements for such hopeless fare as *Daylight*, *The Rock*, and *The Bone Collector* swell the trade publications and inspire widespread derision. The lack of standards for the awards makes the competition increasingly furious and ridiculous.

Back in 1971, George C. Scott refused to accept the Oscar for his performance in *Patton*, deriding the award as a popularity contest and the ceremony as a "meat market." The situation is worse now. To an outside observer, such craft awards as editing and costume design can be particularly bewildering. It is widely believed that the various specialists in these areas largely control their own awards and pass them around on the basis of who's due next.

But the more prominent awards aren't so much corrupt as irrational. The voters seem to use the Best Acting

The Everett Collection

The Everett Collection

UPI / Corbis-Bettmann

Bette Davis and Spencer Tracy, 1938.
George Arliss and Lionel Barrymore, 1931.
Jimmy Stewart and Ginger Rogers, 1941.

UPI / Corbis-Bettmann

The Everett Collection

UPI / Corbis-Bettmann

Grace Kelly and Marlon Brando, 1955.
John Huston and Walter Huston, 1949.
Dustin Hoffman and Meryl Streep, 1980.

awards to show that appearing in Hollywood films is the preeminent goal for every actor and that Hollywood is a very kind-hearted and welcoming place. Thus, being from some other country is the highest qualification; in the past ten years the winners have included three Englishmen, one Australian, and an Italian. Next, playing a character with a physical or mental incapacity is a plus, as is homosexuality, transvestism, alcoholism, various forms of insanity, and flamboyant wickedness. The characters portrayed by the last ten Best Actor winners have been a quadriplegic poet and painter, a doctor accused of attempted murder, a serial killer, a blind man, a homosexual dying of AIDS, a simpleton, an alcoholic, a mentally ill pianist, an obsessive-compulsive, and a kooky concentration camp inmate.

For women, being English gets a nomination, but usually not the big prize. Here, faking an accent is a plus, and making oneself ugly helps, but the big money is in struggling to do a job with a lot of big, dumb men getting in your way. Thus the 1990s Best Actress winners have portrayed a woman pretending to be a man so that she could play a woman on-stage, a waitress taking care of a sick son and troubled by other needy males, and a North Dakota policewoman tracking some blundering male criminals. Also: an FBI agent working with a serial killer to catch another serial killer (both male), a nun crusading for a murderer (male), a couple of mentally unbalanced characters, a crusading Englishwoman, and a mute piano teacher abused by a man. Here one clearly sees an ideology forming.

Being old and never having won an Oscar is a good qualification in the Supporting Actor and Actress categories. James Coburn, for example, won last year, and Jack Palance, Martin Landau, Judi Dench, and Brenda Fricker have all won in recent years. Being very new is also good, as Anna Paquin and Cuba Gooding Jr. can attest. With the oldsters, the message is *Sorry we missed you back when you were actually good*, and for the youngsters, it's *Hollywood is a very warm-hearted, welcoming place, not the cutthroat battle you've found it so far.*

The screenplay nominations, by contrast, have a strong bias toward what Hollywood calls creativity. *Gods and Monsters*, *Sling Blade*, *Fargo*, *The Usual Suspects*, *Pulp Fiction*, and the like cement Hollywood's reputation as a hotbed of new ideas, consistently lavishing attention on a variety of doomed weirdoes. Having two screenplay categories (original and adapted) also enables the academy to honor newcomers such as Callie Khouri and Christopher McQuarrie while consigning them to obscurity unless, like Matt Damon, Ben Affleck, and Billy Bob Thornton, they can act. The Best Director award, by contrast, nearly always goes to the Best Picture winner, to remind us that movies are a director's medium, meaning that they are much better than television.

Which brings us to the biggie. Some observers have complained about a political bias in the Best Picture selections of the past decade and a half, but if there is one, it must be very general indeed. The winning films since 1983—*Terms of Endearment*, *Amadeus*, *Out of Africa*, *Platoon*, *The Last Emperor*, *Rain Man*, *Driving Miss Daisy*, *Dances with Wolves*, *Silence of the Lambs*, *Unforgiven*, *Schindler's List*, *Forrest Gump*, *Braveheart*, *The English Patient*, *Titanic*, and *Shakespeare in Love*—vary widely in quality, location, time period, political implication, style, action, characters, romance, special effects, etc. Most, but not all, are set in past times, and most, but not all, take a long time to watch. Some are uplifting, some have happy endings, some have important romantic elements, and some portray grand and heroic characters. But others do not.

What they all share, however, is an intense and consistent *earnestness*. The movies that win the Best Picture Oscar are all passionately serious—overtly, pressingly sincere. They all attempt Big Subjects: the Holocaust, Vietnam, the settling of the American West, class divisions, the role of the artist, the nature of evil. Of course, most of them fail in their attempt at Big Subjects, with characters that make little sense and cinematography often inappropriately glamorous and distracting. But they all clearly strive to be taken seriously.

This year's nominees—*The Sixth Sense*, *The Green Mile*, *American Beauty*, *The Insider*, and *The Cider House Rules*—all share this now-mandatory surface sobriety and sense of great import. But only one of them, *The Sixth Sense*, has a reasonably logical story line, believable characters, and appropriate direction. The rest just have Importance.

What this reveals is that the most economically and culturally powerful entertainment industry in the world lacks the self-confidence even to nominate superior but less earnest films such as *Three Kings*, *The Matrix*, and *Toy Story 2*. In short, the academy's choices for Best Picture—and the other major awards—beg for respect.

This, then, is what the Academy Awards are all about today. Behind all the bluster, the glamour, the passion, and the backstage intrigue is the real purpose of today's Oscars: to soothe Hollywood's immense artistic inferiority complex. So the academy soldiers on, no longer confident in either its traditional standards or its current importance but doing very well nonetheless: money, power, and inferiority all in one big, gaudy package. ♦

The Private Interest

In our confessional culture, we have a right of privacy—and nothing private. **BY ADAM WOLFSON**

Life in America is marked by two apparently contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, we are a nation of exhibitionists and voyeurs. Sometimes it's an intimate who "tells all" (as when the first lady reported that her husband had been abused as a child), but usually we have no one but ourselves to blame for the disappearance of privacy. Whether it's the president blabbing about his taste in underwear, "ordinary" Americans divulging their fantasies on *The Jerry Springer Show*, or "cyber-exhibitionists" broadcasting their lives on the Internet, we seem unable to keep anything to ourselves. *60 Minutes* hit an all-time low in 1998 when it televised Dr. Jack Kevorkian killing a man by lethal injection.

But if we are a nation of exhibitionists and voyeurs, we are also the only nation in history to invent a "right of privacy." Decades ago, the Supreme Court declared that embedded in the Constitution is a right that frees the individual "from unwarranted governmental intrusion" in certain fundamental matters, including the right to buy contraceptives and, eventually, the right to have an abortion. In taking what was once thought a matter of high public concern—the killing of unborn human beings—and privatizing it, the Court extended privacy beyond anyone's wildest imaginings.

The Limits of Privacy
by Amitai Etzioni
Basic Books, 280 pp., $25

The End of Privacy
Personal Rights in the Surveillance Society
by Charles J. Sykes
St. Martin's Press, 304 pp., $24.95

This coexistence of a confessional culture with constitutionally protected privacy is no contradiction. Rather, these are the combined results of the breakdown of the wall that once separated the private from the public in American culture. Though two recent books on the subject do not solve this fundamental problem, *The Limits of Privacy* by Amitai Etzioni and *The End of Privacy* by Charles J. Sykes make important contributions to our understanding of the problem's implications.

We might begin the modern story of privacy with Samuel D. Warren and Louis D. Brandeis's 1890 *Harvard Law Review* article, "The Right to Privacy." Known as the most famous law review article ever written, it contains one of the first declarations of a "general right of the individual to be let alone." By this, they did not mean to become forerunners of today's "leave us alone" coalition of gun owners, home schoolers, and libertarians. Rather, Warren and Brandeis were promoting the idea that an individual should have some measure of control over what is said and published about him. (This has come to be known narrowly as "informational privacy.")

In declaring a right "to be let alone," Warren and Brandeis sought to conserve a tradition that was then under siege. In her groundbreaking 1996 work *The Repeal of Reticence*, the historian Rochelle Gurstein aptly labeled the defenders of that tradition the "party of reticence." It included such nineteenth-century leading lights as Charles Eliot Norton, Henry James, and James Stephens. They sought, unsuccessfully, to counteract "the forces of exposure," including the new mass circulation newspapers, the liberal reformers of the sexual hygiene movement, and the avatars of a new literary style known as realism, which sought to tell it like it is.

We can learn much from these defenders of reticence, about the character of both the private and public realms. Warren and Brandeis said their goal was to protect, as they put it, "the privacy of private life." Today, their concern might seem like mere prudery, but as Gurstein pointed out, such was not the case. The party of reticence believed that private life, by its very nature, was unsuited to, and distorted by, a public light. And thus they wished to shelter private things—love, friendship, birth, death—from the destructive gaze of strangers.

It's not only private life that suffers when its contents are tossed into the public square. As Warren and Brandeis show, our public life is also harmed:

> When personal gossip attains the dignity of print, and crowds the space available for matters of real interest to the community, what wonder that the ignorant and thoughtless mistake its relative importance. Easy of comprehension, appealing to that weak side of human nature which is never wholly

Adam Wolfson is executive editor of the Public Interest.

> cast down by the misfortunes and frailties of our neighbors, no one can be surprised that it usurps the place of interest in brains capable of other things. Triviality destroys at once robustness of thought and delicacy of feeling. No enthusiasm can flourish, no generous impulse can survive under its blighting influence.

Warren and Brandeis's concern for the delicacy of private life and the robustness of public life, and their perception of the connection between the two, was swamped in the century to come. As a matter of law, Warren and Brandeis had negligible influence. Little of our private lives is off limits to the public—a fact to which we have all too readily accommodated ourselves. Meanwhile, the public realm has become flooded with what would have once been dismissed as mere gossip or pornography.

But if Warren and Brandeis's understanding is dead, the modern view is alive and well. This year marks the thirty-fifth anniversary of *Griswold* v. *Connecticut*, in which the Supreme Court declared, "the Bill of Rights have penumbras, formed by emanations" that create zones of privacy. One of those zones was the right of married couples to purchase contraceptives. In subsequent decisions, the Court extended the right beyond married couples, and in *Roe* v. *Wade*, the Court found the privacy "broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy." Many legal scholars argue that it's broad enough to encompass "physician-assisted suicide" as well. Thus, Warren and Brandeis's discrete understanding of privacy has become an outsized concept containing a variety of rights that together form a radical version of personal autonomy.

The difference between privacy and autonomy cannot be overstated. Liberal reformers at the turn of the last century charged the party of reticence with being ashamed of things relating to the body, especially sex. When liberals took up the banner of privacy later on, it was not because they suddenly recalled how to blush. Rather, these defenders of contraception, abortion, and physician-assisted suicide, far from rediscovering shame, were defying its power. The new right of privacy has nothing to do with reticence and everything to do with personal empowerment. What were once thought to be, by definition, private matters (sex) are now public, and what were once thought to be, by definition, public matters (deliberate killing) are now private.

In *The Limits of Privacy*, Amitai Etzioni claims that we suffer from too much privacy. As the country's foremost communitarian, Etzioni has, in scores of books and articles, taken liberalism to task for pushing individual rights, including privacy, beyond what is good for the country. According to Etzioni, a radical individualism overtook the culture during the last quarter century, raising the right of privacy above the commonweal. In his thoughtful examination of issues from the testing of infants for HIV to the public use of medical records, Etzioni argues that we have generally erred on the side of privacy. He usefully reminds rights-happy liberals that privacy should not automatically trump the common good. And he usefully reminds road-to-serfdom libertarians that, historically, privacy and other individual liberties have been lost because of breakdowns in social order, not because of Big Brother's long reach.

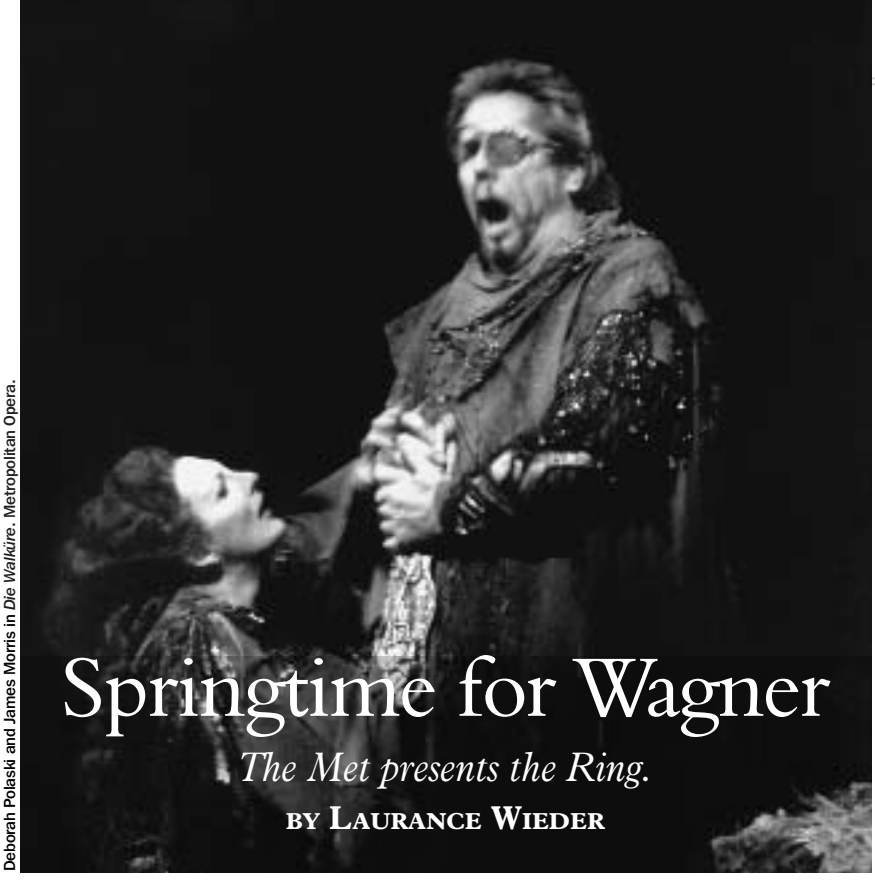
Real private life can withstand neither modern techniques of publicity nor modern ideas of privacy.

For all of his sensible criticism of liberalism, however, Etzioni remains in the liberal camp. It's not simply that he defends liberalism's ultimate trump card—abortion. It's a larger problem in his attempted defense of the common good against the excessive rights-claims of individuals. Repeatedly, Etzioni defines the public good as "public safety and public health." But that's how most of the contemporary liberals whom he attacks would define it too. It's a view that allows for anti-smoking campaigns but falls short of anything resembling a moral dimension.

Charles J. Sykes takes a different approach in *The End of Privacy*. Written from an individualist or classical liberal perspective, Sykes argues that we suffer not from an excess of privacy, but from too little. On most policy issues, he disagrees with Etzioni, arguing for encryption and against national ID cards, for example. The two authors also disagree about what poses the greatest threat to privacy. Sykes says it's Big Government. Etzioni says its Big Business.

Sykes recognizes, and this is the great strength of his book, the larger cultural backdrop of the privacy debate. Strictly speaking, we have today neither a public nor a private realm. The former has long since been overrun by gestures and sentiments that do not rightly belong to it. At a reception during the Constitutional Convention of 1787, Gouverneur Morris, on a dare, approached George Washington, slapped him on the back, and asked how he was doing. According to one account, Washington stepped back and angrily glared at Morris, who withdrew in fear and shame at what he had done. In this single story, no matter how apocryphal, we see the vulnerability of the public to the private. Familiarity, it was once understood, breeds contempt.

If the public square is in a shambles, so too is the private realm. As Warren and Brandeis foresaw, the delicacy of private life cannot withstand publicity's glare. Nor can it survive, ironically enough, the Court's discovery of a zone of privacy. What becomes of the delicacy of a private realm that sanctions the most extreme forms of personal autonomy? This part of the breach in our public and private lives will have to be attended to as well. ♦



Deborah Polaski and James Morris in *Die Walküre*. Metropolitan Opera.

Springtime for Wagner

The Met presents the Ring.

BY LAURANCE WIEDER

New versions of Richard Wagner's operas are always epochal, if only because of the effort it takes to mount them. Particularly rare are productions of the complete four-opera cycle of Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung*. But this spring, the Metropolitan Opera in New York presents the entire *Ring*, and the event promises to be, well, epical.

The March 25 matinee of *Das Rheingold* begins the first of three complete turns of Wagner's epic justifying gods' ways to man. The other operas, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung*, roll out on April 1, 15, and 22, with the entire cycle performed again the last week of April, and again the first week of May. Singers Placido Domingo, Jane Eaglen, James Morris, and Deborah Voigt appear in each cycle, with a rotating cast that includes Stig Anderson, Graham Clark, Philip Langridge, Wolfgang Neumann, Felicity Palmer, Hanna Schwarz, Birgitta Svendén, and Ekkehard Wlaschiha. James Levine conducts the orchestra, and Otto Schenk oversees the production.

The *Ring* takes nearly twenty hours to perform. It begins underwater, travels from the underworld to Valhalla, and ends in fire, its action spanning three generations of gods and heroes. Whether measured by the demands it makes on the theater, or by the performers it requires, or by its ambition and expense, Wagner's *Ring* remains the standard for colossal music theater.

Last fall, by way of preparation, the Metropolitan Opera mounted a new production of *Tristan und Isolde* starring Ben Heppner and Jane Eaglen, the first tenor and soprano up to the task in a generation. *Tristan* has always been regarded as the purest expression of Wagner's artistic ideal. The leads must sing their hearts out for over four hours, without benefit of action, or plot, or suspense, since everyone in the house already knows the lovers will die. (In fact, the original Tristan, Ludwig Schnorr, died within weeks of the opera's 1865 premiere in Munich.) Their sole support, and the source of all intensity, is the orchestra, which plays without ceasing and carries them away.

Although he may not have intended to kill his first Tristan, Wagner did intend to abolish the borders between representation and experience, myth and history. He wanted his operas to be more than music, drama, poetry, or spectacle. His "art of the future" was not merely outside the usual limits of his artistic medium; it was the execution in music of the kind of thinking usually found in magnates and explorers, or conquerors and tyrants. Wagner propounded an absolute art that would enlist the sister arts in service of a transcendent form. Whatever one may think of it, his work displays a more intimate relationship with power than any other artist's, before or since.

Richard Wagner was born in Leipzig on May 22, 1813. His mother was married to a police actuary who died shortly after his birth, and after a brief widowhood, she married Ludwig Geyer, an assimilated Jewish theatrical performer whose family had been musicians for generations. Wagner had a sound *Gymnasium* education, but received little formal musical training. And he certainly sat at the feet of no living master.

Wagner wrote his first symphony and first opera when he was nineteen, but it was in the 1840s, after a spell in Paris, that he first found real success. A string of operas—*Rienzi*, *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Lohengrin*—became hits, and the young lion was appointed royal music director at Dresden. Those composers who promoted his early career found themselves discarded (like Giacomo Meyerbeer, whom he rejected as an internationalist and a Jew), or exploited (like Franz Liszt, whose charisma he traded on, and whose daughter he lived with before marrying).

Along the way, Wagner embraced language as no composer had before. Rather than treat the libretto as an occasion for the music, he wrote his own texts in which he invented an alliterative verse style that struck the ear as formal and slightly medieval. He fashioned a mythology out of Norse and Celtic myth that felt meaningful and allegorical (which is not to say explicable). Here was an unexplored musical continent of gods, dragons, dwarves, and heroes, haunted by recurrent strains and dissonances, lapped by alien seas. It wasn't just new opera; it was a new form of art.

This new art required a new building to house it, and the ideal auditorium Wagner finally succeeded in building in

Laurance Wieder is a poet and reviewer in Patchogue, New York.

Bayreuth represented a complete departure from previous custom. The audience all faced forward toward the raised stage in a darkened house (as moviegoers do), with the orchestra concealed in a pit below the level of the stage. This was not a ballroom, where the performance was incidental, or a curved opera house, where the audience gazed across the orchestra at one another. Wagner transformed the music theater of bourgeois Western Europe into a church of the emotions. His operas, as Charles Baudelaire put it, had the same effect as drugs.

But Baudelaire was thinking of its private, individual effect, and German music had a national mission. According to Wagner, the Romantic impulse in poetry had turned away from the heroic to the aesthetic, inward, and decadent. He believed that even Johann Wolfgang Goethe, the seminal figure of German Romanticism, could not bear to represent the true condition of the human spirit. The voice of individual striving could not resist the "practical plurality of everyday occurrences," Wagner wrote. "The romance poem turned into journalism." And thus "the poet's art has turned to politics: No one now can poetize, without politicizing."

Wagner's artistic ideal was instead to represent feeling so powerful that the beholder "passes into that ecstatic state where one forgets the fateful question 'Why?'" Rather than being accountable, civilized, and sensible, his art would move the human spirit out from under labor and frustration. It was to this end that he deployed all the artistic means at his disposal—mythology, poetry, drama, spectacle, symphonic orchestra, even architecture—to imply some kind of new human being and new world order.

A great deal of ink has been spilled trying to explain just what Wagner's *Ring* is about. Wagner himself thought the operas sang the origin of the German national spirit in the legends of pre-Christian Europe. (The Nazis and other nationalist mystagogues made much of this same source.) But George Bernard Shaw, remembering Wagner's youth on the revolutionary barricades of Dresden, interpreted the gods of Valhalla as proto-capitalists and the dwarves (who actually build the castles and forge the weapons) as the despised workers. Musicologist Richard Taruskin makes a witty case for the *Ring* as an allegory of godlike composers giving laws to performers, whose glory consists in faithful realization of their masters' intentions.

A précis hardly does justice to the complexity and recalcitrance of Wagner's libretto. Much of the mythical

Richard Wagner

UPI / Corbis-Bettmann

strength of the narrative comes from its refusal to be reduced to an explanation—but then, mystic incomprehensibility has always enjoyed a long run.

In *Das Rheingold*, Alberich of the Nibelungs (a tribe of dwarves who inhabit the underground realm of Nibelhelm) renounces love, which is the magical requirement for anyone who wants to steal the gold of the nymphatic Rhine maidens. Meanwhile, up in the heavens, Wotan is trying to weasel out of his promise to give his sister-in-law Freia, goddess of youth and beauty, in payment to the giants Fafner and Fasolt for building Valhalla, the hall of the gods. But the crafty god Loge has a plan. He suggests to Wotan that they give the giants as substitute payment the treasures a dwarf named Mime has forged for Alberich from the Rhinegold: the Ring of Power and the Tarnhelm (a helmet that allows whoever wears it to assume any shape). So Wotan and Loge descend and trick Alberich out of the Ring and Tarnhelm, which they swap for Freia. Alberich curses whoever possesses the Ring. Fafner kills Fasolt. The gods cross the rainbow bridge back to Valhalla, ignoring the pleas of the Rhine maidens to return their stolen gold.

In *Die Walküre*, Siegmund, the mortal son of Wotan, finds himself in the house of Hunding, his enemy. Hunding's wife Sieglinde falls in love with Siegmund. She tells about a sword a stranger plunged into a tree that only her long-lost brother can remove. Siegmund removes it. The lovers discover they are brother and sister. Wotan orders the Valkyrie Brünnhilde to protect his son from Hunding, but Fricka, Wotan's wife, insists that the marriage bonds be defended. Caught between law and will, Wotan at last decides for law and orders Brünnhilde to aid Hunding. She defies him, but Siegmund is slain anyway, though the pregnant Sieglinde escapes with the (now broken) sword. Sieglinde shelters near Fafner's cave. Brünnhilde is sentenced to become a mortal and sleep, surrounded by a wall of fire, until awakened by a mortal hero.

In *Siegfried*, the hero Siegfried, reared by the dwarf Mime after his mother Sieglinde's death, knows no fear. At Mime's forge, he remakes his father's broken sword. Mime sees the youth as a way to gain the Ring. Wotan warns Alberich against Mime, and both try to rouse Fafner (now a dragon, thanks to the Tarnhelm's magic) and urge him to return the Ring to the Rhine maidens. Siegfried kills Fafner and claims the Ring. Tasting the dragon's blood, he understands the language of the forest birds, who tell him that Mime is plotting against him. The hero kills Mime. The birds also tell him of a maiden asleep on a rock, circled by fire. Siegfried meets Wotan at a crossroads, and shatters the god's spear. Siegfried wakes Brünnhilde. They love.

In *Götterdämmerung*, the Germanic Fates, the Norns, predict the fall of the gods. Siegfried takes leave of Brünnhilde. He gives her the Ring of the Nibelungs, and she gives him her horse. Hagen, son of Loge and half-brother of Gunther, lord of the Gibichungs, counsels his brother to marry Brünnhilde. They drug Siegfried into forgetfulness, and marry him to Gutrune, Gunther's sister. The hero agrees to bring Brünnhilde to Gunther. A Valkyrie begs Brünnhilde to return the Ring to the Rhine maidens. She refuses. Siegfried assumes Gunther's shape, and claims both bride and Ring. Brünnhilde wants revenge. She joins with Hagen and Gunther in a plot to murder Siegfried. On the banks of the Rhine, Siegfried is stabbed in the back. He remembers Brünnhilde and dies. Hagen kills Gunther, and Brünnhilde rushes into Siegfried's funeral pyre. The Rhine overflows, the Rhine maidens drown Hagen and regain their gold, and Valhalla burns. Only our world remains.

The entire run of the Met's production of *Tristan* last fall was sold out. As the first new Tristan and Isolde in many years, Ben Heppner and Jane Eaglen received critical praise, and the orchestra, directed by James Levine, performed to a high standard. The stage was bare, the performers backlit as they sang in tableaux for the full four hours.

Mostly, that production of *Tristan und Isolde* promised great things for this spring's performances of the *Ring*. But not entirely. In Act One of *Tristan*, as the lovers drank their potion, the stage lighting shifted color and an audible minority in the audience—which would have been receiving erotic communion at this moment a hundred years ago—tittered. Audiences have always been divided into Wagnerites and non-Wagnerites, and going to his operas has always been like attending political rallies: thrilling for the party members, chilling for the strays who wander in.

But the giggling at *Tristan und Isolde* derived from another source. The opera begins after the fact, with nothing to do but declare and die. There are no seductions, no compromises. All that remains is the composer's relentless pursuit of the power of his "art of the future." Some feel it is unfair to blame Wagner for Hitler, who adopted both Beethoven's music and Wagner's "art of the future" for the sound track of the Third Reich. But surely it is fair to point out that Wagner's characters do not live in the way Shakespeare's Hamlet lives, or Goethe's Faust, or even Alban Berg's Wozzeck. Tristan, Isolde, and the characters of the *Ring*, are as powerful a creation as any artist has ever managed—but they are incomplete as creatures. They do not live outside the music.

Even inside the music, the characters in Wagner's art of the future are doomed victims. That, rather than his rabid anti-Semitism, is the origin of his appeal to twentieth-century tyrants. This is what beguiled Hitler, and prompted Stalin to command a production of *Die Walküre* at the Bolshoi theater just before the outbreak of the Second World War. Wagner's impact on an audience—his concentration of every available resource toward a single effect—suits the totalitarian, who wants a *useful* art to help him sway crowds and topple monuments. The future has always been a convenient excuse in the hands of those who regard themselves as new and powerful, with nothing to restrain them.

Wagner has a deeper appeal to the totalitarian mind, however, for as the despot is to the state, so Wagner is to his created world. Hitler and Stalin are like bad artists, who regard people as incomplete beings waiting to be animated by their masters. Wagner is a great artist—great enough to understand that his heroes, who live only while he animates them, must be incomplete and lacking—but he can't escape the logic of creation. Like his gods and heroes and dwarves, Wagner's art of the future becomes merely an instrument when placed in the hands of the state.

Power in politics, or in art, must eventually destroy imagination, by denying that there is any alternative to its single purpose, its directed version of the future. The *Ring of the Nibelung*, though fed by a wellspring of the spirit, presents life without hope. It is a closed world of sound and shadows on the wall. On the other side of that wall, out of earshot, is where people can actually live. ♦

James Kimsey, co-founder and chairman emeritus of America Online, traveled to the Colombian jungle to bring the wonders of e-commerce to leaders of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, a Marxist guerrilla army. The group, which earns over $500 million a year in extortion, kidnapping, and protection for the drug trade, murdered three Americans last year as part of its terrorist campaign against the United States.

—*Washington Post*, March 15, 2000

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia

"Sometimes You Gotta Break The Rules"

To: Warriors and Shareholders
From: Manuel Marulanda, General, President for Life, CEO

Comrades, Dudes:

Capitalism rocks!

As you may have heard, we just completed our IPO and it was phat! We opened at 37 and were trading at 127 by the end of the day. The whole concept of a narcoterrorist dot-com really captured the imagination of the NASDAQ dealers. We now have a market capitalization six times that of the Soviet Union on their best day, and our upside growth potential is awesome!

We owe our success to a lot of hard work (remember those all-nighters!) and our laser-like focus on our core business plans. As you know, with this IPO we are disaggregating our businesses into two core entities. The heroin trafficking business smack.com (now trading under the symbol SMAQ) will allow e-junkies to purchase the finest horse online (with a free first-run video thrown in). Buyers will just plug in an order on our site, and dealers from around the world will bid for their business! It's a paradigm-shifting approach that empowers addicts, making them the market drivers in a frictionless global networking environment. You can read more about my concept in my new book, The Management Secrets of Che Guevara (Wile E. & Sons, $29.95).

The extortion and terrorist division, ransom.net, has become the buzz of the chat rooms, because while the drug division has an old-fashioned revenue stream, the profits from an on-line people's liberation army are still speculative. We have some refrigeration glitches to work out (necessary for returning the parts of kidnapping victims), but those are entirely correctable, and the response from our Super Bowl commercial "We Will Bury You, American Pigs" has been overwhelming.

In the next few weeks many of you will be seeing the first proceeds from your insider stock options. There will be temptations to change your lifestyle. But I hope we can all remember the dream that inspired us to take up arms in the first place. It's never been about the money. It's about killing people.