the weekly Standard

MARCH 12, 2001

$3.95

THE BUSH AGENDA
CHESTER E. FINN JR.
IRWIN M. STELZER

The Clothing of the American Mind

Fashion in the information age

BY DAVID BROOKS

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March 12, 2001 • Volume 6, Number 25

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Cover: AP Photo/Luca Bruno. Maxi length fur coat with quilted linen over a classic brown suit at the Gianfranco Ferre Fall/Winter 2001 men's collection presented in Milan, Italy, Thursday, Jan. 18, 2001.

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the weekly Standard

THE WEEKLY STANDARD (ISSN 1083-3013) is published weekly (except the last week in April, the second week in July, the first week in September, and the second 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 1-850-682-7653 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

Gore Fell Short, It's Bona Fide

"Various consortia of leading national and Florida newspapers are examining scores of thousands of disputed and/or uncounted ballots. It will be many weeks before the results of these tabulations are known. And it is theoretically possible that they will validate Bush's victory, just as it is theoretically possible that, on account of random Brownian motion, all the molecules of air in one of the counting rooms will rush to a corner and the counters will be asphyxiated. But it's not likely. What is likely is that the independent counts will demonstrate that, no matter what standard is used, Florida, and therefore the presidency, was unjustly awarded."

That was Hendrik Hertzberg, in the January 15 *New Yorker*, propounding what was only recently an unchallenged gospel for card-carrying Democratic journallectuals. Trouble is, two of the leading Florida newspapers they were counting on have since completed independent reviews of those 10,644 famously "uncounted" ballots in Miami-Dade County, and both publications have concluded that the presidency *wasn't* unjustly awarded.

Last month, the *Palm Beach Post* reported that its analysis of the disputed Miami ballots suggested George W. Bush deserved a net gain of 6 votes. And last week, the *Miami Herald* reported that its own review—employing even the loosest standards of dimple interpretation—indicated that Bush could at most have lost just 49 votes overall had the recounts Al Gore demanded been allowed to proceed. Neither paper's Miami numbers, added to Gore-favorable recount results in Broward and Palm Beach counties, the other two jurisdictions subject to litigation, are large enough to have altered the election's official result.

Does this matter? The Scrapbook doesn't think so. The Scrapbook thinks the ballots in question weren't legally cast; that Bush therefore won the election on Election Day; and that subsequent newspaper investigations are mere navel-gazing. But such hot-faced pro-Gore scribblers as Hendrik Hertzberg never agreed with us about that, and so we would expect them now to take the *Palm Beach Post* and *Miami Herald* very seriously. Perhaps, when all those molecules of air properly arrange themselves through "random Brownian motion," the scribblers will finally admit they were wrong. ♦

Profs Distort Why Standards Slide

As both The Scrapbook and writer Noah Oppenheim have reported here in recent issues, Harvey Mansfield, distinguished professor of government at Harvard and occasional contributor to this magazine, abandoned his long-running guerrilla war against grade inflation earlier this year. Citing figures from the registrar's office that suggested more than half of all grades at the university are A's or A-minuses, Mansfield said he was "tired of punishing my students" and from now on would give them two sets of marks each semester. The accurate one would remain unofficial. Only the other one, jiggered upwards to conform with campus-wide practice, would appear on their transcripts.

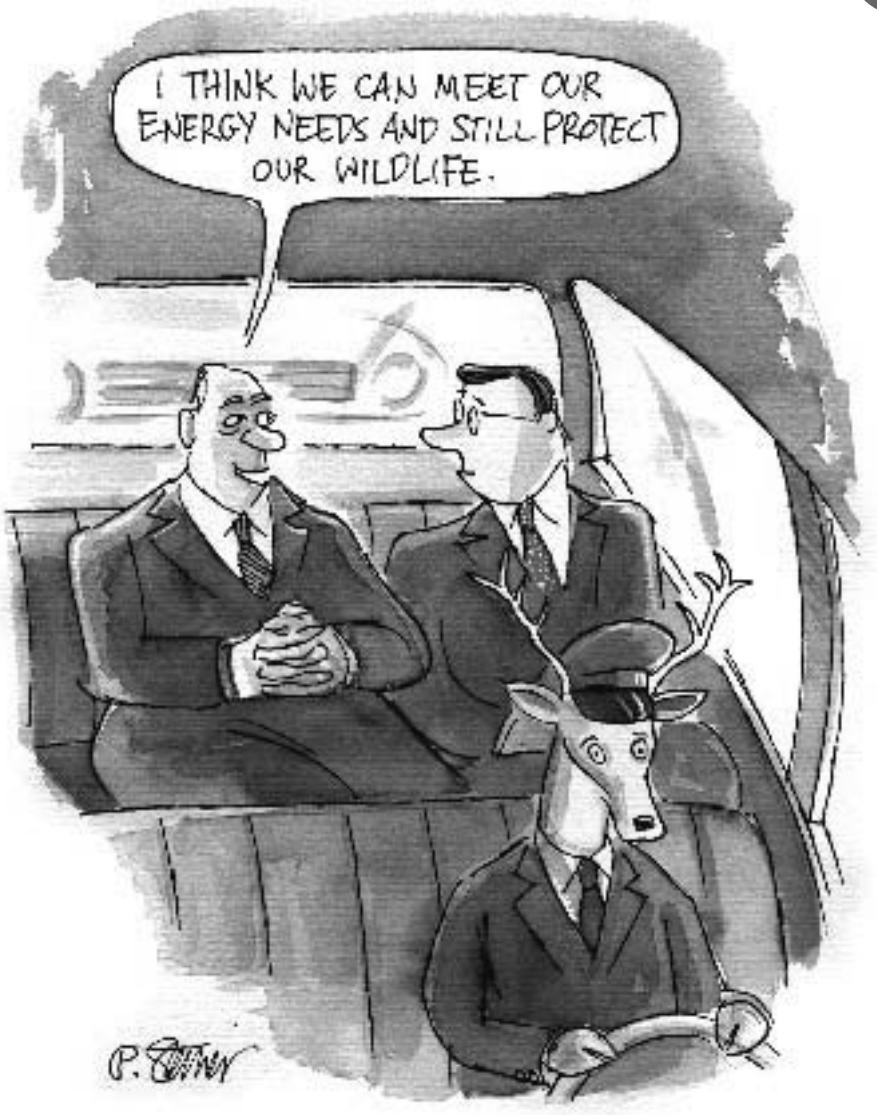
Mansfield's move, and the complaint it implied, initially received widespread and favorable notice, including a front-page piece in the *Boston Globe* that deeply embarrassed Harvard's administration. Things quickly turned sour, though, when Mansfield's faculty-club critics successfully mounted a diversionary counterattack involving—you guessed it—a veiled but unmistakable charge of racism.

Grade inflation at Harvard, Mansfield had publicly speculated, was in part a legacy of two late 1960s phenomena: the Vietnam war, when good grades were necessary to maintain an academic exemption from the draft, and affirmative action, the theory of which could not be maintained if its beneficiaries' transcripts were polluted with C's and D's. Mansfield's mention of affirmative action prompted Harvard to wag its finger at him scornfully. "Nothing I have personally observed," university president Neil Rudenstine wrote in reply, "leads me to believe that grade inflation resulted from the enrollment of greater numbers of minority students." Oh dear.

But wait! Late last week, *Fifteen Minutes*, a weekend magazine supplement of the *Harvard Crimson*, ran a long analysis of the entire controversy, which concluded, first, that "grade inflation is real," and, second, that "some evidence correlating the influx of black students 30 years ago and higher grades at Harvard does exist." Mansfield's theory "deserves further investigation."

Of course, *Fifteen Minutes* and the *Crimson* are independent publications. Harvard's administration is sticking with its idiotic party line: Grades are high there because the average Harvard student performs better than the average Harvard student.

"I think that by far the dominant cause of grade 'inflation' at Harvard," explains Harvard College dean Harry Lewis, "is the application of constant grading standards to the work of ever more talented students." Anyone but a Harvard professor of logic would give Dean Lewis an F. ♦



Olympic Sport Where Reds Preside?

The International Olympics Committee will decide the site of its 2008 Summer Games in July. For now, an evaluation committee is carefully inspecting the five cities in the running. Four of them would make excellent and honorable hosts, we figure: Paris, Toronto, Osaka, and Istanbul, each a modern, democratic cosmopolis.

But the fifth contender is the capital of the world's only totalitarian superpower. So THE SCRAPBOOK hereby announces that it will boycott the games if they are held in Beijing—and hopes that the Bush administration will use whatever influence it can to derail Beijing's application.

Two weeks ago the IOC's evaluation committee spent four days in China. "What we want them to see," said Jiang Xiaoyu, vice president of that country's Olympic bid group, "is the real Beijing." Whether they realized it or not, the IOC representatives did see the real Beijing. Run-down homes and businesses were demolished, and "undocumented" residents were expelled to the countryside. Critics of the regime were placed under house arrest by the police. Shan Chengfeng, wife of imprisoned dissident Wu Yilong, was shipped to a forced labor camp for threatening to appeal to the IOC on his behalf. And so on.

When he left Beijing, Hein Verbruggen of the Netherlands, chairman of the IOC evaluation committee, announced himself "most impressed with the level of professionalism of the bid committee." Verbruggen's only stated concern was China's intention to conduct the Olympic beach volleyball competition in Tiananmen Square, where hundreds of pro-democracy demonstrators were massacred in 1989. Inappropriate? No, too far away from the Olympic housing complex China plans for the athletes.

Please, President Bush. Just say no. ♦

They Report, You Decide

HIS PERKS AND POWER GONE, CLINTON FACES STORM ALONE
by Adam Nagourney

"He has lost much of his White House staff, the counsel of many of the people who have guided him through eight years of intermittent crisis. . . . There had been discussion as well among Mr. Clinton's advisers to set up a central operation to respond to attacks on Mr. Clinton, or a war room, but that idea has been discarded. 'Can I kill one thing?' said Karen Tramontona, Mr. Clinton's chief of staff. 'There are not daily conference calls, there's no war room.'"

—*New York Times*, March 1

FROM CLINTON DIE-HARDS, A COMMAND PERFORMANCE; PARDONS PROMPT PODESTA, OTHERS TO KEEP UP DEFENSE
by John F. Harris

"The uproar over Clinton's pardons has prompted a command performance of the die-hard defenders—in a long-running show the performers had assumed had been taken out of production for good. . . . A Clinton damage-control operation has been assembled—churning out a daily stream of rebuttals and talking points."

—*Washington Post*, same day

Casual

Sweet Sixteen-Hundred

I'll admit, I didn't have the highest expectations for our first Valentine's Day as husband and wife. I was afraid that with marriage would come a tapering off of certain romantic attentions. But to my delight, my husband surprised me not only with long-stemmed red roses at the office, but also with something I had wanted for the longest time: a private tour of the White House.

Part of the fun of living in Washington is having friends in high places, and a friend of my husband's has been on the permanent staff at the White House since early in the first Bush administration. After an elaborate check-in process at the East Gate, complete with a search for weapons, we were buzzed in, and our friend joined us.

Right away, we could sense the excitement of the transition. As we made our way down corridors and up stairways, every staff member we ran into compared notes with our friend: "How do you like it so far?"

Some seemed to be in a state of amazement at having reliable hours and weekends off for the first time in years. Several commented on the new efficiency that has overtaken the White House or expressed open admiration of the Bushes. By contrast, no one seemed eager to talk about the former occupants.

As we toured the ground floor of the main house, our friend told us about events that had happened in each of the famous reception rooms. We lingered in the China Room. If you can tell a lot about a man by the way he treats his horse, what can you tell about a president from his china pattern, I wondered? Woodrow Wilson's china was stately and presidential. George and Barbara Bush simply added an oval platter, white with a red rim, to an existing White House set of dishes. It was tasteful and understated, much as I hear the elder Bushes are themselves. The Clintons ordered new china. It's ivory with a thick rim of gold.

As we left the China Room, another staff member rushed up to our friend with a large photo of himself and a recent White House visitor. A national celebrity or foreign president, I assumed, or maybe royalty. Several other staffers gathered around to look. Impressive VIPs walk these halls every day, I thought. I was surprised when it turned out the man in the picture was an aging Tom Wopat, from *The Dukes of Hazzard*, a show that went off the air over fifteen years ago.

In the main hallway, below the great stairs leading to the private residence, the guard told us that the president had gone outside, as is his nightly ritual. He was walking his dog, Spot. I whispered to my husband, "I love this guy!" My husband and the guard smiled at me. I asked about Barney, the new puppy; he turned out to be in Texas with Mrs. Bush. The Bushes have a cat, too.

Our tour wouldn't have been complete without a visit to the West Wing. In the Oval Office, we saw the pastel rug that has replaced Bill Clinton's bright blue one, as I'd read in the paper. Pictures of Bush's wife and twin daughters were on the table behind his desk. Our friend pointed out the small office off to the right, saying, "Sometimes President Clinton had private lunches in there." We looked at each other and held our tongues. It was an awkward, unpleasant moment.

A couple of the staffers we encountered were effusive about how courteous and punctual the new president is. One flashed me a glimpse of Bush's daily agenda. "See all the circles?" the staffer said. "That means he accomplished each task or meeting on time. He gets a lot done." I came away thinking maybe no man is a hero to his own valet—unless he sticks to his schedule.

As we wound up our tour, I felt inspired by the mood of respect and even enthusiasm for the new president. And I was grateful to our friend, a true romantic, who'd stayed at work late on Valentine's Day to give us our personal tour. It was my favorite Valentine's surprise ever.

Now I can't wait for our first anniversary (hint: Air Force One).

Lauren Trotta Husted

Correspondence

Laughable Commission

I HAVE JUST FINISHED READING Jennifer Braceras's article condemning the U.S. Civil Rights Commission as led by its chairperson, Mary Frances Berry ("Uncivil Commission," Feb. 26). The article deals chiefly with the commission's actions in Florida in connection with an effort to prove discrimination against blacks and Hispanics in the 2000 election.

I write as a member, since 1987, of the advisory committee of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission for Oregon. Under Berry's leadership, the commission has hogged the appropriations made by Congress for civil rights investigations, and has seen to it that most of the funds stay in the hands of the national body at the expense of the 50 state advisory committees and branch offices.

So little money is left for us that we have little or no logistical support at all. The Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and other Northwest bodies are "served" by a branch office in Los Angeles, upwards of a thousand miles away. That office has few clerical staff and is unable to service the many states in its charge, whatever the goodwill and effort they display.

It is now possible for a typical state advisory committee to meet maybe once or twice a year. We lay plans, only to nearly forget their substance by the time we get to meet again. In the years before Berry, I used to get magazines, printed reports, and communications from Washington with some regularity, so that I and other members remote from the capital had some feeling of being educated on the activities of the national commission and the other state committees. No more. Hardly a piece of printed material has come in a year or more.

The reports formerly prepared by state committees used to be printed and distributed. There is little of this. Indeed, the national commission chairperson seems to have little confidence in the state bodies, much less in their work. If we hold hearings, have them transcribed, and edit them into decent form, they will go to the regional offices and disappear forever. The directors of such offices seem to lack funds and personnel (and the confidence of the national staff and commission), so that they have little incentive to further the work of the state advisory committees.

For some time I have been at my wits' end to decide whether to resign and forget it, or to protest, perhaps to Oregon's senators and representatives. I think, in light of your truly excellent article—with which I totally agree, especially as to the gross bias exhibited by the Berry commission—I will begin with your fine publication, forwarding this informal letter of comment and protest.

As one affiliated in a limited way with the commission's work through the minor office I hold, I felt shame at the enormous rudeness and bias exhibited by Dr. Berry and some others on the commission in the televised Tallahassee hear-

ings. Her calculated repeated use of "laughable" immediately after the close of the hearings to describe the testimony of Katherine Harris, done when the witness had left the building, was disgusting. It made the headlines and dominated press coverage, as this experienced propagandist knew it would.

VAUGHN DAVIS BORNET
Ashland, OR

Clinton Cover-Ups

THE COVER OF YOUR FEB. 26 ISSUE, "Why Move On? This is too much fun," disturbed me. The left has long presumed our gleeful cynicism with the Clinton scandals. Your magazine gave wings to their accusations.

It's not true. Clinton's perennial shamelessness is not fun for those of us who love our country, not to mention truth or justice. Your cover gives Clinton's sycophants cover for their attacks on our motives.

JOEL MARK SOLLIDAY
Maple Grove, MN

The Nature Of Hobbes

HUGH ORMSBY-LENNON did a fine job of informing us of the current "Hobbes boom" ("Hobbes's Nature," Feb. 19). I was disappointed, though, that his discussion reinforces the long-standing habit of downplaying Hobbes's treatment of religious topics. While he allows that "the Atheist of Malmesbury" owed some of his thinking about the social contract to Reformation theology, and that he may have privately held to "some heterodox version of Anglicanism," Ormsby-Lennon is content to relegate these matters to Hobbes's private life—"for public appearances, he chose the cool line of geometry."

This ignores the fact that books III and IV of *Leviathan* are roughly equal in length to the much discussed first two books, and they are devoted to an in-depth discussion of biblical-theological matters; "yet the attitude of far too many scholars towards them," J.G.A. Pocock observed, "has traditionally been, first, that they aren't really there, second, that Hobbes didn't really mean them."

In at least one of the books reviewed by Ormsby-Lennon, A.P. Martinich's *Hobbes: A Biography*, Hobbes's theological views are discussed in careful and sympathetic detail. Yet Ormsby-Lennon chooses not to mention this important discussion of the philosopher's very public interest in religious matters. This is regrettable, in that it reinforces the mistaken notion that the early modern explorations of democratic theory were made possible only by a self-conscious attempt to ignore the theological topics that had long influenced political thought—an assessment for which the recent studies of Hobbes's (and Locke's) thought provide much counter-evidence.

RICHARD MOUW
Pasadena, CA

Correspondence

The Root of Evil

I was profoundly disgusted by *Hannibal*, the book. I am just as disgusted by The Weekly Standard's movie review by Michael Long, even if he notes that the film isn't very good ("Home Cooking," Feb. 26).

What offends me is his endorsement of the idea that "devotion to beauty can exist without morality; morality can exist without beauty."

The character of Hannibal Lecter is more than the absence of morality, he is pure evil. He has given himself over to evil completely. Apparently, so has Thomas Harris, who, in the book's acknowledgments, tells us that the evil is all his own.

The concept that it is so simple and understandable for Clarice Starling to switch sides at the end is reprehensible. It suggests more than that one can be devoted to beauty (and luxury) without morality. It implies that good and evil are simple constructs with no independent existence.

I have been fascinated by Harris's other books because of the way they looked into the face of evil and revealed how it can dominate human beings. But *Hannibal*, book and film, suggests that cannibalism is just another alternative lifestyle, like pedophilia or sex with animals.

Allen S. Thorpe
Castle Dale, UT

Harvard Hodgepodge

As a current MBA student at the University of Rochester, I took great joy in reading James Higgins's article highlighting the skills an MBA alum can bring to the office of the presidency ("What Bush Learned at Harvard," Feb. 19). Exceptional MBA programs teach skills that are extremely relevant to the presidency—namely, the ability to run a large organization, hire competent people, see the big picture, improve efficiency, and think strategically.

However, Harvard Business School takes a unique approach to MBA education by revolving its entire curriculum around case studies and placing a high percentage of a student's grade on classroom participation. Several other prominent business schools do not necessarily endorse this style of instruction. A solid analytical, theoretical, and quantitative background enables a manager to understand and dissect data and problems. (I'm not suggesting that President Bush fails to possess these skills.)

While I generally agree with Higgins's article, the notion that an MBA-educated CEO or American president does not need an appreciation for quantitative analysis or policy is misguided.

Stephen Joyce
Rochester, NY

I had to check the date of the issue in which James Higgins's cliché-ridden piece contrasts George W. Bush's much lauded managerial skills with "C-student" Al Gore's nerdy obsession with policy details. I thought I had mistakenly picked up an issue from the fall. The Weekly Standard, of all publications, should be glad the election is over. Let's hold off from reviving it, at least until the real election results come in.

Tim Bartlett
Jersey City, NJ

Wives and Taxes

While Allan Carlson and David Blankenhorn proclaim themselves to be "marriage buffs," their criticism of President Bush's marriage penalty reduction proposal indicates a better moniker would be "non-working wife buffs" ("Marriage Penalties," Feb. 26).

Bush's proposal allows couples to deduct 10 percent of up to $30,000 of the lower-earning spouse's income. Because this deduction reduces the taxation of second-income earners, it would encourage some of those who have been driven out of the labor force by high marginal tax rates to return to (paid) work.

According to Carlson and Blankenhorn, these second-income earners, primarily women, would then feel less dependent on their spouses for financial support and thus the institution of marriage would be weakened, not strengthened. (Taking their logic to the extreme, it seems that Carlson and Blankenhorn would simply have the government confiscate any income earned by a woman.)

While Carlson and Blankenhorn are correct that Bush's plan is a marriage disincentive for women who do not currently work, they ignore the fact that the current code is a marriage disincentive for working women. By reducing the tax penalty for couples in which both spouses would work regardless of marital status, the Bush proposal reduces their incentive to divorce or to cohabit without marrying in the first place. Which of the disincentives is stronger is ultimately an empirical matter, but the fact that a majority of women are working and a majority of female high school graduates are enrolling in college (presumably intending careers) suggests that the tax code's current disincentive for marriage is larger than that which would be created by the Bush plan.

Carlson and Blankenhorn's caricature of economic thought also requires comment. No economist with even a modest level of sophistication, which I know includes Milton Friedman and presumably Alan Reynolds, claims that non-working wives are "economic non-contributors."

What economists do claim, however, is that economic welfare is reduced (but not eliminated!) when the tax code causes women who would otherwise work to drop out of the labor force. (Similarly, the high level of taxation on first incomes may reduce welfare by inducing some women to work when they would otherwise prefer not to be in the labor force.) Reynolds is quite correct that our tax code, as currently structured, reduces welfare by providing a work disincentive to millions of women.

Finally, I should note that, like Carlson and Blankenhorn, I would also prefer that the Bush plan take a different form. Rather than needlessly adding another deduction to the complexity of the already unfathomable tax code, Bush should instead adjust the standard deduction for married couples (currently $7,350) so that it is double that for single filers (currently $4,400). Likewise, the president should adjust the thresholds in the marginal tax rate schedules so that the brackets for married taxpayers are double those of single taxpayers.

E. Frank Stephenson
Mount Berry, GA

the weekly Standard

Clinton's Foreign Policy (cont.)

Six weeks into a new administration is, of course, too soon to start making a definitive judgment about its foreign policy. But it is not too soon to start worrying that President Bush may be content to continue walking down dangerous paths in foreign and defense policy laid out over the past eight years by Bill Clinton. Conservative columnists across the country have been crowing about how refreshingly different Bush is from his predecessor. In some important respects they are right. But in foreign policy, we don't yet see much difference.

Bush's decision to adopt Bill Clinton's defense budget for the coming year was the first sign that something was amiss. Bush explains this as prudence: no new spending before a top-to-bottom review of defense strategy. But the decision to seek no increases was made not at the Pentagon, and not by any experts on defense planning. It was made by the Office of Management and Budget and above all, by political aides at the White House concerned about the tax cut. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who presumably knows about the needs of the military, was not asked his opinion. In fact, Rumsfeld believes a substantial increase in defense spending is needed right away to address the military's readiness crisis—the one Bush and Cheney warned about throughout last year's campaign. We can only hope the secretary of defense gets the president's ear in time to push through a supplemental appropriations bill for this year, as well as an increase to next year's budget proposal. But will Democrats in an evenly split Senate agree to a substantial defense budget increase later this year when even the White House has suggested there is no urgency?

At least Bush's stumble on the defense budget can be remedied. The same may not be true of the damage done by Secretary of State Colin Powell in the Middle East last week. The decision to drop most of the economic sanctions against Iraq in return for a new regime of so-called smart sanctions may have been a graceful, face-saving way to retreat from ten years of confrontation with Saddam Hussein. But make no mistake: It is a retreat. Powell told reporters that his decision would be criticized by some in the United States as a sign of "weakening." Notably, he did not try to explain why the critics would be wrong.

In fact, the new smart sanctions will prove no more effective or enduring than the old dumb sanctions. Powell rejoiced to find that the Arab leaders he met with were supportive of his plan to ease sanctions on Iraq. What a surprise! Among those expressing their alleged support were the king of Jordan, the most pro-Iraq nation in the "moderate" Arab world, and the new leader of Syria, that great friend of the United States. Of course Saddam's frightened neighbors support easing sanctions on Iraq. But anyone who thinks they will be any more observant of the smart sanctions ignores the central reality of the current dismal situation: Absent a clear reversal of American policy, and absent a serious commitment to the genuine removal rather than the phony "containment" of Saddam, Arab nations will continue their current stampede toward full normalization of economic and political relations with Iraq.

Unfortunately, the Bush administration so far shows little sign of reversing Clinton's feckless approach to Iraq. After much Republican campaign ballyhoo about supporting the Iraqi opposition, the Bush team, led by Powell, shows scant enthusiasm for this more confrontational approach. So far they have dribbled out small amounts of money to Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress, just as the Clinton administration did. But at the State Department, the National Security Council, and the CIA, support for the opposition is almost nonexistent. This is not all that surprising given that some of the same people who made Iraq policy for Clinton are still making it for Bush. National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, for instance, has apparently decided to keep on Bruce Reidel, a holdover from Clinton's Iraq team who has been sharply critical of the Iraqi opposition. President Bush, in his public statements, has not even hinted at a desire to remove Saddam. Like Clinton, he talks only of containment.

Finally, there are signs that Bush may continue the Clinton administration's dangerous courtship of China. When Bush learned that a Chinese firm had been helping Iraq build improved air defenses for the purpose of shooting down American aircraft, his first, instinctive response was anger. He vowed to "send a message" to China. But

then began the kowtowing. Condoleezza Rice hastened to correct the president, telling reporters that the administration is "not accusing . . . the Chinese of anything." Beijing, after first accusing the United States of fabricating the charge, apparently promised to "investigate." Within days, the Chinese were putting out the word, courtesy of the *Washington Post*'s John Pomfret, that the huge Chinese telecommunications firm helping the Iraqis try to kill Americans may have been doing so without Beijing's knowledge or approval. If you'll believe that, you'll believe anything. Bush chose to believe it. In dealing with China, Bush declared, he was inclined to "begin with trust."

Trust Syria. Trust Jordan. Trust China. We wonder how far this trust will go. On China, the next big test will come this spring when the Bush administration decides what new arms to sell to Taiwan. Senior Bush officials like Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Armitage, who will serve as Powell's deputy at State, are on record favoring a much closer military relationship with Taiwan, with stronger guarantees that the United States will provide Taiwan the weapons it needs and will come to Taiwan's defense in the event of a Chinese attack. But the Chinese government is already warning Bush that selling more advanced weapons to Taiwan will destroy the Sino-American relationship. Which course will Bush take? There are rumors that Bush plans to visit China to meet Jiang Zemin as early as this fall. Taiwan's supporters in the United States fear, correctly, that Bush will not want to poison the atmosphere for such a meeting by approving a controversial arms sale to Taiwan this spring. If Bush does rush off to see Jiang in the fall, it will be still more evidence that Bill Clinton's foreign policy has outlasted Bill Clinton.

Our conservative and Republican friends have until now been giving their new president and his team the benefit of the doubt. You can be sure that if Bill Clinton or Al Gore's secretary of state had done what Powell did in the Middle East, they would be screaming bloody murder. If Clinton had let the Chinese off the hook for building Iraqi air defenses, they would be calling for an investigation. If Gore had gone back on his campaign promise to increase defense spending, they would be hauling the Joint Chiefs of Staff out to testify about the aircraft that can't fly and the troops that can't train.

But maybe our friends are right to give Bush some more time to get his house in order. During the campaign, we applauded Bush for enunciating what he called a "distinctly American internationalism," an active American role in the world to defend American principles and interests against the likes of Saddam Hussein and our primary "strategic competitor," China. In his address to Congress last week, Bush spoke again of this "distinctly American internationalism." It is a magnificent phrase. Bush should begin translating it into actual policies—soon.

—Robert Kagan and William Kristol

Michael Ramirez

Goodbye to "Clinton Haters"

The epithet has lost its utility.

BY FRED BARNES

WHERE HAVE ALL the Clinton haters gone? Nowhere, really. It's just that the phrase "Clinton hater," brandished so often by defenders of President Clinton to dismiss criticism of his ethics, morals, or honesty, has been dropped from the political vocabulary in Washington and across the country.

On the Sunday talk shows, it's been uttered only once in recent weeks. And that was by a journalist who mentioned the phrase so Republican representative Dan Burton, whose Government Reform Committee is investigating Clinton's pardons, could reject it. Columnist E.J. Dionne of the *Washington Post*, a chronic Clinton sympathizer, refers only to "anti-Clinton purists" and "Clinton's ideological opponents." Bob Herbert of the *New York Times* writes of the ex-president's "enemies"—and then suggests they've been right about him all along. Even John Podesta, Clinton's last chief of staff, watches his words now in talking of Clinton's foes. They are "people" who are "ever present" and who want to "destroy and undermine . . . all the good things [Clinton] did as president," Podesta said on *Meet the Press*.

Why the disappearance of Clinton haters? The answer is simple: the pardon scandal. The pardons of fugitive financier Marc Rich, an herbal medicine quack named Almon Glenn Braswell, and drug kingpin Carlos Vignali, among other scoundrels, have outraged Democrats and liberals who in the past rushed to Clinton's defense. Suddenly they find themselves in agreement with, well, the folks they used to denounce as Clinton haters. This makes it difficult—or at least hypocritical in the extreme—to persist in attacking these folks as insatiable critics of the former president.

For years, however, "Clinton hater" was an effective epithet, used to dismiss criticism of Clinton as so ill-motivated and irrational as to be unworthy of serious rebuttal. And it was used more and more by allies of Clinton as his presidency progressed and scandals proliferated. White House aides used it. Democratic apologists used it. Journalists sympatico with Clinton used it against their conservative foes on TV chat shows. Letters-to-the-editor writers used it liberally. Actually, to the extent the term Clinton hater still has a life, it's in letters to newspapers and chat rooms.

The pardons have outraged liberals who once rushed to Clinton's defense. Suddenly they find themselves in agreement with the folks they used to denounce.

Two other things have contributed to the vanishing of the Clinton hater. One is the uncomfortable similarity between the pardon scandal and the earlier scandals of the Clinton era—uncomfortable to Clintonites, that is. No doubt they would like to pretend there's no similarity. But I suspect most of them, privately anyway, now realize what Bob Herbert was bold enough to indicate publicly: that Clinton's moral and ethical shortcomings aren't new. Worse, some may have even come to understand that by attacking his opponents in past scandals, they served as enablers and helped clear the way for unjustifiable pardons.

The absence of Clinton spinners in the pardon scandal has also played an important role. As president, Clinton could command an army of apologists and attack dogs who frequently were able to shift the media's attention to the supposed unsavoriness of Clinton's foes and away from Clinton himself. They demonized his opponents relentlessly, and, more often than not, it worked. Just ask Newt Gingrich, Ken Starr, Billy Dale, Bob Barr, Henry Hyde, Paula Jones, Gary Aldrich, Bob Livingston, and David Sentelle. Now Clinton has only a few obscure ex-aides to help, part-time, and they've been unable to rehabilitate Clinton or demonize his critics.

Just how similar is the pardon affair to the other scandals? Very. Five factors that cropped up in the earlier scandals—sex, money, lying, abuse of power, and collateral damage—were also involved in the pardons. The other scandals include Whitewater, Troopergate, Travelgate, Filegate, Paula Jones, and Monica Lewinsky.

Sex? I'll leave that to your imagination or the *National Enquirer*. But money was certainly involved in Whitewater, Travelgate, Lewinsky, and Pardongate. It was a wealthy Democratic donor, Walter Kaye, who arranged for Lewinsky to become a White House intern. And of course it was wealthy Clinton donors and fund-raisers who strongly influenced the pardons of Rich and convicted cocaine smuggler Carlos Vignali. Then there was Hugh Rodham, who got $400,000 for producing two clemencies. And so on.

Lying is generic to all Clinton scandals, and it's been ubiquitous in the pardon flap. Denise Rich lied

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about asking Clinton to pardon her ex-husband. The father of Vignali lied about the campaign he organized—it included heavy Democratic donations—to free his son. Clinton lied by saying Republican lawyers who'd worked for Rich had advocated a pardon. He lied by saying Rich's role in the Middle East peace process was a major factor in the pardon. He surely misled his own aides, including John Podesta, who thought when they left the White House on the evening of January 19 that Clinton had turned down Rich's bid for a pardon.

Abuse of power? This, too, is a specialty of Clinton scandals. It's hard to abuse a power that's absolute, but Clinton managed. Firing White House travel office employees and falsifying the reason is one thing. Attempting to stash Lewinsky in a government job at the United Nations is another. But pardoning totally unrepentant criminals is a more egregious abuse. Not only did Clinton purposely fail to consult the Justice Department, he pardoned people on the advice of *Rolling Stone* publisher Jann Wenner and the Rodham brothers. The standard grounds for a pardon—remorse and good works—were ignored.

Finally, there's been the usual amount of roadkill, only this time it includes Clinton himself. In the past, Clinton glided through scandals practically unscathed as his friends and allies were ruined for life. In Pardongate, the Clinton victims include deputy attorney general Eric Holder, Denise Rich, Beth Dozoretz . . . oh, why bother naming them all? The body count is still rising.

No longer free to trash people as Clinton haters, fans of the former president have a fallback position. Sure, the pardons were horrible, but dwelling on them is designed to negate the good things Clinton did as president. This is a favorite line of John Podesta. E.J. Dionne says Clinton's foes are exploiting Pardongate to wage "one final re-education campaign" against him. Maybe Dionne is right. Only this time, the campaign is working. ♦

Two Cheers for Deregulation

It's not as simple as it seems.

BY IRWIN M. STELZER

WITH ALL EYES focused on the president's efforts to push his tax cuts through Congress, little attention is being paid to what we economists call microeconomic policy—more (un)popularly known as regulation. That lack of interest in a coherent underpinning for policy proposals is already evident in the defense of their boss's tax cuts being mounted by the president's men. These advocates are abandoning the solid supply-side basis for the reductions—that reducing marginal rates and the overall tax burden will encourage harder work and more entrepreneurial risk-taking—in favor of Keynesian tax cuts-as-economic-stimulus arguments that will lose their potency if the economy begins to recover.

Although it is fashionable to believe that policy is made by a series of ad hoc deals with congressional barons, and by opportunistic appeals to shortsighted voters, no policy worthy of that name can actually succeed without a consistent, coherent underpinning. Franklin Roosevelt may have lurched from one expedient to another, but he succeeded in weaving a social safety net because he believed firmly that capitalism could not survive without one. Lyndon Johnson may not have created a "great" society, but he certainly refashioned the old one in his own image because he knew what he wanted: a redistributionist welfare state with an activist government. And Ronald Reagan succeeded in unleashing a record-breaking period of economic prosperity because he aimed his several domestic programs at unleashing individual initiative and freeing markets to do their job of allocating capital to its highest and best use. The vision thing matters.

Contrast this with the failure of Richard Nixon in the domestic arena, as he lurched from speeches supporting free-market capitalism to the imposition of wage and price controls. Or the dismal record of George Bush the elder, who loaded costly regulations and an increasing tax burden on American business, all the while thinking that his was a pro-business, pro-enterprise administration.

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Which is why George W. Bush and his able team of economic advisers must do some hard thinking about what sort of regulatory policy they want to promote. It does no good to say merely that one opposes "regulation," or any initiative to which one can affix that label. No good, either, to allow the rules-writing bureaucrats who are ever with us to go their merry, regulation-crafting way. And no good to adopt an ad hoc approach, signing off almost at random on this or that regulation, while frowning on others.

So we start with first principles: The market does a better job of allocating the nation's output and its capital in an efficient manner than do regulators, even the best-intentioned and most able ones. Unfortunately for opponents of "regulation," that simple principle calls for more than a hands-off policy: It demands an active policy to preserve competition. Last week's argument before the appeals court in the Microsoft case was not, as many conservatives see it, a battle between evil regulators who would stifle a successful company out of envy of the wealth of its founders, and, on the other side, defenders of the capitalist faith. Rather, it is a battle between two views of how to maximize competition. The government argues that the competitive system is best served by preventing a dominant firm from engaging in a variety of practices that the lower courts found will stifle new competitors; the Microsoft team contends that competition is better served by recognizing that in a high-tech world all monopoly power is transient, and that consumers are best served by letting Microsoft go about its business of creating software that makes the lives of computer users easier and easier.

Whatever one's views on this particular case, it is difficult to argue with the following two propositions. First, the competitive system is worth preserving, both because it increases economic efficiency and because it contributes to the preservation of an open society in which fledgling entrepreneurs can challenge incumbent firms on a relatively level playing field. Second, firms with dominant positions will at times find it in their interests to erect barriers to the entry of newcomers, relying on tactics that have no relation to superior efficiency. Bigness is certainly not bad, which is why fairly won monopoly power is beyond the reach of the law. But use of exclusionary or predatory tactics to obtain monopoly status is, and should be, a felony. Bush's new antitrust chief, Charles James, although he may differ slightly from his predecessor on some details of antitrust enforcement, knows that, and should be left to pursue a vigorous enforcement policy without interference from those Bushies who really would like to see the antitrust laws repealed.

These truths lead to a conclusion that some conservative economists will find unpleasant: One informing principle of regulatory policy must be that all policy initiatives should be aimed at preventing incumbent businesses from barring entry by price-cutters and innovators. Translated into specific terms: Maintain a vigorous and well-funded antitrust division of the Justice Department, and do the same for the Federal Trade Commission. Recognize that the best way to avoid the need for regulating the prices and practices of America's corporations is to maintain a competitive marketplace, and leave it to consumer preference, reflected in the forces of supply and demand, to do the job of constraining business behavior.

Unfortunately, competition is not always feasible. Not so long ago we thought that to be the case in airlines, trucking, and a host of industries in which competition has, indeed, proved possible—and infinitely superior to the old regulatory regimes in producing reasonable prices and a wide variety of services. Not so long ago, we thought that all regulators were in the business of balancing the interests of consumers and investors to produce what we called "just and reasonable prices." We now know better: Many regulators, even the most able and least venal, tend to protect the firms they are supposed to control, and to see potential competition as a threat to the health of their charges.

But the narrowing of the areas requiring regulation because competition is not effective does not mean that no such areas remain. It is not possible, for example, for newcomers to threaten the market power of many incumbents in a variety of so-called wires businesses—transmitting electrical energy over long distances; moving that energy from distribution points into the home; getting a telephone call to travel the so-called "last mile" over the local loop into each residential customer's home.

That leaves the Bush folk, who approach this issue with an admirable bias against government intervention in business affairs, with two options. One was best stated by Michael Powell, the new chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, an agency that under Clinton-Gore cast its regulatory net widely enough to cover the content of children's programs and the ethnic composition of firms bidding for spectrum. Powell, quite properly, says that he intends to put a stop to such mindless intervention. Regulatory barriers to entry in the form of restrictions on media cross-ownership clearly have no place in a world in which the sources of news and entertainment have proliferated. Nowadays, every viewpoint and everything that passes for entertainment can be found in some newspaper, magazine, or on some television station or on the Web.

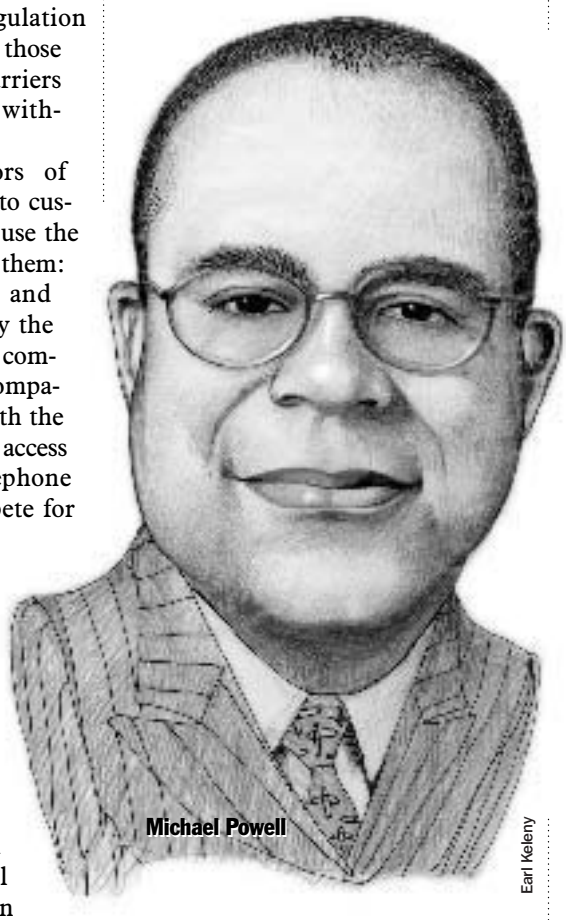
But Powell may have gone one step too far when he told reporters, "I do not believe that deregulation is like a dessert that you serve after people have fed on their vegetables, as a reward for competition. I believe instead it's a critical ingredient to facilitating competition." The chairman is certainly right in believing that there are instances in which the public interest is best served if regulators simply get out of the way, even at the risk of perpetuating a transient monopoly, in the hope that new entry will soon increase competition and

consumer choice. But he and his colleagues in the regulatory agencies must also recognize that there are instances in which the regulated monopolist is too entrenched, the cost of building an entirely new competitive infrastructure too great, simply to remove all regulatory constraints and hope for the best. It is the job of the regulator to distinguish those instances in which deregulation reduces barriers to entry from those instances in which those barriers are so high that he cannot withdraw from the game.

If independent generators of electricity are to have access to customers, they must be able to use the only path that exists to get to them: the transmission systems and wires that are often owned by the utilities with which they are competing. Similarly, if phone companies struggling to compete with the Bells cannot have reasonable access to Bell-controlled local telephone networks, they cannot compete for customers.

Unless fealty to ideology compels Bush's microeconomic policymakers to remain passive in the face of such monopoly power, they must do one of two things: assure that in those instances where it is effectively uneconomic to build a competitive infrastructure (an empirical not an ideological question), access is granted on reasonable, non-discriminatory terms (again, an empirical question); or separate the monopoly elements of the electric and telephone businesses from the vertical levels in which competition is feasible.

I don't know just what careful empirical analyses of the various regulated industries would show. I do know that regulated companies are skilled at presenting evidence that favors the status quo, and that they often outgun the agencies that are supposed to regulate them, although not necessarily their adversaries, potential competitors with a stake in breaking down barriers to entry. But I also know that the answer to the difficult policy questions surrounding these industries is not to be found in a creed that holds that all government intervention in markets is likely to harm consumers. It is the hard work of the regulator to learn the facts, and then decide whether the public interest is best served by intervening in the hope of simulating, or better still creating, a competitive market where none exists, or by washing his hands of the controversy and letting the players fight it out in the marketplace. There is no one-size-fits-all answer to the myriad questions regulators face. But there is one pair of principles that fits all: competition where possible, regulation where necessary.


Michael Powell

Earl Keleny

Which brings us to the other area that the Bush team will find difficult: environmental policy. It is not enough to say that we have abundant supplies of coal, so the government will subsidize the development of clean coal technologies, as it has announced it plans to do. Or that we have a shortage of oil and gas (at prices that politicians find acceptable, there being no physical shortage of these resources) and therefore should drill offshore or in wilderness areas. Here, as with other aspects of regulatory policy, lurching from ad hoc solution to ad hoc solution is not policymaking: It is the equivalent of sailing without a compass.

What Christie Todd Whitman's Environmental Protection Agency and Spencer Abraham's Department of Energy must do is shed the ad hocism that will leave them defenseless against energy producers when they uphold some restrictions on development, and under siege by environmentalists when they approve drilling, or mining, or expanded fossil fuel use.

Again, policy must have a basis in principle, and the principle here is that the benefits of any proposed policy must exceed its costs, which means making a best-faith effort to measure both costs and benefits. To be sure, there is some truth in historian Eric Hobsbawm's observation that "from time to time history catches economists at their brilliant gymnastics and walks off with their overcoats." But careful analysis supplemented with a dollop of humility should enable the new rulers of EPA and DOE to decide whether the value of lost environmental amenities exceeds or is exceeded by the value of the oil and gas to be retrieved from offshore fields, and whether the expenditure of public funds on subsidies to various new technologies has a significant public payback. One thing seems certain: The recent rise in the prices of oil and gas should increase the benefits of developing new reserves, without increasing the social costs associated with their development.

All of this may seem excessively prissy to those who prefer to be free to develop policies on the basis of what strikes them as practical in each separate case. But in the failure to impose coherence and a vision on microeconomic policymaking lies chaos. ♦

Will California Fail the Test?

Getting rid of the SAT will not improve college admissions. **BY EDWARD BLUM**

IF YOU LIKE WHAT California has done to deregulate electricity, you will love its plans to make college admissions "fairer."

In a move that stunned the higher education establishment, University of California president Richard C. Atkinson recently asked the university's academic senate to discard the Scholastic Assessment Test I, which has been the bane of college-bound high school students for over 50 years. Atkinson wants the nation's largest university system to take a more "comprehensive" and "holistic" approach to evaluating prospective students. Instead of using the SAT I, Atkinson wants the California system to use the SAT II, which tests a student's mastery of subjects studied in high school, in addition to his grades, essays, and a number of other subjective criteria.

But that's only the beginning. Ultimately, Dr. Atkinson wants state schools to abandon all numerical measurements of student aptitude. The SAT and other high-stakes tests, he has said, "can have a devastating impact on the self-esteem" of young students.

No one should be surprised by this latest assault on the SAT I. For years the test has been attacked as culturally biased by various racial advocacy groups such as the NAACP and the League of United Latin American Citizens, left-leaning college administrators, and most important, the Clinton-era Department of Education. Nearly two years ago, the department's Office of Civil Rights floated guidelines that stated "the use of any educational test which has a significant disparate impact on members of any particular race, national origin, or sex is discriminatory, and a violation of Title VI and/or Title IX, respectively, unless it is educationally necessary and there is no practicable alternative form of assessment which meets the educational institution's needs and would have a less disparate impact." In other words, schools were told to ditch the SAT I or face the threat of discrimination lawsuits. Only after howls of protest from the university community did the Education Department start to back off.

Atkinson's call for ending the use of the SAT I should also be seen as a counterpunch to Proposition 209—the California initiative that ended racial preferences in public education—and to lawsuits challenging race-based admissions in other states. Disarmed of the race preference, California's elite campuses no longer have the proper numerical racial "diversity" (read, proportional representation) so beloved by university administrators. Even though the top 4 percent of all qualified high school graduates in California are assured spots at the University of California, some campuses—Berkeley and Los Angeles—and graduate programs have not recovered their pre-209 levels of minority enrollment.

Atkinson's push for a more "holistic" approach to evaluating applicants is naive at best, cynical at worst. For 2001, the California system has received over 90,000 applications for undergraduate admission. For the sake of efficiency, GPAs and test scores must be the main criteria for screening applicants. While small, liberal arts colleges may have the luxury of considering a broader range of factors, this would be unworkable at any large university system. Dr. Atkinson surely knows this.

Putting aside the fragile self-esteem of applicants, the real reason for this latest move is the persistent and disheartening disparity in standardized test scores that sets whites and Asians apart from blacks and Hispanics. This gap exists at every grade level and among all economic groups: Middle- and upper-class blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans lag behind middle- and upper-class whites and Asians. Gaston Caperton, the president of the nonprofit College Board which designs and distributes the SAT, has written that the disparity "is particularly troubling because we are not talking about disadvantaged youngsters. Even minority students from relatively wealthy families with well-educated parents do not perform as well as white and Asian students from similar backgrounds."

In spite of the endless siege on standardized tests, the College Board—which has often gone along with its critics—concludes that the SAT "and other admissions tests tend to 'over-predict' the college performance of African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans. That is, minority students at predominantly white colleges and universities attain significantly lower grade-point averages than white and Asian-American peers who attained similar SAT scores in high school." Simply put, the great irony of the SAT I is that it is biased *in favor* of black and Hispanic students, not the other way around.

There is another distressing aspect to the controversy over standardized testing. Critics of the SAT I conveniently overlook the fact that continuous testing has proven to be the best method for narrowing the educational gap between the races. Virtually all successful inner-city schools are ones that rely on frequent and demanding testing.

As to shifting from an "ability" test

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like the SAT I to an "achievement" test like SAT II, such a decision would be a big mistake. It would likely reward the children whose parents can send them to private schools and hire special tutors for them. Achievement tests stack the deck against kids from poor backgrounds and poor schools, whereas an aptitude test usually gives them an opportunity to exhibit their potential. The results of Atkinson's proposal will be exactly the opposite of what the "fairness" crowd wants.

Some have speculated that the California Board of Regents—the ultimate arbiter on matters such as this—will eventually heed Dr. Atkinson's proposal and vote to end the use of the SAT I. New admissions guidelines would be in place for the freshman class of 2003.

If this happens it will be heartbreaking for the students of California. Rather than demonize one of the best methods for assessing intellectual skill, California should demand greater effort from minority pupils and reform failing inner-city schools. Instead of eliminating one of the best predictors of college achievement, California should intensify its efforts to prepare every student to compete on the SAT I. ♦

Bush's Education Semi-reform

Don't open the champagne bottles yet.

BY CHESTER E. FINN JR.

THE BUSH TEAM made a strong start in education, sending forth its ambitious school-reform plan early and with much hoopla, cozying up to key members of Congress, including ranking education-committee Democrats Ted Kennedy and George Miller, recruiting every Republican in sight to cheer for the proposal, and barnstorming the country on its behalf. Many positive vibes followed.

This is a wide-ranging plan, 28 pages even in sketchy form, meant to bring federal education policy into the 21st century, revamp dozens of failed programs, and redirect billions of wasted dollars. (It also adds more programs and billions.)

At its heart is the demand that public schools receiving federal education dollars be held to account for their students' academic results, that rewards come to those that boost achievement, that sanctions follow failure, and that progress be monitored via testing. Lots of testing. Texas-style testing, with states required to examine every child annually in grades 3 through 8 and with the federally managed National Assessment serving as outside auditor. (Unlike Clinton, with his proposed national test, however, Bush would have each state select its own test, based on standards of its own choosing.)

Early press accounts and political reactions erroneously focused on the program's faint whiff of vouchers—instantly dubbed a "deal-breaker" by every Democrat in town. Yet this is no voucher program. Only if sundry other interventions have no effect—and not sooner than six years after the bill's enactment—would a failing public school face the possibility that its federally aided pupils might leave for private schools. If the accountability program succeeds, however, that day will never dawn, no child will ever change schools and no vouchers will flow. To those who want Washington to *foster* school choice, this was a letdown. So, too, was the plan's neglect of "portability," the idea that federal aid dollars should be apportioned to students rather than school systems and should follow them to whatever schools their states and communities let them attend. (Though many forms of school choice are now widespread, Washington's LBJ-era programs still pump their dollars into the student's school district of residence.)

We know from Jay Greene's recent evaluation of Jeb Bush's Florida program that the merest threat of vouchers can speedily prod awful public schools to become at least a little better. That's the reasoning behind brother George's proposal to deploy vouchers as the ultimate weapon in his accountability arsenal. This, of course, was also the feature of the Bush plan that appealed to conservatives nervous about its big-spending, big-government elements. Even before its unveiling, however, the White House began to fudge the school-choice parts. Indeed, the president's people have hinted that, at the end of the day, testing is the only part of their many-splendored education program that they will die for. As word of this filtered through Washington, alarming Republicans who favor choice and are wary of mandatory testing, liberal Democrats proposed tens of billions more for existing programs. Though the new Bush budget is more generous toward education than anything else, it cannot win that sort of bidding war.

Thus within days of his plan's grand debut, President Bush was disheartening the right with his lack of ardor for vouchers and rankling the left with his comparative tightfistedness. Meanwhile, the education blob began rallying its usual defenses against testing and accountability.

The White House congressional strategy was murky, too, more Austin-

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style than Washington. In other high-tension fields, such as tax policy and health care, the Bush team has shrewdly welcomed proposals far bolder than its own, as well as measures that do less, thus making its recommendations seem the moderate middle course. (In his February 22 press conference, Bush even used the Goldilocks phrase "just right" to describe his tax porridge.) In education, however, the White House let it be known that it would rather nobody offered a full-bore conservative alternative. Much of its time has been spent seeking common ground with Democrats. With floor debate scheduled for early March, education committee co-leaders Republican Jim Jeffords and Democrat Ted Kennedy crafted a bill that contains no "controversial" provisions. In education land, of course, the only way to avoid controversy is to extend—and add money to—current programs, making no significant reforms at all. A lively debate on testing lies ahead. But it seems unlikely that vouchers and portability will even rear their heads on the Senate floor. (Bush also proposed a discretionary fund for school-choice experiments and a tax break for families saving for private schools. These provisions, too, are in the gun sights of congressional Democrats and education establishment sharp-shooters.)

The House—which soon opens hearings on the Bush plan and rival bills—could be different, but new education committee chairman John Boehner will have trouble holding together his fractious Republicans, much less finding enough Miller-led Democrats to muster the votes for real reform. Even the president's signature testing proposal is in jeopardy. Once one has divulged one's bottom line, after all, that becomes the starting point for further compromise. As testing comes to play the role in education debates that Jerusalem plays in Middle East peace negotiations, testing is where concessions are ultimately demanded. Especially with no decoys on the field—such as a conservative voucher bill—Bush has the dubious honor of having offered the most radical proposal. In a "bipartisan" era, that's not a great place to be.

From every corner demands are pouring in to soften key features of the White House plan. The National Governors' Association wants the statewide testing requirement eased (to allow for local options that will inevitably yield non-comparable data). Some House Republicans are nervous about mandating use of the National Assessment as an external check on state progress. "New" Democrats and "moderate" GOP senators are loath to cede to states much flexibility in where and how they spend their federal dollars, meaning that new accountability requirements would not be accompanied by freedom from regulations and formulas.

Illustration by Drew Friedman

The Bush education team, meanwhile, is talented but tiny—Education Department staffing is molasses-like—and includes few Washington veterans. Perhaps that's why they often seem to be operating within the political norms of Texas, where bipartisanship means quietly cutting deals among people with similar values. If those rules applied along the Potomac, Bush would get at least his tests, while Miller and Kennedy would get more money for favored programs.

In that case, everyone would trek to the White House for a gala bill signing and solemnly proclaim a great victory for children and teachers. But this isn't likely to happen in today's Washington, especially in the fractious field of education. In any case, it wouldn't be much of a win for children. Testing is essential, and the Bush version is fine, but in the end it simply provides more thermometers by which to know how the patient is doing. If we want him actually to get well, something must force change upon the system that is failing him. Democrats ordinarily put their trust in federal regulations and top-down interventions. Republicans usually choose to open up the marketplace and put parents in control. The third option is to trust states to innovate while holding them to account for academic results. Today, however, none of these approaches commands strong support at either end of Pennsylvania Avenue, and it's possible none will actually come to pass.

Congress will surely enact something this year—the centerpiece Elementary and Secondary Education Act is overdue for renewal—and will inevitably vote more dollars for school aid. Before opening any champagne bottles, however, we'd be well advised to see if this year's legislation changes anything important. Placing a weakened testing scheme atop the same old programs doesn't do much. Half a thermometer can't even show a fever. And a patient as sick as American education needs a radical treatment plan, not just a new diagnosis. ♦

The Clothing of the American Mind

Fashion in the Information Age

BY DAVID BROOKS

Milan

People who know me well will not be surprised to learn that I attended men's fashion week in Milan this year. They will quickly perceive that while the leading members of the global fashionocracy flock to the city to review the new lines, none brings my unique perspective—a total lack of any sense of style.

Every other year or so I drag myself out to buy a new suit, and when I come back my wife greets me with, "What shade of gray did you buy this time?" Some years, I swear, I go out with the full intention of buying a suit that isn't gray. But then I get to the store and look at the suits, a rainbow of gaudy navy blues and garish blacks. Too loud. Then I notice a gray one fading modestly into the background on some distant rack, and I admire its self-effacing dignity. I live in Washington, which has got to be the most sartorially unimaginative city in the world not excluding Tehran under the ayatollah. And I like to think of myself as a fashion vacuum even by our local standard. If you catch me not wearing a blue shirt, a red tie, and a gray suit, it's probably because the dry cleaner sent back the wrong items by mistake.

Nevertheless, there I was jetting into the brand new Milan international airport (which, judging by the time it took to get to the city, seems to have been located in southern Norway). No sooner did I arrive downtown than I was whisked over to a fashion house, where I found myself sitting at a table with a hot designer on the eve of his winter show.

The designer's name is Gigi. He is about 35, balding (he styles his remaining fuzz in a little pyramid on the top of his head), and slightly built and frisky, sporting the three-day growth of beard that Italian men do so well and Yasser Arafat does so badly. We were surrounded, and I am not exaggerating, by nine publicists for his company—two from the United States, two from Germany, one from Japan, and four from Italy. The firm's French publicist phoned to say she wasn't going to be able to make it because of traffic. This seems to be the ratio in the fashion business—about a dozen publicists for every actual designer.

Gigi is a passionate man, and he leapt up from the table to show off the menswear he had designed for the season. "This is my life! This is my passion! This is my work! I work all the time! I see something and I just have to sketch it down!" he exclaimed. People who know their fashion would be able to describe his stuff in evocative terms. Let me just say first off his clothing is brown. Gigi pointed to all the publicists sitting around the table: "These fabulous, fabulous women," he called them. He pointed out that almost all of them were wearing brown, whereas eight months ago they would have been wearing black. I made a

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little note to myself: Brown is in. I even considered returning home and buying a brown suit. Nope, too loud.

We were going through Gigi's line of travelwear for next fall. There were sweaters, hooded parkas (artificial fur for environmental reasons). Last year, Gigi explained, the look was "technological." The colors were black and the materials artificial, so everybody walked around looking like they were wearing a laptop travel case. But this year the trend is a natural look on the outside, and high-tech on the inside. Gigi had racks of knitwear, all nubby and textured. One jacket was made out of some fuzzy wool—shorn from the Phyllis Diller of sheep—with a lining of one of those high-tech polyesters. Gigi was so proud of the little thermometer mounted inside the jacket that I didn't have the heart to point out to him that a thermometer pressed against a human body won't give you much useful information about the weather outside.

Gigi showed me luxury sweatshirts with four or five different fabrics in them ranging from wool to distressed leather, for people who can afford the best but want to hold onto that just-out-of-art-school look. He showed me rich chocolate colored corduroy jackets and intricate herringbone cardigans with little pockets for your cell phone. Gigi's line is rich, layered, and a little intellectual. If you were a dashing young anthropology professor who had just won a MacArthur grant, this is how you would dress on your way to a corporate-funded technology conference on Lake Como.

In fact, Gigi's clothes were so nice, and yet in a tasteful sort of way, I began wondering, Why don't *I* have a look? Why don't I try to express anything with my costume, anything beyond pure nullity? And the more I thought about it, the more I began to be amazed at the stunning conservatism of American male fashion, which has silently shaped my wardrobe, and probably yours, too. There was a brief moment around 1972 when Joe Namath was wearing fur coats, when American men dressed creatively (and horribly, it must be said). But aside from that, we are an unbelievably demure lot—even in supposedly arty neighborhoods like Santa Monica and Soho, where brown would be a daring departure from the normal black on black.

We stolid Americans are supposed to look at all this as decadent frippery. We're simple cowboys who drive cars with names like Yukon, Expedition, and Durango.

Men in the rest of the world are not like this. In Germany and Holland the newsreaders on the nightly news wear bright plum sport coats. In France they are French. And even in Britain they wear those electrocuted pinstripe suits, with vibrating striped shirts and oversized cuffs. The quintessential American designer, on the other hand, is Ralph Lauren, a Jewish guy trying to succeed in the world by mastering the art of Anglican restraint.

In Milan, I came across men wearing an incredibly wide variety of looks, and not only among the fashionista types. The rule seems to be that if you are beautiful you can be yourself, but if you are ugly you must be interesting. The underlying clothing might be brown or black, but half the men I ran into this week had some sort of obsession with florid scarves. There was a profusion of male brooches—sophisticated clusters of gold and silver—sprouting on their lapels. In eyewear, I saw a range of colors beyond all describing. Some go for green glasses, some bright orange, and a handful favor the chunky black that suggests intellectual seriousness. There was also a stunning diversity of facial hair. Few men wore the standard issue goatee that relief pitchers in America tend to adopt. Instead people had strips of carefully shaped fuzz slicing from sideburns to chin, vaguely suggesting the roadmap of a large central city tapering off into a peninsula on either end.

We stolid Americans are supposed to look at all this as

decadent frippery. We're simple cowboys who drive cars with names like Yukon, Expedition, and Durango. What manly American man would want to have to go up to one of his hunting buddies and say, "Excuse me, I think I left my brooch on the floor of your Yukon." We don't have time to spend agonizing in front of our armoires, trying to figure out if the green in our silk chemise brings out or overpowers the blond tinting in our hair. We're substantive, sensible folk, after all, with more important things to think about. We're used to regarding the fashion world as a frivolous carnival, a sideshow to the really important parts of life.

But I wonder who is being delusional here. For when you actually look at the fashion world, you see two things. First, and most obviously, you see what is indeed a decadent floating party cycle for Eurotrash. One of the perplexities of my week in Italy was that I repeatedly found myself deep in cocktail chatter with semi-beautiful women with no fixed address and no clear occupation, talking about, say, the wonders of homeopathic jet lag remedies. But second, and more ominously, you see the shape of things to come. For underneath the glitter, fashion is a highly competitive industry. In fact, this is the quintessential industry of the Information Age.

Businessmen used to disdain genius. But today, CEOs are no longer chief bureaucrats. Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Richard Branson are auteurs —visionaries, philosophes.

The experts who write about the global economy point to the emerging trends: away from industrial production and toward the manufacture and marketing of ideas and images; away from national industries and toward transnational hybrid firms; away from rigid hierarchies and toward flexible teams; away from patient verbal communication and toward fast-paced visual communication. When you look at the fashion industry you realize that the people who dominate these companies have been operating in a new-economy mode for decades. The industry is already a highly evolved version of the global Information Age economy, and the people you see in the fashion industry are highly evolved products demonstrating what it takes to thrive under the new rules.

Consider some of the operating principles of the fashion world:

* *The workers are free agents.* The day before Gigi's show, I walked into the space where the "installation" was to take place. (Not all designers have traditional catwalk shows. Some prefer to set up sprawling exhibits, with models standing around like sculptures and the rest of the clothes displayed on the walls and racks like pieces of environmental art at the Guggenheim.) The room was bare except for a few raw boards and lots of technicians running around. Most of these freelancers had been flown in at the last moment to build the show: a producer from New York, models from Paris, lighting people from Italy, others from Britain. In the middle there was an old woman in black peasant garb shouting orders to everybody. It looked like Mamma Leone running a design revolution.

In other words, this show was put on by an ensemble of free-agent consultants who were called together to complete this one high-pressure project before dispersing to the four winds, or the next show. They worked all night, building and painting the sets, arranging the footwear, organizing the catalogues for the press, making the hors d'oeuvres, and by early the next morning they had transformed the room into a weird glowing space full of earth-tone clothes and lines of footwear, soon to be occupied by hundreds of milling fashionistas chatting over their champagne glasses. This is exactly the sort of high-pressure teamwork that they rave about in *Wired* and *Fast Company* magazines. It's the

economy peppered with consultants and freelancers that economists have been noticing. It's the sort of temporary arrangement that sociologists worry about in essays on the "Death of Loyalty."

* *Everything revolves around an animating genius.* By the morning of the actual show, Gigi was out of his mind. He was bouncing all around the exhibition space, talking to everybody and readjusting everything. There was a press conference at 8:30, which started about 9:15. This was the first time I'd been to an Italian press conference, and it was a little bit different in that nobody stopped talking. While Gigi was talking, the reporters kept up a running commentary with each other about what he was saying. That was good, because Gigi certainly wasn't going to let them interrupt him to ask questions. Various aides walked up to Gigi while he was talking to tell him things, and one finally told him to pipe down and get off the stage.

But really the whole point was for him to be this way. This whole publicity apparatus had been erected to celebrate him and his ability to intuit the mind of the consumer. The publicists kept telling me what a genius he is. And in his hyper mode, he looked the part.

And that's the way it is throughout the information economy. Businessmen used to disdain genius. Arthur Schlesinger called anti-intellectualism "the anti-Semitism of the businessman." In traditional capitalism, the hero is utilitarian and practical. He succeeds through application and industry, not flights of vision. "Why I Never Hire Brilliant Men" was the title of an article in *American* magazine in 1924. But today, CEOs are no longer just chief bureaucrats. Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Richard Branson, and the like are auteurs—visionaries, *philosophes*, charismatic leaders. Their stock prices rise and fall on their reputations for creativity. They have to write wild books with titles like *The Road Ahead*. They have to go to tech conferences and make big, 500-year predictions about the sweep of history. Everyone is an auteur.

More broadly, in this economy, a company's value is measured less by its fixed capital in plants and equipment and more by the talent of the people who temporarily work for it. As the modern cliché goes, the company's chief assets walk out the door each evening and go home. That means that the workplace is supposed to become a creative workshop, where the masters help their underlings stretch their minds. And ambitious young strivers are supposed to think, in the words of Gary Hamel's current business best-seller, *Leading the Revolution*, like "seers" and "heretics." Their goal is to become the genius around whom a company revolves. Hamel has a little creed in his book: "I am no longer captive to history. Whatever I can imagine, I can accomplish. . . . I am an activist, not a drone. I am no longer a foot soldier in the march of progress. I am a revolutionary."

Even the fashionistas don't get this grandiose. But in their world, companies have always been structured like workshops, with teams of creative people striving to implement the vision of one "genius." The value of the company depends on the mystique that surrounds the genius. So of course Gigi was the center of the marketing effort for his house. Across town, Tom Ford, another more celebrated designer who has worked at Gucci and Yves Saint Laurent Rive Gauche, was spoken of in hushed tones. The big designers maintain their prestige not by having any fixed capital, or even by staying at one house, but by sustaining their aura. They are the industry geniuses, like the genius chefs of the restaurant world and the genius analysts of Wall Street. Commerce follows the stars.

* *You stay on the cutting edge or die.* The Silicon Valley guys talk about the need to stay at the forefront of change. They invent laws like Moore's Law to illustrate the relentless pace of progress, and they use phrases like "ashheap of history" to situate people who do not stay on the cutting edge. People rush into things like e-commerce willy-nilly because they feel that the cost of missing the next big thing is death.

This is the way the fashion industry has always worked. The people who tell the old fashion world joke—"That's so 5 minutes ago . . . "—are scarcely exaggerating. When Gigi made that comment about most of the publicists in our meeting wearing brown instead of black, I noticed that in fact two women at the table were not wearing brown. The next day they both showed up at work in brown.

One night I found myself at a dinner table next to an American named Eric, a big blond guy who looks like a more ruggedly handsome Andy Gibb. He's worked at Hugo Boss and other houses and said that in his business you get to recognize the signs—the notch in a lapel, the placement of a button—that mark each season's suits. So you can pretty much tell at a glance how long the person you are talking to has owned his costume. I liked Eric because he was one of the few people who didn't look at my two-year-old suit with the expression of one who has just passed fresh roadkill. "You forget about wearing anything for a year," Eric said, speaking of people in his line of work. "You buy something you like. You wear the hell out of it. Then you give it away." Eric's brother has a wonderful collection of just barely out of date menswear.

For people in the industry, this isn't frivolous trendmongering, it's professional survival. They have to be seen as members of the avant-garde. If Donna Karan designs three-tier shirt collars that look like folded napkins, you'd better not be caught in a single-tier collar. If Christian Dior

is doing the trailer trash look, then you'd better get on the Winnebago. The race is fastest at the front. The brave individual stays ahead of society.

* *Big brands thrive.* In the Information Age we have a set of industries where many people are either free agents or short timers. They hop from job to job, but very often their product is intangible or a matter of taste. A screenwriter can't measure his or her output in widgets, neither can a computer game designer, a publicist, a graphic artist, or an academic. So how do you attract attention and get hired? You develop your brand. A brand is like an identity or a persona. It is the quality or aura that defines your role in the marketplace. *The Brand Called You* is the title of Tom Peters's advice book. If you type "branding" into the *Amazon.com* search engine, you find 69 recent books with that word in the title.

Milan was full of people nurturing their brand. That's why they dress so perfectly, to enhance their persona. That's why they seem to be on a first name basis with race car drivers, club owners, and the best polo ponies. They want their brand to have some of the prestige that rubs off from those glamorous brands. That's why their dinner parties are always at the "it" restaurants. I went to one that was part-restaurant, part museum, part eclectic lifestyle shop, part hotel, and I knew my hosts were chic because when the main course was cleared (at about midnight), the owner of the restaurant, a big local celebrity, sat down at our table and had the waiter bring her some tea. She was affiliating her brand with our brand, and we all knew something glorious was happening. You could tell by the way our gratitude glowed off the strands of jewelry in her elegantly shaded blond hair.

In his recent book *The Future of Success*, Robert Reich drops in the stray sentence "Harvard University is becoming the world's preeminent brandportal for learning," which is certainly an interesting way of putting it. But maybe it's essential. The dot-com shakeout underlined the importance of having a big and trusted brand. When the going gets rough, the big brands, like Yahoo! and AOL, survive, and the little brands that are out there competing for recognition perish.

In fashion, of course, people have been competing for eyeballs, as the Internet types say, for centuries. Their whole industry is about cultivating a brand. If you come into a meeting in an Armani suit, that says one thing about you; if you come in wearing Betsey Johnson, that says another. The fashionistas have been climbing the status ladder from one prestigious house (or brandportal) to the next for decades. And the keepers of the brand are quite supple about attending to the care and nurture of their personas. Recently Calvin Klein got into a bitter and public feud with one of its licensees, Warnaco, in part because Klein thought Warnaco was tarnishing the brand. Gucci has shown that you want to leverage your brand into the mass market to make the big profits, but you've got to do it without diluting the brand identity.

One of the interesting effects of this brand-consciousness is the way it elevates the cultural power of journalists and celebrities. Journalists and celebrities are the keepers of the buzz. They are the ones who focus attention on one brand or another. If you own a restaurant, you want it to be the place where the supermodels go. If you own a fashion house, you want Madonna at your show. At the fashion events, the pecking order is marked by where you are seated. The high status front row is generally given to celebrities and celebrity journalists. They sit in full view of the crowd, ignoring the show and talking on their cell phones. The next rows are given to the buyers from the big stores, the people who do the millions of dollars of actual business with the houses. Money is important, but apparently it is secondary to buzz, since money follows buzz. Then further back are the non-celebrity journalists, the ones who are not high profile editors but who do the actual writing. They have the worst view of the action. Some journalists specialize in writing about footwear, but they are so low status they have to sit in the back and can't see the shoes. But at least they get to be in the room. Everybody else has to wait outside.

They say men's fashion week in Milan is only a fraction as intense as women's fashion week. But it was still pretty intense. Living in this sort of industry takes total commitment: cultivating one's brand, staying on the cutting edge, building up one's cultural capital, hopping from job to job as the winds of innovation shift. But this is the way more and more people are going to be living. The fashion people have been perfecting for decades the mentality, tactics, and behavior that other Information Age workers are only now coming to grips with. We are all becoming fashionistas.

The essence of this new mode is the competition for attention. We are moving into an overcommunicated world, in which there are too many TV stations, too many websites, too many start-ups, too many commentators, too many conference panels, too many brands competing for eyeballs. The old pioneers faced a daunting wilderness. Industrial age managers were under constant pressure to make their production processes more efficient. But the Information Age johnnies live in a jungle of communication. Each individual and each company has to wade into this tangle of messages and find a sustainable spot where survival is possible.

There's a reason the new elites revere Picasso. By constantly reinventing himself, he kept himself in the public eye. There's a reason Andy Warhol is still on people's minds. He fused the attention-getting techniques of art and advertising, and so created a potent combination for staying famous. Andy Warhol probably didn't create great paintings, but he created one fabulous brand.

The jungle of communication breeds a certain type of individual. He is not the conformist that David Riesman worried about in *The Lonely Crowd*. On the contrary, it's imperative to deviate (within socially acceptable limits) from the norm in order to establish that distinct identity. Nor is he a rugged individualist, as one might have found on the American frontier. On the contrary, he's got to have antennae finely tuned for others' reactions. Nor is he a Dale Carnegie gladhander. He's got to show he is cerebral, edgy, avant-garde.

There's a reason Andy Warhol is still on people's minds. He probably didn't create great paintings, but he created one fabulous brand with staying power.

Instead, he is a protean figure, constantly changing in surprising and contradictory ways in order to win attention. He has a short time horizon, because the great blizzard of messages quickly obscures anything that happened as long as a few months ago. He is a risk taker, saying and doing extraordinary things to win attention, knowing that once you're famous there are few penalties for being wrong or outrageous. He has a great tolerance for flux and insecurity. He has a genius for reading cultural signifiers, knowing to behave one way with the cowboy hat crowd and another way with the counterculture set. He is always productive, using every social event and chance meeting to build his network and publicize his brand. He has a great rhythmic sense for when people are sick of a cultural trend and ready to hop on a countertrend. He's unembarrassed by a level of self-promotion that would have seemed distasteful a few decades ago. He is, above all, self-confident.

Stop me if this is beginning to sound too much like Bill Clinton or Tina Brown or Al Sharpton or any of the other titans of buzz. But the Information Age really does pose new cultural challenges. Conservatives are veteran culture warriors. We're used to identifying the harmful effects of bad ideas. Sometimes if you read conservative literature, you get the impression that the American educational system is absolutely incompetent at teaching students how to read and write, and deviously brilliant at passing along every corrupting idea hatched in a New Left faculty lounge.

But the cultural offensive of the 1960s isn't the only thing that influences American character. People are more influenced by the way they live than by ideas passed along in a lecture or on a TV show. And if the Information Age workplace threatens to turn Americans into frenetic self-branders, competing for buzz and attention, that's just as big a threat to virtue as anything the tenured radicals could dream up. The problem is to figure out what sorts of temptations and corruptions the information economy does pose, and then—since we're not going to abandon the Information Age economy—figure out what sorts of cultural institutions we can set up to remind people how to separate what really matters from the onslaught of ephemera.

The fashionistas don't write books that you can refute. They don't quote Rousseau. But if their world becomes the whole world, pretty soon we'll all be changing scarves and looks and personalities every six months in desperate competition for attention and cool. The trivial will crowd out the eternal. The flood of e-mail and instant messages will be overwhelming. We'll never remember anything that happened more than a few months back, and we'll never think more than a season ahead. We'll all be on the floor of our SUV wondering whatever happened to that damn brooch. ♦

In Defense of the XFL (sort of)

What's wrong with blue-collar football?

By Stephanie Gutmann

It's hard to conceive of a publicity campaign better calculated to outrage polite opinion than the one that heralded this year's new football league—the XFL, brainstorm of the World Wrestling Federation's Vince McMahon and his partner, NBC Sports chairman Dick Ebersol.

McMahon has always known—political correctness and feminism be damned—that people really do enjoy watching big, strong men sweating and grunting and violently throwing each other around, which is why he was able to turn the WWF into a billion-dollar empire. How big a fortune could you make, he must have wondered, if you combined all the hot elements in one, i.e., reality programming (*Survivor*, *Temptation Island*, etc.), with the outsized warrior characteristics of WWF wrestling? Such a grand project requires lots of money so he recruited Dick Ebersol as partner. Of course, when pro football is at its best (think of the 1985 Chicago Bears with the "Fridge," the "Funky QB," etc.), it does combine all those elements. Thus McMahon envisioned a football league that would play in the off-season. Sure, this meant running the ball into NFL territory, but the NFL, McMahon knew, is more vulnerable than people think.

The NFL still finds and grooms the greatest football players in the world, but over the decades its less-PC edges have been buffed away, and it's become too smug and too bland. What can you say about an organization that banned crowd-pleasers like end-zone dancing and cheerleaders!

For many years, one of the great pleasures of football had been the moment when a besotted TV cameraman, flopped on his back, panned all the way up the long expanse of smooth, golden leg belonging to a Dallas Cowboys cheerleader. The blinding white of the hot pants set against the blue of the Texas sky produced a God Bless America/I Love This Game! moment more powerful than anything the NFL promotion team could dream up. But the NFL began to worry that men out there saw the cheerleaders as sex objects—rather than the wholesome, healthy, enthusiastic girls we knew them to be, and those long, loving pans became a relic of the past, fileable under '70s excess. In 1985, for instance, Virginia McCaskey, daughter of Chicago Bears owner George Halas, abolished Chicago's "Honey Bear" cheerleading squad because, as the front office put it, "the concept of cheerleading has outlived its time." From there, it was probably just a short step to deciding that the concept of football has also outlived its time—that the game is too downmarket, too redneck, too old-fashioned. How else to explain ABC's decision to put comedian Dennis Miller in the color commentator spot for *Monday Night Football*? It could only be a signal that, yes, it is hip to watch football—as long as one is sufficiently ironic about the "retrograde" macho of it.

So McMahon and Ebersol set out to showcase retrograde macho. With the XFL, they would present "reality programming wrapped in a sporting event." As in *Survivor*, mikes and cameras are placed everywhere around "players," who are supposed to ignore the attention and just "be real." Selected XFL players (like the quarterbacks) have mikes in their helmets. So do the coaches and the cheerleaders, and there are innumerable mikes around the field to pick up ambient noise—especially all those thuds and grunts and howls of pain.

It is supposed to be a "you are there" kind of thing. One is supposed to be able to hear the coach talk strategy and berate his players and curse the other team. Commercials trumpet the XFL's "unprecedented" "All-Access" locker room—yelling! crying! cortisone shots! Dating between players and cheerleaders is now supposed to be out in the open (even used as *Temptation Island*-style narrative), not swept under the rug as in the old days. Camera crews are to roam the field unimpeded. "When the quarterback fumbles or the wideout drops a pass—and we know who he's dating—I want our reporters right back in her face on the sidelines demanding to know whether the

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AP/Wide World Photos

The opening scramble, Hitmen vs. Bolts, Feb. 11

two of them did the wild thing last night," growled McMahon. Like professional wrestlers, players would have nicknames on their jerseys—to speed up the process of "character development." McMahon decreed that XFL teams would not be named after animals—what genius in the NFL, for instance, decided to let so many teams to be named after birds (Ravens, Cardinals, Falcons, Eagles, Seahawks)? No, XFL teams would have names like the Las Vegas Outlaws, the New York/New Jersey Hitmen, the Memphis Maniax, and the Chicago Enforcers.

Early expensive-looking promotional commercials for the XFL promised too much, which is probably why TV ratings dropped about three quarters between the first weekend and the fourth. The spots made the XFL football look like something out of a *Mad Max* movie—a blasted, post-nuclear desert populated with what looked like extras from the film *Conan the Barbarian* wearing ominously darkened visors on their football helmets. But this bombastic publicity, plus the Girls! Girls! Girls! angle, and Vince McMahon's press-baiting pre-season press conferences, did succeed in sending sportswriters and columnists from all parts of the paper into apocalypse-of-the-month mode.

George Will predicted "a further coarsening of the culture." One sportswriter fretted about "cheerleaders who give lap-dances." Much was made of the fact that the XFL was removing the player-protecting rules like the signal for a "fair catch" and the "in the grasp" rule for quarterbacks. Keith Elias, a running back for the New York/New Jersey Hitmen, predicted, "It's going to be mass carnage." Mariah Burton Nelson, author of a book titled *The Stronger Women Get, the More Men Love Football*, told the *New York Times*: "The XFL may become to sport what gangsta rap is to music. If there is going to be a training ground for athletes getting involved in domestic violence because of their sport, it is going to be the XFL."

So it was with some queasiness that I tuned in the home-opener for "my" new team, the NY/NJ Hitmen, who were hosting the Birmingham (Alabama) Thunderbolts at Giants Stadium on what the announcers kept calling a "frigid" afternoon (30 degrees with a purported wind chill of minus six).

Just a few minutes into the broadcast, though, it was clear that this was not the fall of Rome; in fact for quite a long time it wasn't quite clear what the hell was going on. On top of the hurtling chyrons, incessant music (used in the TV broadcasts, as in a movie, to tell you how you're supposed to be feeling), and announcers baying like werewolves about "the spirit of violence" in the air, someone had apparently fallen asleep at the switch and was showing the video of one commercial combined with the audio of another, producing the discombobulating experience of watching a woman in workout clothes rolling an object around her living room floor while audio describing "The Beer Thermometer" played. It was an appropriately surreal introduction to the world of the XFL.

In fact this disconnect between audio and video was very much like what was going on in the game. Announcers Craig Minervini and Bob Golic, a huge ex-Oakland Raiders tackle, were in a near frenzy attempting to convince TV viewers that this was indeed the "smashmouth" football the ads had trumpeted. "Hah, Ha!" gloated Golic, as XFL star Keith Elias (who has been on a football hiatus, spending his time writing screenplays with his brother) walked stiffly to the frozen field. "You know he wants to hit!" Color commentary mostly consisted of, "Yeah, a lot of crunching going on," "Man what a hit!" and, "The Hitmen Are Hitting!"

When action subsided for a time, play-by-play announcer Craig Minervini attempted a few minutes of

relaxed badinage: "So," he asked Golic, "we've heard a lot of crunching going on. What does it actually feel like from inside the helmet?" "Oh man," Golic said dreamily, "that feeling when you land on him and you hear the air kind of going whooooooof out of his chest? That's sweet."

Lest we forget that this is the league that's going to give us no-holds-barred tackles, there was an intermittent feature called "Big Hits" and a salute to the "Hit of the Day" at the end of the game. As the credits rolled, there was file footage—I'm not even sure if it was from that day's game—of a player lying on the ground tossing violently from side to side as he moaned and clutched his leg.

AP/Wide World Photos

Xtreme cheerleaders

But all this maniacal chortling over "hits" actually seems designed to distract the viewer, so he won't realize that the play in general is not at all gratuitously violent—no more violent than your average football game. The play is, in fact, downright sportsmanlike—as when you tackle the guy just hard enough to stop him, then get off him fast and pass up the opportunity to get in that sly little extra bounce on his spine.

Some of the relatively tenuous quality could come from inexperience. But there also seems to be a sweet, simple determination to just play football—in defiance of management's drooling about smashing mouths. These, as Hitmen coach Rusty Tillman put it, are all players with "something to prove"—to the guys that didn't draft them out of college, to the NFL team that cut them after one season. Some are like the obviously talented Memphis Maniax player Rashaan Salaam, who won the Heisman trophy in 1994, was drafted in the first round by the Chicago Bears, and then choked—he had a weird first year marked by spectacular running followed by frequent fumbles. He now says the years of injuries and weight gain—and illness caused by dieting—were caused by his addiction to marijuana. Maybe Salaam is just a hopeless neurotic who will never let himself win; maybe he's finally gained some emotional maturity. Who knows? But players with "something to prove" put energy on the field— sometimes more energy than a blasé million-dollar NFL player.

NFL players make millions as compensation for the years of concussions and knee surgeries, but XFL players are making a much tougher gamble with their lives—especially the XFL quarterbacks, who are getting sacked on nearly every play because the league has taken away rules that would protect them. XFL teams are also much smaller, which means there's very little time off. But the average XFL player earns $45,000, a quarterback only $50,000, and players on the practice squad, only $1,000 a week. The most draconian part is that the XFL is just one big company: Since NBC and McMahon own the entire league, it's impossible get a higher salary by negotiating with another team.

There's a soberness and seriousness about many of the XFL players. These are hard-knocks, hard-luck guys: Some are just out of college; a few hadn't played since high school; most have knocked around the globe, going from the NFL, to the short-lived American Football League, to Arena Football League, to NFL Europe. The gaps have been filled in with . . . whatever. One young player with a good college record said his last job was at a Bed Bath & Beyond, and in a profile for TV he is seen lecturing a teammate about the low thread count in the hotel's bedsheets. Another described his last job as "breaking bricks." Quite a few are short. A quarter of the 45-man Hitmen roster are under 6 feet tall. The tenacity of the guys—usually elevated to star rank in the XFL—who have had seasons in the NFL before being cut and roaming the globe in search of more football work is quite poignant; when an older guy like Casey Weldon, the QB of the Birmingham Bolts, says he just loves to play football, you believe him.

Lest anybody chicken out, or come on the field without the proper "rip 'em to bits" spirit, the XFL has thrown in what it is supposed to be an extra incentive. If a player wins the game, the announcer relentlessly crows, he's "going to

win $100,000." Actually that's tricky wording. It's the team that wins $100,000, and that is divided up among the, say, 40-man roster, boiling down to $2,500 a man. During the game the announcers attempt to build tension over the Who-Will-Walk-Home-With-That-Cash drama with a little break in which players are asked what they'd "Do With That Money?!!" In the Hitmen opener at Giants Stadium, players said things like "pay my bills," "pay my '98 tax return," "buy a whole lot of diapers for my newborn kid," and "buy a whole lot of sandwiches."

In general the potentially murderous game of football is played in a sportsmanlike way. Football players from the NFL on down are mercenaries—they get shuffled from team to team, and they often find themselves playing opposite guys they used to stand next to in the huddle. This kind of fellow feeling—and reluctance to give another guy a career-ending injury—seems especially strong in the XFL. If they are reluctant to blow the other guy's knee out, it may be because they know how he must feel about getting a break, and what it would be like to end this big break by dealing a career-ending injury.

In fact there seems to be a general player rebellion under way, directed at all of the XFL's gimmickry: the announcers' heavy breathing about the money; the promises of "blood on the field"; the idea that players will develop outsized WWF-like personalities. A number of teams have not put nicknames on their jerseys. As one player pointed out, "If they don't know your name, you want them to know your name first; nicknames come later; other players give them to you."

Here in fact is the crux of the WWF/NBC's problem. There is an inherent conflict between "reality programming" and sports. Serious, watchable players are not entertainers; in fact, trying to be an entertainer distracts them from a game that, like combat, calls for one's complete attention. Rusty Tillman, who came from the Seattle Seahawks where he was an assistant coach, has in fact stated on the XFL pre-game show that "if management wants actors, they can call Al Pacino. . . . As far as I'm concerned, it's real football. . . . I'm just a football coach. That's all I ever was and will be. I don't want to be a TV star; I'm not at home in that element."

I suggested to Tillman that if management wanted more drama and violence on the field, they could start by smacking down the roving reporters who dog coaches and players, asking inane questions. In fact this has been the real drama—watching Tillman, players, and other coaches in their small rebellion against the reporters determined to get histrionics out of them. By the time the Hitmen opened in their home stadium, players had begun turning their backs and simply walking away from the roving camera teams. Coaches had begun covering their playbooks when wandering cameras happened by. At the end of game three, after being badgered about what it felt like to lose the game, Tillman shoved a cameraman and told him to "get out of my face." The announcers kept trumpeting the XFL's all-access locker rooms, but it seemed to take longer and longer for coaches to let cameramen in.

But if it's sport and not entertainment, will there be an audience? In its first month, the new league has gone from 14 million to 4 million viewers. Can the XFL survive? It's quite clear that the Roman carnival version proffered by WWF/NBC management will not, unless they decide to burn through players like dry kindling and resupply teams with the "40,000 bricklayers, plumbers, and cops" who showed up hoping to try out. Under the hyperactive screen graphics, the bombastic music, and the frenetic announcers, however, is something small and brave that could survive and should.

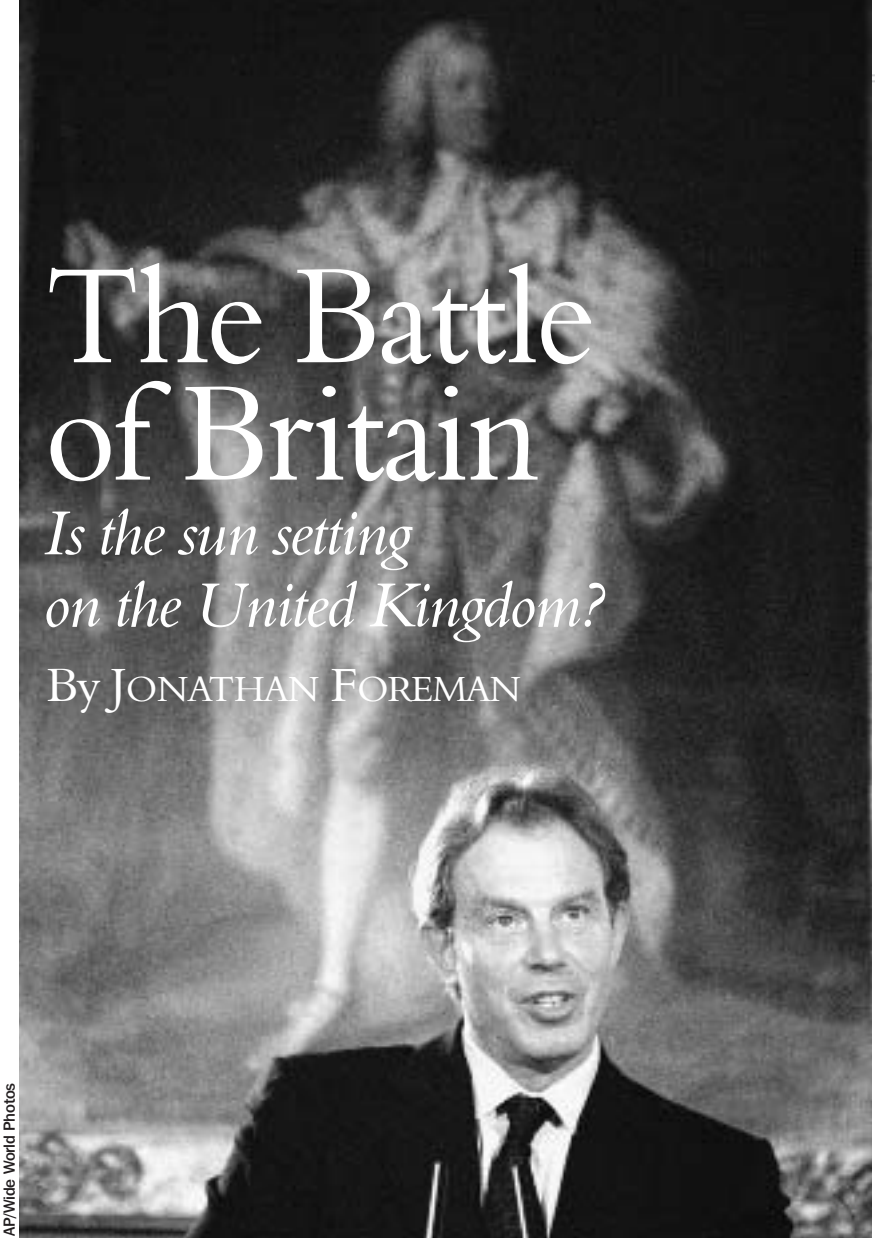
As one sports analyst pointed out, the XFL's target demographic is "disaffected. . . . They're not happy with their lives. . . . They like the WWF because it's a release, they know it's fake but they don't care; they know the XFL isn't as good as the NFL but they won't care about that either." What's not to like when you can get a great seat for $25, when you can hang out with your friends in the stands and act goofy and not get shut down, when you have commentators like Brian Bosworth who like to diss quarterbacks? What's not to like, when *you* can actually talk back to your quarterback: At the end of the Hitmen's second losing game at home, the only fans left, the ones who'd stripped off their shirts and jackets in the below zero windchill and stuck beer cans in their pants, began to chant, "Puleri, you suck." Puleri, who was once quarterback for Lehman High School in the Bronx, started to answer a reporter's question but roared into the mike to address the crowd over the Jumbotron: "You can keep booin.' I love it, baby. I'll be back next week and the week afta." That's reality TV when it works.

What I'm hoping is that coaches will continue to demand the conditions they need to field a good team, that the players will tune out the persistent demand to act like WWF wrestlers, and that management will lose the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* cheerleader get-ups (long sinister black leather coats, platform boots, and garter belts). Basically guys are happy if they can just see pretty girls jumping up and down. It would also help if the announcers calmed down and stopped the relentless shilling. Then we might have a less pretentious, shaggier, more accessible alternative to the overbearing NFL—as *New York Post* sports columnist Wallace Matthews put it, "football as it oughta be." ♦

The Battle of Britain

Is the sun setting on the United Kingdom?

By Jonathan Foreman



AP/Wide World Photos

A few years ago, I was hiking up to an observatory in Georgetown on the Malaysian island of Penang. On the steep, winding road to the top, I fell into conversation with a well-dressed middle-aged man, a Malaysian Chinese, who told me about the problems his daughter faced getting into university because of the regime's nastily racist program that favored ethnic Malays and penalized the ethnic Chinese minority. It was unfair, unjust. "You're British," he said. "You should do something about this."

The Abolition of Britain
From Winston Churchill to Princess Diana
by Peter Hitchens
Encounter, 332 pp., $22.95

Jonathan Foreman is a film critic at the New York Post.

It was touching and not a little sad that he thought British influence still counted for so much, and that he automatically associated the concept of fair play with the former colonial power. From a historical point of view, he wasn't entirely mistaken: Over the centuries, many people—African slaves in agony in the Middle Passage, Hindu widows being burned alive, Indian travelers strangled by religious lunatics, Belgian civilians brutalized by Wilhelmine soldiery, and Jews being kicked to death by Nazi brownshirts—have all wanted the British to do something about it, and eventually they did.

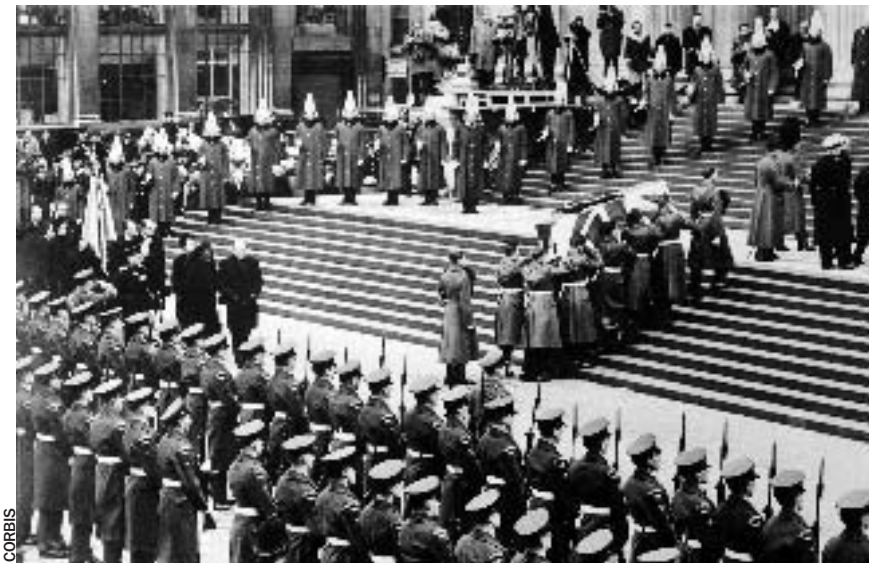
But then Britain and its prestige are perceived differently abroad than at home these days—especially by the political class. When Peter Hitchens, the former Trotskyite who is now Britain's most forthright conservative pundit, laments the "abolition of Britain," he isn't talking just about the Blair government's formal destruction of the United Kingdom as a unitary state or even the modernizing *Kulturkampf* against such vestiges of the imperialist, racist, class-ridden past as the breeches worn by the Lord Chancellor and the popular Royal Tournament show of military pageantry.

He's also talking about the long-term shift in national self-perception that allowed all this to happen—a shift, strangely enough, that accelerated as Britain left the strikebound malaise of the late 1970s for the prosperity of the 1980s and 1990s. Essentially, the British seem to have reacted, rather belatedly, to the loss of empire with an orgy of self-contempt. Pushed along by a middle-class minority who passionately desire the submersion of Britain in a European superstate, this peculiar self-loathing has made the British particularly vulnerable to a virulent form of PC multiculturalism and to the idea that Britain's institutions and traditions are, at best, outmoded and absurd.

"We allowed our patriotism to be turned into a joke, wise sexual restraint to be mocked as prudery, our families to be defamed as nests of violence, loathing, and abuse, our literature to be tossed aside as so much garbage, and our church turned into a department of the Social Security system," Hitchens writes in his concluding chapter.

> We let our schools become nurseries of resentment and ignorance, and humiliated our universities by forcing them to take unqualified students in large numbers. . . . We abandoned a coinage which. . . . spoke of tradition and authority. . . . We tore up every familiar thing in our landscape, adopted a means of transport wholly unfitted to our small crowded island, demolished the hearts of hundreds of handsome towns and cities, and in the meantime we castrated our criminal law, because we no longer knew what was right or wrong.

Some of these changes were organic and others artificial (though Hitchens,


CORBIS

Winston Churchill's funeral, January 1, 1965.

to the detriment of his argument, rarely distinguishes the two). Some were initiated by Labour governments, but a surprising number were the work of Conservative administrations.

So, for instance, the foreign office under Margaret Thatcher pursued a relentless policy of post-imperial betrayal, beginning with hints to the Argentines that Britain no longer cared about the Falkland Islands and culminating in the selling of the people of Hong Kong to Communist China—after first removing their right to reside in the United Kingdom, so they'd have no leverage and nowhere to run.

And so, for another instance, the Tories under John Major took the country deeper into the European Union—while reciting the mantra that further integration into the emerging superstate was the only way Britain could hope to exert any influence, now that it was merely a "fourth-rate power." (This phrase is always delivered in tones of such gloomy satisfaction, no one notices that such a "rating" ignores factors like economic strength, nuclear deterrents, seats on the U.N. Security Council, and cultural influence.)

But Tory surrenders of sovereignty pale beside the changes instituted by the "New Labour" government of Tony Blair. For the most part, the British population has been an unenthusiastic but oddly resigned witness to even more revolutionary changes. (Though the drive to abolish British currency and replace it with the Euro provoked a surprisingly vocal opposition.) The most important of these changes are the constitutional "reforms" carried out merely because the need for such changes was self-evident to the London media elite that calls the tune in British society.

The fact that the United Kingdom seemed to work—despite the oddness and antiquity and irrationalism of its constitutional arrangements—was declared irrelevant. Sure, it provided reasonable prosperity, liberty, and security at least as effectively as systems in use in the Continent (or across the Atlantic). Sure it proved less vulnerable to economic and political storms than, say, the modern German state since 1870 or the various republics, empires, and monarchies that have ruled France since 1789. But that's all ancient history. The key thing is that nothing about the old United Kingdom conforms to what the new British elite conceives of as "modernity."

The idea that there might be risks in sudden, radical constitutional change, that for a constitution to be effective it needs legitimacy and the emotional allegiance of the people, is not one that Britain's hyper-rationalist but parochial reformers have given much thought to, despite the warnings flashed from Yugoslavia. For the new public-sector middle class and the metropolitan media elite, a single idea is paramount: Britain is a musty, provincial place "held back" by dated, irrational institutions and a culture that wrongly venerates a history that is essentially a record of shame and oppression.

In its mildest form, this idea is manifested in the culturalist theory of British decline that influenced Thatcher as much as Blair: the idea that postwar economic failure is inextricably linked to the persistence in Britain of a culture of deference. Better policy might well have been found by asking instead how a pair of small islands off the coast of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Princess Diana's funeral, September 6, 1997.

Europe managed to become the world's most powerful nation for a century and a half, producing a fair number of the world's best scientists, poets, admirals, and statesmen. But those old successes were dismissed. As the newly elected Tony Blair put it in 1997—so memorably and tellingly, in marketing-man's jargon—Britain desperately needs to be "rebranded" as a "young country."

That the Blair government has been able to tear so much down in so short a time with so little effective opposition is one of the most fascinating mysteries of modern politics. After all, it's rare for a perfectly viable system of government to be dismantled in a time of peace and prosperity. Peter Hitchens understands that Britain came to this pass because of a series of social and cultural changes, some of them inevitable results of postwar exhaustion and impoverishment, but many more of them the products of cultural and class warfare.

Unfortunately his *Abolition of Britain* is arranged in such a scattershot way that it conveys no real sense of either the chronology or the interplay of the various factors that broke British morale and allowed a resentful section of the population, without previous experience of power and responsibility, to make a revolution. Still, *The Abolition of Britain* is an entertaining and moving read that helps explain why certain key strata of the British middle classes are such enthusiasts for eliminating the things that make Britain unique. It offers a key to such mysteries as how the British state could actually prosecute merchants for using non-metric measures, jail a farmer for defending himself against brutal robbers, and arrest a man for the "racist" act of flying a flag above a pub.

There are so many effective anecdotes in Hitchens's book that it is difficult to pick one as particularly telling. So, for symbolic concision, how about the abolition of the flag? It was in 1997, the year of Blair's election, that British Airways removed the Union Jack flag from the tails of its aircraft and replaced it with "ethnic" designs that it hoped foreign customers would find more sympathetic.

The airline's then-CEO, Robert Ayling, apparently feared that foreigners associated the British national flag with skinheads, soccer hooligans, and imperialism. This was not based, of course, on any polling of Africans or Asians or Europeans. But Ayling did know that the Union Jack is associated with skinheads and soccer hooligans and imperialism by the media folk and the professional middle classes who now control Britain. These are people far too well-educated and sophisticated to have any truck with anything as atavistic as national pride and who simply cannot conceive that anyone would see a Union Jack as a symbol of something positive. (Britain is not in fact a flag-waving country; its inhabitants have long been embarrassed by the kind of loud patriotism associated with their continental neighbors or the United States. But there's a difference between this kind of reticence and actual hostility to the flag.)


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Kipling once asked, "What do they know of England who only England know?" The Blairite elite, for all their vacations in French or Tuscan villages, have much less experience of the outside world than the imperial elite they replaced. It's why they don't know that the French, whom they worship, are utterly unembarrassed by the traditional pageantry being scourged in Britain and would not dream of deconcessioning the tricoleur. Have the Blairites never seen the Communist deputies saluting, as mounted republican guardsmen in breastplates and horsehair plumes lead the Bastille Day parade, just in front of the tanks? Apparently not, which is another reason no one in the new ruling elite even questions the assumption that Britain is an embarrassingly Ruritanian society, long overdue for a thorough housecleaning.

Still less do they doubt that a country properly cleansed of cringe-inducing vestiges of a quaint, elitist past like the changing of the guard, Oxbridge, red telephone boxes, hereditary peers, and the monarchy will be both more efficient and more popular with foreign tourists. For them it is an article of faith that new is better.

Alas for Peter Hitchens, impassioned, perceptive, and courageous though he is, the opposite is also an article of faith: For him, all change is bad. Hitchens actually laments the advent of central heating and double glazing, because families are no longer brought together by having to huddle around a

single hearth. When he contrasts the Britain of Princess Diana's funeral with the Britain of Churchill's funeral, his case that everything has gotten worse includes the "crazed over-use of private cars" and "the disappearance of hats and the decline of coats."

Indeed, if you were going to be harsh you might almost subtitle this book "A compendious diatribe of everything I hate about Britain today, with minor, aesthetic irritations given the same weight as the destruction of the constitution." There's a silly chapter in which Hitchens bemoans the famous trial of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, which made it all but impossible for the British government to ban books on the grounds of obscenity. Then there's his notion that the "American Occupation" of Britain from 1941 to 1945 introduced adultery to British womanhood—a claim that would have amused Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton.

But the most bizarrely wrong chapter is the one that blames the satirical television and wireless programs of the late 1950s and early 1960s for destroying national unity. The idea that a culture that survived Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift could be brought down by Dudley Moore and Alan Bennett is preposterous. And if comedy "made an entire class too ridiculous to rule," then P.G. Wodehouse and perhaps even Charles Dickens are also to blame.

Of course many things are worse in Britain than they were during the 1950s, the decade that Hitchens takes as his paradigm for the real, lost Britain. Even people of the Left look with disgust upon Tony Blair's "Cool Britannia" with its ubiquitous youth culture awash with drugs, its government by glib marketing men, its increasing corruption, the ever-spreading coarseness, and the startling ubiquity of violent crime (you're now much, much more likely to be mugged or burgled in London than in New York).

But is it so terrible that the food is better, that there are sidewalk cafes, that middle- and even working-class people can afford to travel, that the state plays a smaller role in the nation's economic life (though a far greater one in other realms)? Some of Hitchens's nostalgia fixes on things that were not especially British, or not laudably so—like censorship, or the prosecution and blackmailing of homosexuals. Other things Hitchens sees as quintessentially British were, in fact, freakish phenomena of the postwar decades. In particular, the placidity and gentleness in those years was an artificial state, the result of exhaustion and wartime discipline.

AP / Wide World Photos

Construction of the Millennium Dome in London.

Hitchens should know that for centuries European and other visitors were struck by the amazing pugnaciousness of the English and by their quick sentimentality. (Two enjoyable recent books, Jeremy Paxman's *The English* and Paul Langford's *Englishness Identified*, take up this topic.) From the eighteenth century on, Britons were seen even by their many European admirers as terrifyingly violent. That's why small numbers of them were able to defeat large numbers of foreigners either on the continent or the battlefields of empire. The British soccer hooligan is a mere return to form. So, too, the Victorians were famous for their weeping: They kept emotional reserve for important moments, like when they were about to be tortured by Fuzzy Wuzzies.

It's a shame *The Abolition of Britain* includes so much cranky fogeyism (including nostalgia for the flogging of teenage criminals). It's a shame, because at its best this book combines superb reporting (especially about the hijacking of education by frustrated leftists) with a heartbreaking analysis of one of the strangest revolutions in history. And in many ways it is the most important of the torrent of books that have dealt with the crisis of British identity.

What Hitchens understands is that bourgeois New Labour is far more revolutionary than any government before—although, ironically, it learned just how easy it is to defy tradition and make radical constitutional changes from Margaret Thatcher, who abolished the Greater London Council merely because it was dominated by her political enemies. Hitchens rightly sees the New Labour "project" as a kind of politically correct Thatcherism with a punitive cultural agenda aimed at certain class enemies. The House of Commons's vote to abolish fox hunting is a perfect example: an interference in British liberty enacted by our urban middle-class rulers in order to kick toffs in the teeth—one that will put thousands of rural working-class people out of work. When Labour was dominated by cloth-capped, working-class socialists, ownership of the means of production may have been at issue, but the par-

ty never threatened the structure of the kingdom. Tony Blair heads the least socialist, least redistributive Labour government ever. Yet at the same time he has used the legally unchecked powers of a House of Commons majority to enact the most revolutionary changes in the British constitution since the Civil War of the 1640s.

It still isn't clear whether the Blair government sees its steady stream of attacks on the old order's structure and accouterments as a clever and harmless way of distracting its genuinely socialist members and supporters from their fiscal conservatism, or whether they actually know that traditions and rituals are rather more important than marginal tax rates when it comes to destroying the old United Kingdom they despise.

Because the reforms, enacted swiftly and without serious debate, were intended mostly to proclaim the new government's difference from the Tories, they followed no consistent theory. Scotland and Wales got separate parliaments but continue to send MPs to Westminster where they make laws for the English (some 80 percent of the population) who do not have their own separate parliament.

Of course, it never occurred to the Blairites—who see themselves as technocrats above primitive feelings of attachment to nation or any community other than their own cosmopolitan class—that by tossing bones to the Welsh and Scots nationalist minorities they might awaken the long slumbering beast of English nationalism. These people have lived so long under the protection of an inclusive British nationalism, they couldn't imagine that English nationalism, fed by growing submission to Europe and the unfair favoring of Scotland, will of necessity be racial and resentful. When a few old souls mentioned the danger of awakening nationalisms after centuries of peace and comity, they were laughed at by the Blairites. Now you see all over England the red cross of St. George, a symbol from the medieval past that spontaneously appeared in the hands of soccer fans and on the dashboards of London taxicabs. It's enough to make Hitchens warn of "interesting times" ahead—in the scary sense of "interesting." As he says, "When a people cease to believe their national myths and cease to know or respect their history, it does not follow that they become blandly smiling internationalists. Far from it."

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Of course, you can detect in the Blair generation's discomfort with Britain's past an element of envy and insecurity. It cannot be easy for middle-aged Britons to look back on the achievements of their fathers and grandfathers (who defeated Hitler and the Kaiser), or, worse still, those of their great grandfathers (who brought peace and prosperity to millions around the globe), without wishing to denigrate those achievements.

But if you want to understand why a significant chunk of the British population loathes Britain and wants to undo it, you have to look beyond generational resentment to class. An acquaintance of mine was on his way to a party for the fiftieth anniversary of VE day in 1995 when he bumped into Jon Snow, a well-known British broadcaster and fairly typical figure of the new British establishment. He asked Snow if he too were going to a VE celebration. Snow sneered back that he was going to "an anti-VE day party." Not for him any of that jingoistic nostalgia for World War II.

As Orwell pointed out, the English intelligentsia has always been severed from the common culture of the country. But in the 1930s, the intellectuals were joined in their alienation by a significant number of mandarins, upper- and upper-middle-class civil servants, who responded to democratization and the simultaneous decline of British influence by deciding that their country would be better off ruled by Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union.

The modern equivalent is to transfer one's allegiance to the "European ideal," which means, in practice, rule by the smooth bureaucrats of Brussels. For the remnants of the mandarin class, there's something comforting in the idea that Britain and Europe can be run by a sophisticated international elite—made up of chaps not unlike themselves.

"Europe" also solves a status problem for the new public-sector middle class. Unlike the treacherous mandarins, these people have not lost position; they never had it. They therefore define themselves as being more "civilized" than the country-house toffs above them and the bigoted proles below. And they take to an extreme the *retarditaire* notion that everything is done better on the Continent. The basic idea is that if you are the kind of person sophisticated enough to appreciate wine and cappuccino—rather than beer and tea—then, of course, you must favor the transfer of sovereignty from Britain to Brussels.

There are good reasons for Americans to study Peter Hitchens's *The Abolition of Britain*. It won't be a good thing for America if British PC multiculturalists manage to discredit the parent culture of the United States. More important, however, is the lesson about the fragility of culture that Americans should take from this book. In his famous essay "England, Your England," George Orwell wrote, "It needs some very great disaster, such as prolonged subjugation by a foreign enemy, to destroy a national culture." But reading Hitchens you soon realize that Orwell was wrong: A culture can be destroyed from the inside, as well. ♦

Impeaching America

Why the Europeans embraced Clinton.

BY STEPHEN BATES

"Where's the outrage?" Republicans wailed during the Monica Lewinsky scandal. Well, don't look for it overseas. To news outlets abroad, President Clinton's misdeeds were trivial, and the political response to them, culminating in the first presidential impeachment in over a century, was sheer lunacy.

Peter H. Merkl, a political scientist at the University of California, Santa Barbara, thinks that the foreign journalists got it right. In *A Coup Attempt in Washington?: A European Mirror on the 1998-1999 Constitutional Crisis*, he argues that they provided "a more objective view" than excitable American reporters. What's more, this European view closely matched the easygoing compartmentalizing of Middle America: The American counterparts to Parisian cosmopolitans reside in the hinterland, while the bluenoses are assembled in America's metropolitan newsrooms. Further, the overblown scandal cost the United States a good deal of international prestige. "It was not so long ago that Europeans and the rest of the world deeply admired American democracy and its venerable Constitution." No longer.

A Coup Attempt in Washington?
A European Mirror on the 1998-1999 Constitutional Crisis
by Peter H. Merkl
Palgrave, 288 pp., $35

Merkl offers several explanations for the foreign press's incredulity about the impeachment. Europeans sometimes forget that the United States doesn't have a parliamentary government, in which a legislative majority can easily oust a disfavored leader. Further, they find struggles between major national institutions "rather archaic and disturbing." In addition—a provocative point that merits more attention than he gives it—there's a pattern here: Europeans likewise poohpoohed Watergate, deeming President Nixon's misdeeds "no worse than some actions of their own political leaders."

And, of course, foreign journalists judged the Lewinsky matter a mere sex scandal and therefore insignificant. Merkl quotes the editor of *Le Monde*: "We have a very French way of looking at things. We think a president who has affairs is charming." In print, *Le Monde* faulted Republicans for "banalizing the use of the impeachment procedure." Another French newspaper, *Le Figaro*, sounded out demoiselles on the street, one of whom said: "Clinton has bad taste in women, a weakness for inflatable dolls. But as a gentleman he must lie." "What," wondered the Johannesburg *Mail & Guardian*, "is all this unseemly fuss about a routine extramarital gobble?" The foreign journalists, like many Americans, were never persuaded that it was about obstruction of justice rather than gobbles.

When the foreign press *did* condemn Clinton, it wasn't for the liaison and the lying, but for the apologies. The expressions of regret that many Americans deemed a belated *mea minima culpa* struck Europeans as excruciatingly florid. *Le Figaro* faulted Clinton's "pathetic contrition," and the British *Guardian* scoffed at his "serial groveling." "The European ethos of masculinity," Merkl explains, "is simply not inclined toward apologizing in matters of sex, least of all publicly."

All fairly interesting. Unfortunately, Merkl can't stick to a cool-headed assessment of the differences between American coverage and foreign coverage. Instead, he rants. Forget the title's question mark; Merkl should have used an exclamation point.

He considers it likely that "enlightened future historians" will use the "anti-Clinton conspiracy as a textbook example of how unrestrained hatred and partisanship nearly ruined the Constitution." But wasn't it the peaceful exercise of a constitutional provision for redressing presidential wrongdoing? Don't be fooled: "The takeovers of Mussolini, Hitler, and of the Vichy government of France typically began with at least some nonviolent steps that were perfectly legal and in partial accord with the constitutions of those nations." And, while the Republicans involved in the impeachment were not "neofascists or neo-Nazis"—whew!—"some telling analogies still remain."

Later Merkl devotes three pages to comparing Clinton's impeachment to a lynching. Once again, the similarities overwhelm him. "Typical lynchings . . . frequently included horrible tortures, sexual mutilations for souvenirs, and the showing off of the (often burnt) body of the victim. Is it really such a stretch to compare the ordeal imposed on the president by the media circus of 1998, the salacious Starr Report, the DNA sample, the grand jury videotape, and worldwide humiliations to the lynchings of the past?"

Behind the American press coverage, Merkl espies "a conspiracy among publishers and editors to topple the chief executive," a conspiracy aided and abetted by Ken Starr, the independent counsel, who was "quite adept at manipulating the media." (This doesn't sound like the Ken Starr I worked for.)

Merkl faults *Time* for a piece musing on whether Lewinsky could have had sex with Clinton while he didn't have sex with her, but fails to mention that this was Clinton's precise defense to an allegation of perjury. He declares a

Stephen Bates, formerly a lawyer in the Office of Independent Counsel, is the literary editor of the Wilson Quarterly.

Coup de Gueule

CNN program on Clinton's grand jury testimony, featuring Judy Woodruff and Bernard Shaw, "worthy of Joseph Goebbels." Of a *Los Angeles Times* cartoon depicting Clinton and Lewinsky as insects who survive nuclear war, he sniffs that "to compare the president of the United States and his paramour to cockroaches is crude."

The European press, he assures us, eschews such undignified "personal diatribes" against American political figures. Of course, a few pages later, he quotes French television commentator Nicole Bacharan's description of Starr: "A devil of a man. Round face and fleshy lips, his gray hair slicked down over his balding skull, looking like a prematurely aged baby. He wears the fine spectacles of a clergyman and affects a permanent sulking mien."

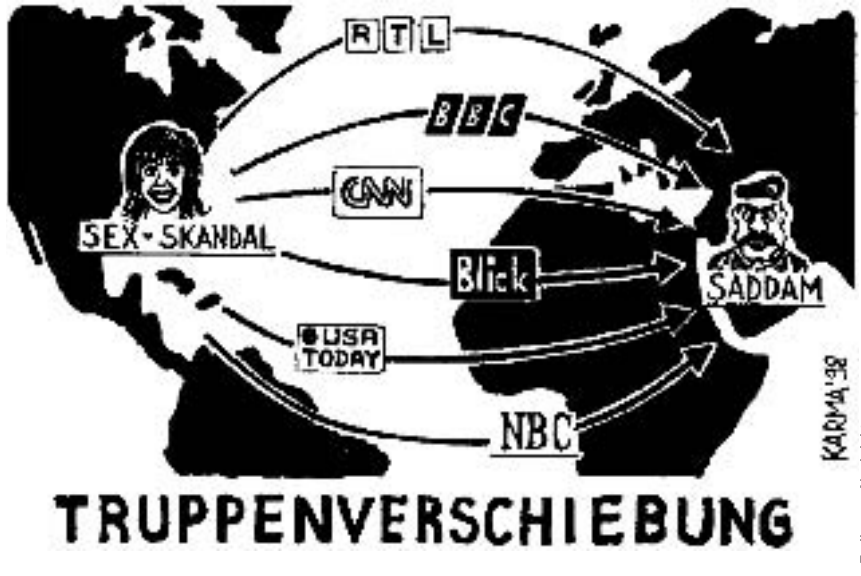
Bacharan, author of a book about the scandal, is a Merkl favorite, "a knowledgeable French observer" who "obviously knows her American law." One of her discoveries especially delights him—"a *60 Minutes* broadcast of 1987 in which an American judge had declared: 'The media must never reproduce explicit or implicit descriptions of sexual acts. Our society must be purged of perverts who furnish pornographic materials to the media. . . .' Bacharan added: 'That judge was Kenneth Starr.'" Bacharan and Merkl have been had. That *60 Minutes* tale was an Internet hoax, and it was debunked in 1998 by *USA Today*, the *San Francisco Examiner*, the *Atlanta Constitution*, and the *Washington Post* (which noted that the quotation, read aloud, sounds like Daffy Duck).

I didn't think it possible, in fact, but Merkl has managed to write a Lewinsky book that's even more error-ridden than Jeffrey Toobin's *A Vast Conspiracy*. Toobin at least has a law degree. Merkl mixes up affidavits and depositions, civil discovery and grand jury investigations, the role of judges and the role of prosecutors—as well as *censor* and *censure*, Senator John Warner and movie mogul Jack Warner, and even Jeff Toobin and Jeff Rosen. He bungles the name of Richard Mellon Scaife's Pittsburgh newspaper, misquotes Clinton's famous 1969 letter on avoiding the draft, and jarringly understates the allegations of "Joan Brodderick" (Juanita Broaddrick) as "a kind of date rape."

Merkl's depiction of the Starr Report, which I had a hand in writing, is no better. Leaning on Renata Adler's dotty deconstruction in *Vanity Fair*, he condemns us for covering up Linda Tripp's previous role in investigations. Actually, the report's introduction, evidently overlooked by Adler and Merkl, identifies Tripp as a witness in three ongoing investigations. He faults the report for containing merely "bits of evidence—uncorroborated by witnesses."

In truth, it corroborates the allegations lavishly, perhaps overabundantly, with White House documents, testimony of Secret Service officers, Monica Lewinsky's contemporaneous statements to friends and relatives, her scribblings, her deleted computer files, her DNA-spattered dress, etc. And he refers to the report, not including supplemental evidence, as fifty thousand pages long. (We wrote a lot in the Starr Report, but not that much.)

Maybe it's unrealistic to expect fact-checking from a scholarly press, but



Freiburger Nachrichten

what about editing? In Merkl's prose, the die is always cast, someone barks up the wrong tree, people listen with bated breath, the president is in the hot seat, media sharks smell blood in the water, Framers turn over in their graves, higher and higher pile the clichés until the "steamroller that could no longer be stopped . . . seemed unstoppable." As *Le Monde* might say, how banal.

In 1998 the potent evidence of President Clinton's felonies got lost in a swirl of thongs, cigars, and dress stains. In this book about the scandal, fittingly, the valid insights disappear amid the author's errors, hackneyed prose, and partisan bile. ♦

BCA

Video Commandments

Kryztof Kieslowski comes to Blockbuster.

BY DAVID SKINNER

Video cassettes and DVDs are the paperbacks of cinema. Just as Penguin has been a ready supplier of literary classics, Blockbuster and the other video-rental outlets have become important purveyors of great movies and television—and thanks to them you might, on a Saturday night with nothing to do, come across a half-obscure gem like *Decalogue*, Kryztof Kieslowski's set of ten short films about the Ten Commandments.

Last fall, Blockbuster started renting out copies of *Decalogue* at a significant number of its 5,000 stores nationwide. While newspapers bulged with articles in praise of HBO's *The Sopranos* and *Sex and the City*, practically no one noticed as the *Decalogue* series slipped past customs. Of course, all ten films had been shown before in the United States, though only at somewhat less than popular venues such as the Lincoln Center film festival. Indeed, the series has been celebrated, by film critics anyway.

AP / Wide World Photos

Kryztof Kieslowski, 1942-1996.

But critical acclaim, not critical mass, is all one could expect for ten movies, each an hour long, that debuted on Polish television in 1988. And though Kieslowski won some measure of fame with his tricolor series of films (*Red*, *Blue*, and *White*) in 1993 and 1994, his work has never been very accessible. Many of his storylines have translation difficulties that go well beyond subtitles. Consider the most successful film he made before *Decalogue*: the 1985 political ghost story *No End*. It is about a labor organizer, a dead lawyer, and the lawyer's widow, who rightly suspects that her beloved husband is haunting her. Though one can find it on videotape, it's never been popular, perhaps because to an American it sounds like a Demi Moore vehicle written by the AFL-CIO.

Politics plays an even greater role in the 1970s documentaries Kieslowski made after graduating from film school in Lodz (also the alma mater of Andrzej Wajda and Roman Polanski). Shooting documentaries was an excellent career choice, he believed. The Communist orthodoxy left a whole reality of people and things to be described for, it seemed, the first time. In *Workers '71*, Kieslowski collaborated with several other directors and three different crews to make a huge political portrait of the working class that was to show how laborers' own views differed from party propaganda. Unfortunately, during production, sound tapes were confiscated and Kieslowski was interrogated by the police. The film was never released.

Kieslowski's documentary work led to his membership in a small but determined circle of filmmakers who referred to themselves as the Cinema of Moral Anxiety. Part professional claque, part school of thought, the group was united by the twin desires to honestly depict Poland's fraying social fabric and to make life better for their countrymen. During these years Kieslowski made several politically outspoken films that were pretty much banned, except for small professional screenings that a large number of writers and artists tried to sneak into. It was in 1983, after Poland's years of martial law, that Kieslowski directed *No End*, the heroic anti-Communist film that made his critical reputation abroad.

But it wasn't until the late 1980s, when he exited politics entirely, that Kieslowski became a great filmmaker. This was of course the same period in which the democratic movement made its historic strides. Yet, in the movies of Kieslowski, Poland's problems became secondary—and a serious moral vision took center stage.

Exactly what that moral vision is, however, has always been hard to pin down. In one interview, Kieslowski both described communism as evil and characterized belief in it as a mere intellectual mistake. Even while making movies that attacked the party, he claimed to feel a deep sympathy with the problems individual members faced. A mixture of humanitarian feel-

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New Yorker Films

1: Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

ing and fatalism about anyone's chances of doing good fills the ten films in *Decalogue* with both a sharply accusing moralism and a profound sense of human limitation.

Though most critics focus on the moral ambiguity of the ten parts, there could hardly be anything less ambiguous than devising ten stories around the Ten Commandments. And there is nothing whatsoever ambiguous in the story the first episode tells about the commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." A mathematician believes only in what can be measured and pays with his son's life for ignoring God's presence in the physical world. The lesson wouldn't be any more blunt if it came with a six-foot priest to knock the wind out of you.

Bluntness is certainly not a fault of the second episode—which leaves you mystified about its illustration of the second commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." A physician is visited by one of his neighbors, an acquaintance. The neighbor introduces herself and the physician says, oh yes, he remembers her. Didn't she, the doctor asks calmly, run over his dog with her car last year? Thus opens a relation that is bound by grudge, need, and obligation. The neighbor reveals that she is pregnant, but not by her husband, who happens to be seriously ill. She wants the doctor to see her husband and surmise the man's chances of survival. If he is going to live, she wants to abort the pregnancy. The doctor, however, has many reasons for hoping that the man will live and the child will be born.

Number ten ("Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's") tells the comic story of two estranged brothers—one a bourgeois, the other a singer in a punk band—who become passionate philatelists after jointly inheriting their father's almost priceless stamp collection. Having resented their father all their lives for spending money on stamps while they as children went hungry, the brothers suddenly find there is almost nothing they won't do to extend the collection. In the bargain, a piercing tale of a family torn by an unusual species of greed startles the viewer by becoming a first-rate caper.

The connective tissue of the ten stories is an enormous Soviet-style building complex. Huge, cold, and forbidding, it is teeming with these morality plays. The voyeur in number six can't live very far from the mathematician in number one. Moral dilemmas bump into each other on the elevator. Greed is upstairs and down the hallway, so to speak, from adultery. Far from being a group portrait of exceptional people living in exceptional circumstances, this is a picture of everyman and everywoman in everyday circumstances.

For all that Kieslowski achieved in *Decalogue*, he was blasé describing its conception. "It was cold," he said in an interview. "It was raining. I'd lost my gloves. 'Someone should make a film about the Ten Commandments,' Piesiewicz [his writing partner] said to me. 'You should do it.' A terrible idea, of course." In fact, one might describe the second half of Kieslowski's career as a string of bad ideas that were made into exceptional movies. Take the woefully earnest ideas behind Kieslowski's tricolor trilogy. *Blue*, *White*, and *Red* are based on liberty, equality, and fraternity, respectively. They sound like something a sophomore philosophy major might think up after pulling an all-nighter.

After watching *Decalogue*'s ingenious stories illustrate the sometimes exquisite difficulty of doing right and avoiding wrong, it is worth asking, What if Hollywood made a movie or a television series loosely based on the Ten Commandments? The women would surely be sexy enough to make coveting your neighbor's wife understandable. Mom and Dad would be overbearing; the audience would have to know how hard it is to "Honor thy father and mother." "Thou shalt not kill" would be observed in the breach as the muscle-bound action hero annihilated the bad guys. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" would probably be amended to "But make time for yourself." Of course, you can get those movies at Blockbuster, too. ♦


New Yorker Films

2: Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.

Office of the Majority Nurturer
Tom DeLay

George W. Bush
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President,

My heart is just so full as I write to you. It's two in the morning, on the night after you submitted your budget to the U.S. Congress. I'm sitting alone in my sewing room, sipping a little herbal tea, comfy in my fuzzy slippers. I just watched *Terms of Endearment* again, and I'm opening myself up to the feelings of the past few days. You've really touched me, Mr. President, as I think you've touched the hearts of the whole nation.

Your speech was just magical. When you criticized those Republicans who've been for cutting government regardless of need, my soul just leapt. I've been saying the same thing for years! When, I have been asking my colleagues, are we going to have a president with a good enough heart to raise the budget for the Department of Education by a record 11 percent? Then came you.

I'm with you, Mr. President. As you'll see from my letterhead, I've even changed the name of my office from Majority Whip to Majority Nurturer. I've always tried to be a caregiver to my flock, a Kleenex for those in turmoil, a cuddly Beanie Baby in the hard cold Halls of Power. This new title reflects the soft, feminine side that I've always treasured and offered to my conference.

I felt tingly when I saw the cover of your budget document, promising a "New Beginning." Exactly! When America wants a beginning, it doesn't want an old beginning. It doesn't even want a middle-aged beginning. If it's going to be a beginning, it should be a new one.

I turned straight to the section on the $700 million Federal Compassion Capital Fund, which you mentioned in your speech. Wonderful! I joined the Republican party because I believed ours was the party that could offer the nation a $700 million federal compassion fund. Not a measly $500 million compassion fund. And not a hodgepodge of state compassion funds. But a big, beautiful federal one.

But why stop there? Would you mind if I proposed a $700 million Federal Niceness Fund, to encourage acts of niceness? I already have my staff working on a Courage Fund and a Tax Credit for Extreme Politeness. My heart is full with your inspiration. Let us dream of more New Beginnings!

It's late now, and I should go to bed. I am just so thankful for you. You are my sunshine. You are my moonbeam. You are everything groovy.

Love and kisses,
Tom DeLay